

**GUIDANCE, DOCUMENT** 

# Wales Union Learning Fund prospectus 2025 to 2028

Guidance on funds available to trade unions to encourage and support workplace learning.

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#### Ministerial foreword

The better people's skills, the better their prospects of securing and progressing in work, 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 are committed to a Wales of fair work, and we recognise how TUC Cymru and trade unions are key to realising that ambition. We are clear, joining a trade union is the best way in which any worker can improve their experience of work, safeguard their rights, and ensure their voice is heard.

Our ambition is to provide opportunities for people from all backgrounds to develop their skills and achieve their full potential.

In an increasingly complex world where net zero is an opportunity as well as a challenge and where new technologies are transforming the way we live and work, transferrable employability and basic skills will be essential and unions have a unique opportunity to contribute in ways that will benefit Wales into the future.

Our social partnership approach is underpinned by the benefits of employers and trade unions working as partners in a spirit of collaboration, shared commitment and mutual respect. Trade unions are knowledgeable, experienced and resourceful partners in supporting skills, training and workforce

development. WULF provides further opportunity to underscore social partnership as a way of working in Wales.

Through Wales Union Learning Fund projects, trade unions are playing a pivotal role in strengthening relationships between employers and workers with union led skills and workforce development in workplaces across Wales. For 25 years, WULF has been a beacon of how we do things differently through our social partnership way of working – we look forward to this next round of WULF projects and to building on the successes of the last 25 years.



Jack Sargeant

Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership

October 2024

#### Strategic overview

The Wales Union Learning Fund has been operating for 25 years. During this time, it has firmly established itself as a key element of the Welsh Government's employability offer and is uniquely positioned to support people in work to improve their skills and progress in employment.

The objectives of the programme are closely aligned to the Welsh Government's strategic ambitions in the employability, social partnership and fair work agendas. The following section sets out these strategic objectives and WULF delivery unions should be mindful of them when preparing for delivery during the 2025-28 programme.

#### Social partnership and fair work

Working in social partnership with employers and trade unions has a long and proud history in Wales, it's part of our DNA, speaking to our values of solidarity and collective action. Social partnership is our Welsh way of working, and with the passing of the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act in 2023, we have placed social partnership on a legislative footing. The Act provides a clear impetus for all parts of the system to work closely together in co-producing solutions to the shared challenges we face. These challenges directly read across to the employability agenda and WULF is uniquely positioned to meet many of them as we tackle current and future skills needs in the Welsh economy.

The Welsh Government firmly believes that all workers should be treated with dignity and respect and that their voice should be heard in issues which affect them. This includes skills and learning and development. In its delivery of union led learning, WULF is an important contributor to our approach to fair work.

Fair Work is where workers are fairly rewarded, heard and represented, secure and able to progress in a healthy, inclusive environment where rights are respected. Our 'Guide to Fair Work' (A guide to fair work | GOV.WALES) provides further information on what fair work is, why it matters, and how it can be implemented.

# Stronger fairer greener Wales: a plan for employability and skills

The Welsh Government's Stronger, Fairer, Greener Wales: A plan for Employability and Skills published in 2022 identifies five main areas of action:

#### 1. Future Generations

Invest in and strengthen the whole system approach to delivering the Young Persons Guarantee to make it easy for everyone under the age of 25 to access an offer of work, education, training, or self-employment.

#### 2. Tackling Economic Inequality

Prioritise and consolidate Welsh Government led, national employability support to ensure no one is left behind. Targeting those under-represented in the labour market, those in (and out of) work with long term health conditions, to find work and progress in employment.

#### 3. Fair Work For All

Support and encourage employers to create high quality employment, improve

the offer to workers, champion fair employment practices, ensure the social value of investment and encourage the public sector to embed the priorities in workforce planning.

#### 4. Healthy Work, Healthy Wales

Support people with a long-term health condition to work by preventing people falling out of employment through health prevention, early intervention, healthy workplaces and maximise role of the health service as an anchor employer.

#### 5. Learning for Life

Ensure educational inequalities narrow and standards rise, participation in the skills system is widened for disabled people and ethnic minority groups, whilst tackling low qualifications and increasing the mobility of workers.

#### **Net zero skills**

In Net Zero Wales (2021), the Welsh Government re-stated the commitment to a just transition away from the fossil-fuelled economy of the past to a new low carbon future. Delivering a just transition will mean we leave no-one behind.

In order to deliver on our vision for a Fairer, Stronger, Greener Wales our Net Zero Skills Action Plan prioritises 7 key areas of action. The following 4 align very closely to the aims of WULF:

- · build a shared understanding of net zero skills across Wales
- grow a skilled workforce to meet our net zero commitments
- cross-government and partnership approach to meet our skills commitment

· just transition.

We want to equip all learners with the right information, options and career pathways. Pathways that encourage and stimulate our current and future workforce and represents the diversity of our communities.

