

**Report to the Cabinet**

Meeting to be held on Thursday, 3 October 2024

**Report of the Director of Growth and Regeneration**

**Part I**

Electoral Division affected:  
(All Divisions);

**Corporate Priorities:**  
Supporting economic growth;

**National Skills Fund: Skills Bootcamps 2025/26**

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**Brief Summary**

Skills Bootcamps form part of the Government's Lifetime Skills Guarantee and are funded by the Department for Education under the National Skills Fund. Skills Bootcamps are commissioned through a combination of national procurement and grant allocations to lead authorities in Functional Economic Areas. In Lancashire, following the cessation of the Local Enterprise Partnership, this is now via Lancashire County Council on behalf of the upper tier authorities, pending decisions regarding the proposed Combined County Authority.

A total of £1.2m was allocated to Lancashire under Wave 3 for financial year 2022/23, £3m under Wave 4 in 2023/24 and £6.4m under Wave 5 (2024/25).

The programme and proposal for Wave 6 (2025/26) were discussed at the Lancashire Skills and Employment Board on 5 September 2024. The Board was supportive of the recommendations to Cabinet.

This is deemed to be a Key Decision and the requirements of the council's Cabinet procedure rules (Standing Order C18, Consideration of Key Decisions) have been complied with.

**Recommendation**

Cabinet is asked to:

- (i) Accept any grant funds offered by the Department for Education to enable



the delivery of a Skills Bootcamp programme in accordance with the proposal submitted, to the benefit of Lancashire residents and businesses.

- (ii) Authorise the Executive Director of Growth, Environment, Transport and Health, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, the Section 151 Officer, and the Director of Law and Governance, to review and agree the grant funding offer and terms and conditions, giving due consideration to any procurement considerations, and to agree and enter into any legal agreements required to protect the interests of Lancashire County Council in accordance with its decision making processes.

## Detail

Skills Bootcamps were adopted by the Department for Education under the National Skills Fund, following the pilot of Digital Bootcamps through the Fast Track Digital Workforce Fund, with Lancashire working in partnership with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and Greater Manchester Combined Authority.

Skills Bootcamps are 12-to-16-week programmes, aimed at addressing technical skills shortages predominantly at Level 3 (equivalent to A Level/T Level) and above, which are developed in collaboration with employers to address skills shortage areas and hard to fill vacancies. Skills Bootcamps provide intensive training for adults who are 19+, to either fast-track unemployed residents into jobs, or to boost the skills of employed individuals to enable them to get a better job, gain a pay rise or take on new responsibilities.

The Department for Education has taken a balanced approach to the procurement of Skills Bootcamps, with nationally procured provision and Section 14 grants to Mayoral Combined Authorities and Functional Economic Areas via Local Enterprise Partnerships or lead local authorities (following the submission of proposals). This enables specific skills challenges to be addressed in localities based on local labour market intelligence, including the Local Skills Improvement Plans.

The Skills Hub, with support from Lancashire County Council's procurement team, procured £3m of Skills Bootcamps in the last financial year under Wave 4 (2023/24). Delivery of this has now completed, and providers are collecting outcomes for learners, with project closure at the end of September 2024. The programme has supported 889 learners (exceeding the Department for Education target).

In December 2023, £6.4m was awarded to Lancashire for Wave 5 (2024/25). This was an increase from 2023/24, and allowed a wider sectoral offer to be made available across Lancashire. There are now 33 providers and 54 Skills Bootcamps programmes being delivered in Lancashire. The full list is on the Skills Hub website: <https://www.lancshireskillshub.co.uk/skillsbootcamps/>. The target number of participants is 1,714. As at the end of July 2024, 243 participants had been enrolled onto a Skills Bootcamp, achieving the target set for Department for Education of 20% by the end of July. The next target is 50% by the end of September.



## **Proposal for Skills Bootcamps for 2025/26**

The Department for Education has requested proposals for funds for Wave 6 (financial year 2025/26) from Mayoral Combined Authorities and Functional Economic Areas. In Lancashire, following cessation of the Local Economic Partnership, this is now via Lancashire County Council on behalf of the upper tier authorities, pending decisions regarding the proposed Combined County Authority.

This creates an opportunity for Lancashire to extend funds for Skills Bootcamps to address local skills shortage areas, building on the success of the Skills Bootcamp programme to-date, and for residents to boost their employability and earning potential. Skills Bootcamps can help to address the technical skills needs resulting from industrial digitalisation and the drive to net zero, aligning with the emerging Economic Plan.

Two market engagement events were undertaken by the Skills Hub with a mix of 76 existing and new providers, stakeholders, and employers. Attendees were requested to submit an expression of interest form if they had an idea for a Skills Bootcamps (or wanted to continue existing provision) or a stakeholder form if they wanted to suggest an area of need or be linked with other providers interested in similar subject areas.

The market engagement events, and expression of interest forms supported the formulation of the proposal to the Department for Education. It was made clear that should grant funds be confirmed by the Department for Education, that applications would need to be made via the local procurement process to secure funds.

A proposal for c£6.7m has been submitted to the Department for Education – a slightly higher amount than the current year, with a view to consolidating the programme – targeting technical areas aligned with demands in the local labour market. The Department for Education has indicated that financial allocations will be agreed after the Spending Review in Autumn 2024. Discussion has been undertaken with the Procurement Service to plan a procurement process to allocate the funds. It is anticipated that this will be undertaken through an Open Framework, rather than Invitation to Tender as per previous years to improve flexibility, subject to confirmation of funding.