#### **Economic mission**

The Welsh Government's strategic vision for the nation's economy underwent a refresh in November 2023. Aside from actions to boost the productivity and inward investment in the country, the priorities to enable a stronger economy include a specific focus on:

- Prioritising young people, fair work, and skills, and
- Realising the enormous Net Zero opportunities across Wales from its natural environment to support business growth and engaging with businesses and people to move towards a just transition.

#### Cymraeg 2050

Our ambition as Welsh Government is to see the number of people able to enjoy speaking and using Welsh reach a million by 2050. To achieve this we will:

- Increase the number of Welsh speakers through statutory and postcompulsory education routes
- Promote the use of Welsh through service delivery, in the workplace and across society in general
- · Create the right conditions to promote the language and help it thrive

Trade unions submitting a WULF project proposal should be mindful of the

above strategic context, much of which is reflected in the three themes set out below.

#### Wales Union Learning Fund (WULF): 2025 to 2028

The Wales Union Learning Fund (WULF) has been in operation since 1999 and has been instrumental in providing a broad range of learning opportunities for people in employment.

Through the work of the WULF projects, the participating trade unions, 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.

#### **Objectives of WULF**

The objectives 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 essential and digital skills, employability, and supporting workers to progress onto further learning and/or gain relevant qualifications.
- Support workers to re-engage in learning, and raising confidence levels for those who haven't been involved in learning of any kind for a long time.
- Support the recruitment and networking of Union Learning Representatives (ULRs) in raising demand for learning especially from workers with low skill levels, underrepresented groups, and those who face additional barriers to learning.
- Respond to the emerging skills and employability needs of workers and help deliver the skills needs of both the current and future workforce.
- Engage employers in workforce development, including the establishment of collectively bargained learning agreements and the provision of advice on workplace policies and practices.
- Encourage employers to recognise the value of developing individuals through workplace learning and in supporting employability and progression.
- Increase equality, diversity and inclusion within adult learning by removing barriers to learning and working with employers to widen access to workplace learning and skills.
- Encourage partnership working amongst WULF delivery unions wherever possible.
- Contribute 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.
- Facilitate effective learning partnership activity between employers, other trade unions, learning providers and community-based organisations with the aim of encouraging more workers to engage in learning.
- Deliver sustainable learning by effectively accessing resources and support from employers and others to sustain activity beyond the initial WULF funding period.

#### **Delivery of the WULF programme**

In line with the objectives set out above WULF unions must demonstrate how they will contribute towards the following three themes which ultimately contribute to the areas of actions within the Employability and Skills Plan and the broader aims of Welsh Government around fair work and social partnership:

## Theme 1: Providing an individualised approach to employability support

This theme is centred on the needs of the individual and should take account of personal circumstances, barriers, aptitudes and ambitions. A programme of support that identifies and addresses any barriers will provide the best chance of success. Projects should be mindful of the needs of those who have traditionally not accessed education and training support and put in place measures to encourage participation. Projects should also direct support across a range of groups who may struggle to access learning, including women, disabled people, young people and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people.

Examples of how unions can demonstrate this theme are:

- 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 workers 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
- 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 those who have struggled with or not previously accessed learning, in particular disabled people and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people
- Supporting individuals to assess their learning and development needs and signposting to appropriate external support and relevant funded schemes.

### Theme 2: Underlining the responsibility of employers to up-skill, support their workforce and provide fair work

This theme recognises that 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. Encouraging employers to participate and promoting the value of upskilling or reskilling their workforce is crucial to the economic success of Wales and links directly into the Welsh Government's fair work agenda.

Examples of how trade unions can demonstrate this theme are:

- 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 women, disabled people, those who have a long-term health condition, and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people
- Promotion of Welsh in the workplace and encouraging training in the Welsh language
- 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 support, recognising that in many instances poor mental health can represent a significant barrier to 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
- Encourage employers to contribute to the upskilling of their workforce, including by providing paid time off for learning and development.

#### Theme 3: Responding to current and future skills gaps

Ensuring that people have the right skills and knowledge to progress and meet the current and future needs of employers is key to ensuring sustainable employment.

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 not only now but in the future. Trade unions are well placed to support workers in maintaining and improving transferable skills and learning, and in helping to encourage individual participation developing new and innovative ways of plugging skills gaps, and in the sharing of best practice.

Examples of how Unions can demonstrate this theme are:

- Be responsive to emerging employment and skills needs within their associated sectors by advocating for vocational learning and apprenticeships
- Alignment with the "Regional Skills Action Plans" which reflect local and regional skills needs and which have been developed by the Regional Skills Partnerships
- 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 Mission and in those specific sectors expected to be impacted by digitalisation and automation
- Respond to digital and cyber security skills gaps within the economy by providing opportunities for upskilling
- Respond to rapid developments in automation, Artificial Intelligence and digitalisation by preparing the workforce with necessary and transferable skills
- Support workplace partnerships that seek to transition workers skills that relate to the green economy.

Project proposals must clearly demonstrate how they align with and deliver against the three key themes as outlined above.

#### **Funding and timescales**

The life span of each project will be 3 years, covering the financial years 2025-26, 2026-27 and 2027-28. Although trade unions must provide a 3-year plan outlining intended provision, any funding will be made on an annual basis. An annual Grant Award Letter (GAL) will be provided to trade unions in advance of each funding year, confirming agreed funding and details of delivery.

We will allow 1 project proposal (i.e. 1 project) per trade union or where practical, consortium project proposals will be accepted. Consortium project proposals might be of particular interest to smaller trade unions, where collaboration may help to scale up activity and/or in the delivery of viable projects. Where this is the case, trade unions can only be part of a single consortium project proposal and cannot put in an individual proposal in their own right

The amount of funding for 2025-26 is set out below. There are three tiers of

funding recognising the size of union membership and the subsequent higher possible demand for providing support for larger unions:

- Up to 14,999 members (in Wales): maximum funding of £54,375 per annum
- 15,000 to 49,999 members (in Wales): maximum funding of £108,750 per annum
- 50,000 members or over (in Wales): maximum funding of £163,125 per annum

The above figures are indicative and subject to Welsh Government budget negotiations prior to the draft budget being published in December. The above figures may also be reduced should the fund be oversubscribed.

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 2025 and will need to be completed by 31st March 2026. Projects must ensure 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 three themes set out above.

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, where practical, encourage investment from unions, employers, workers and other relevant partners to maximise the impact 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 main focus for all learning activity must be skills and employability, contributing to continued productivity or progression within the workplace by participating individuals. However, projects may include support for health and wellbeing given we are experiencing a higher demand for such support.

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

Once a project proposal 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 proposals involve new or improved facilities (capital expenditure) such as learning centres or IT equipment, it will be necessary to demonstrate 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 workers 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. Project proposals will be particularly welcomed from trades unions working in partnership with others, such as other unions, employers, education and training providers, Local Authorities.

Project proposals 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 annual financial monitoring and quarterly contract management reviews with the projects, in line with the terms of the grant agreement, to ensure financial probity, that delivery is on track and that activity complies with programme requirements.

All WULF Projects are expected to identify and respond to demands for learning. Evidence of need must be submitted with the proposal.

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 has been governed by the **Welsh Language Standards** and WULF projects will be required to adhere to these

standards.

All projects must ensure that they are fully compliant with the **General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)**.

#### **Support**

Advice and support will be available from your Welsh Government Contract Manager throughout the duration of the project. TUC Cymru will provide ongoing 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 meetings to provide advice, and support to all projects on anything other than formal contract compliance.

#### Assessment of project proposals

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

When assessing project proposals, advice will be sought from the WULF Assessment Panel which is made up of nominees from the Welsh Government.

Project proposals will be considered and assessed by the panel against the criteria in this prospectus. The panel will then provide recommendations to the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning for consideration and approval.

#### **Additionality**

Additional funding to support learning can be sought from other sources such as Welsh Government or UK Government funded programmes. Advice and support can be obtained from the Welsh Government and TUC Cymru 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.

#### **Project proposals**

When drafting project proposals, unions 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**

Project proposals must clearly describe the purpose of and need for the project, including how the project will support the three themes outlined above.

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

Project proposals must show the evidence used as the basis for the project submission. This should include evidence of need of project target groups, surveys of workers and employers, 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.

#### **Targets**

In line with the overarching themes and objectives of WULF, unions are expected to report against the following key targets:

- 1. Number of learners achieving full or part accredited qualifications
- 2. Number of learners achieving non-accredited learning
- 3. Number of learners referred/signposted to other learning opportunities

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

Unions 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.

#### **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 to achieve economies of scale where possible.

Project proposals should include a list of project partners and an overview of the support they can offer.

#### **Sustainability**

The project proposal must demonstrate how it has the potential to create and support a learning culture beyond the project period. Proposals 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 (ULRs).

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, 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/worker when agreeing to fund learning activities. The project proposal must clearly set out how this will be implemented.

#### Monitoring and evaluation

Unions 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:

- a project proposal (start of project)
- quarterly claims and a quarterly progress report throughout the period of the programme

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.

Projects should ensure that they have the systems/processes in place to collect special category data.

#### The submission process

The official Welsh Government project proposal form must be used to apply for funding. We cannot accept proposals which are not in this format. All proposals must be signed by an appropriate senior official of the organisation. Due diligence checks will be undertaken by the Welsh Government's central due diligence teams before any proposal is approved.

#### **Payments**

Payment of grant will be made quarterly in arrears upon receipt of an accurate and complete claim form, accompanied by an invoice addressed to the Welsh Government and a detailed Quarterly 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**

Project proposals must be submitted by noon on the 15 November 2024.

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

#### **Next steps**

The WULF assessment panel will meet to discuss and evaluate all project proposals during the week commencing 25 November 2024. Unions will receive feedback following this assessment and will be informed if the project has been successful, by letter, the week commencing 16 December 2024.

Formal Grant Award Letters will be drafted and issued to all successful projects as soon as practicable after the above date.

This document may not be fully accessible.

For more information refer to our accessibility statement.