In terms of timescales, it is intended that grants be confirmed following the Spending Review in Autumn 2024, to enable contract extensions and local procurement to take place from January 2025, so that delivery can commence from April 2025, with provision completing by the end of March 2026 and outcomes by September 2026.

### **Consultations**

Two market engagement events were undertaken (one in person and one online) targeted at employers, providers, and stakeholders. Seventy-six organisations attended. A total of 165 expressions of interest were received, which were reviewed, combined where the focus was similar, and triangulated with labour market intelligence and vacancy data.



## **Implications:**

This item has the following implication, as indicated:

### **Risk management**

Lancashire County Council has a track record of managing Skills Bootcamps, initially in partnership with Greater Manchester Combined Authority and, from April 2022, independently, with investment made in a Project Manager and four Project Officers in the Skills Hub team to manage the local programme across 2022/23, 2023/24 and 2024/25. The posts are fully funded through the management and administration costs embedded in the Skills Bootcamp funds from the Department for Education (with no match requirement).

### **Human Resources**

The Project Manager and Project Officer posts are currently fixed term until 30 September 2025. It is the intention that the posts would be extended for a further year, should a similar level of funds be awarded by the Department for Education. Should less funds than 2024/25 be awarded, consideration would be given to the level of staffing required. The county council's people policies would be applied and any associated costs, including any redundancy liabilities, would be met by the Department for Education grant so that there is no cost to Lancashire County Council.

### **Procurement**

The procurement process undertaken for 2023/24 and 2024/25 enables extension of contracts for a further one year or two years respectively, subject to performance and funding allocations. There is, therefore, the opportunity to extend existing contracts to continue the Skills Bootcamps currently in delivery. The desire is to extend the range of Skills Bootcamps in-line with local technical skills needs, which would necessitate a further open procurement process in addition to extensions. Discussions are underway with procurement in Lancashire County Council to agree the approach for 2025/26, which could be via an open framework if initiated at the end of February (following delays in the implementation of the Procurement Act) to increase flexibility and enable call off contracts throughout the year to better respond to employer needs.

### **Legal**

The policy intent of the programme is to fast-track people into vacancies in the local economy or to upskill employees to progress within the workplace. The Department for Education has set an expectation that 75% of participants will progress into employment or within the workplace. The 2023/24 Skills Bootcamps have completed delivery, and providers have until the end of September 2024 to claim these outcomes. If employment or progress outcomes are not forthcoming, 20% of the funding is withheld. This is built into the back-to-back contracts so is a risk for providers. Progress of providers is tracked with varying performance to-date against this final milestone – it is unlikely that the full 75% will be achieved by every provider.



There is no financial penalty to Lancashire County Council, rather the funds are not drawn down to pass to the providers. There is no impact on the management and administration costs (which were received at the beginning of the year in full).

Any grant offer from the Department for Education will be reviewed by Legal Services for advice before the signing of any grant agreements. Legal advice will also be provided on the arrangements to distribute funds including any onward grant agreements and the contracts with providers, and the agreements to document these delivery arrangements.

## **Financial**

There are no match requirements from Lancashire County Council. Where providers are delivering Skills Bootcamps that reskill or upskill employees, large companies are expected to contribute to 30% of the cost per learner and Small to Medium Enterprises 10%. The providers are required to collect the funds and provide the evidence as part of the claims process. This requirement is built into the back-to-back contracts. Any financial contributions are deducted from the amounts paid to providers for the learners by the Skills Hub.

Redundancy cost risks are mitigated by utilising part of the grant to create a reserve to meet these costs.

## **Governance**

Regarding Lancashire Enterprise Partnership integration, it is the Department for Education expectation that programmes such as Skills Bootcamps will pivot to upper tier local authorities, which in Lancashire will be Lancashire County Council on behalf of the upper tier authorities (which also operated as the accountable body for the programme for the Lancashire Enterprise Partnership), or a potential future Combined County Authority, depending on the position when the grant is awarded.

## **Equality and Cohesion**

The Lancashire Skills Bootcamp programme is open to all adult residents. Providers are expected to consider the diversity within their groups of learners and are encouraged to ensure that bootcamp provision is accessible. A number are delivered flexibly, for example, in evenings and at weekends, and a number are on-line or blended to increase accessibility. For sectors in which females are under-represented, for example, digital, construction and engineering, providers are encouraged to actively engage females in provision and the split of learners is monitored and discussed at contract reviews. The programme team work with the Department for Work and Pensions locally, which attend the Community of Practice with providers, so that providers are aware of the support for unemployed learners who may have barriers to engaging with the bootcamps, for example, learners can apply for the Flexible Support Funding for equipment and support. A 'pre-Skills Bootcamp' programme has also been developed with local providers of adult education, to provide a bridge to a full Skills Bootcamp in response to feedback from JobCentre work coaches – to improve accessibility for residents who have not been



in education or learning for some time. Although the Skills Bootcamp is available to all adult residents, the measures identified mean that it is expected to contribute positively to the general aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty and particularly to the aim of advancing equality of opportunity for groups with protected characteristics.

### List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
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None

Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

N/A

