



Adult Skills Fund
Open Bid Framework
Leicester City Council
Academic Year 2026-2027

Contact: adult.ed-partners@leicester.gov.uk

1. INSTRUCTIONS

We are launching a call to invite organisations to apply to deliver Adult Skills Fund (ASF) qualification courses to upskill residents in Leicester City.

Leicester City Council ("the Authority"), has successfully secured additional funding from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) for delivery of Adult Skills Fund (ASF) programmes.

The Adult Education Service seeks to commission up to £1.2M of ASF activity in the academic year 2026-27 for up to 10 providers.

Applications should be for between £50,000 and £300,000 of activity

If you are interested in submitting a proposal, please complete a **single stage Application Form (including the delivery plan spreadsheet)** by 12 O'clock Midnight **18th September 2026** for delivery in the 2026-27 Academic Year (1st August 2026 to 31 July 2027).

For this call, we are looking to deliver activity that complements the existing [Leicester City Adult Education](#) programme and supports the city elements of the following strategies:

- [Get Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Working Plan](#)
- [Leicester & Leicestershire Learning and Skills Improvement Plan](#)
- [Leicester Culture & Creative Industries Strategy](#)

This opportunity is for **Adult Skills Funded (ASF)** and 'free courses for jobs' (FCFJ) funding only.

- This does not include Tailored Learning provision, Advanced Learning Loans or Skills Bootcamps.
- This does not include fully online, self-study options

Your Application Form must meet the specification set out in this guidance.

It is essential that you comply with the following instructions in the preparation and submission of your Application Form. The Authority reserves the right to reject any Application Form that does not comply with these instructions.

Application Forms must be received by Midnight on Friday 18th September 2026. Any Application Forms not fully completed or submitted after this date and time will be disregarded by the Authority.

Application Forms must be submitted electronically to adult.ed-partners@leicester.gov.uk. You will receive a formal email receipt of your Application Form no more than 3 working days after submission. If you do not receive this, you should contact adult.ed-partners@leicester.gov.uk.

If you have any questions about this Application Form, please direct these to adult.ed-partners@leicester.gov.uk.

The Authority may accept the Application Form at any time within this prescribed period. The Authority shall, however, not be bound to accept any Application Form(s).

If your Application Form is deemed successful by the Authority, you will be required to enter into a Grant Agreement with the Authority (subject to successful award of DFE funding) for the provision of the Services (“the Agreement”). The Grant Agreement shall incorporate the terms and conditions published with this Application Form.

Your Application Form must be completed in full and in English.

Your Application Form must be submitted in Microsoft Word.

Your Application Form must be signed and dated where required.

1.1 Living Wage

The Authority is a Living Wage Employer <https://www.livingwage.org.uk/>. You are required to confirm as a provider it is your policy to pay employees and all providers connected with the delivery of this requirement Living Wage as a minimum.

1.2 Modern Slavery and Responsible Procurement

The Authority is committed to responsible and ethical practices and aims to achieve this through its Procurement Strategy and supporting policies.

The Authority recognises its responsibility to take a robust approach to ethical and sustainability issues, especially around modern slavery and human trafficking, which it is absolutely committed to preventing, within its supply chains.

The Authority is committed to sourcing services, supplies, and/or works in a way that considers ethical and sustainable considerations, including economic, social, labour, and environmental factors, whilst always aiming to procure and act in a way that is morally right, open, fair, and transparent.

2. SPECIFICATION

Six overarching principles underpin all Leicester City Council's Adult Learning and Skills Development programmes.

Principle 1: Empowerment and Inclusion

Ensure all adults have equitable access to learning that empowers individuals, tackles barriers, and promotes social cohesion across diverse communities.

Principle 2: Relevance and responsiveness

Design and commission high-quality adult learning and skills programmes that meet individual, business and community needs and embrace modern technologies.

Principle 3: Collaboration and Partnership

Strengthen cross-sector partnerships between education providers, employers, communities, and government to co-design skills solutions and maximise shared resources.

Principle 4: Lifelong and Life-Wide Learning

Foster a culture of learning at every stage of life - in families, communities, workplaces, and formal education - to build resilience, adaptability, and wellbeing.

Principle 5: Leadership and Sustainability

Demonstrate strong political will, good governance, and effective resource use to embed skills development as a driver of inclusive economic growth, health, and social value.

Principle 6: Employability skills and Workplace Behaviours

Ensure that provision responds to local employers' needs and develops the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours to prepare individuals for a successful transition into employment.

2.1 Adult Skills Fund

The purpose of the adult skills fund (ASF) is to support adult learners in non-devolved areas to gain skills which will lead them to meaningful, sustained, and relevant employment, or enable them to progress to further learning which will deliver that outcome.

Please read Appendix 1: LCC Subcontracting Policy and the [Adult skills fund: funding and performance management rules 2026 to 2027 - GOV.UK](#) (ASF rules) before completing this application. Any subsequent amendments to the funding rules, made by the department in year, will apply.

This opportunity is for **Adult Skills Funded (ASF)** and **'free courses for jobs' (FCFJ)** only.

This opportunity **does not include** Tailored Learning provision, Advanced Learning Loans or Skills Bootcamps or fully online self-study courses.

The proposed programmes should be aimed at Leicester City residents and employees of Leicester city-based businesses. Residents of devolved regions are not eligible for funding.

All participants must meet the eligibility criteria laid out in the ASF rules.

On the first day of learning a learner must be **aged 19 or older** on 31 August within the funding year.

All subcontracted provision is part of the Leicester City Council Adult Education programme and will form part of their Ofsted inspection.

2.2 Courses

LCC Adult Education are seeking partners to deliver the following Adult Skills fundable provision on their behalf:

1. **Essential Skills** provision to meet current, unmet demand for ESOL, English, Maths and Digital skills.
2. **Vocational preparation or progression** opportunities that complement an existing LCC Adult Education or Skills Bootcamp programme.
3. **Specialist vocational courses** which meet sectoral priorities and priority groups identified in the Local Skills Improvement plan and Get LLR working plan.
4. Skills to support the **Creative Industries** aligned to the Council's Creative Industries Strategy
5. Programmes to support **digital and management skills** for efficiency and productivity in the small business, public and VCS sectors.

Priority will be given to:

- Provision which serves an area of the city with a lack of appropriate local Adult Education opportunities.
- Courses which are delivered flexibly – for example intensive courses, evening or weekend delivery, blended learning.
- Provision targeting learners with low or no previous qualifications and those who are not currently in education, employment or training.

All qualifications proposed must be fundable in the Adult Skills Fund or Free Courses for Jobs categories, for the relevant academic year, as indicated on [the Find a Learning Aim](#) database.

Please remember to check the 'last date for new starts' aligns with your delivery plan and that you have the relevant Awarding Body's approval to deliver each qualification.

2.3 Funding

The Adult Education Service seeks to commission up to £1.2M of ASF activity in the academic year 2026-27 for up to 10 providers.

Applications should be for between £50,000 and £300,000 of activity

2.4 Management Fees

Management Fees for subcontracted delivery (learner recruitment, teaching, assessment, progression and administration) will be 20% of the funding rate for the qualification (s) delivered. The management fees will cover the Council's costs for

- Needs analysis and stakeholder consultation
- Contract Awards and administration
- Quality Assurance and performance management
- Evidence checking and data processing
- Payment management
- Senior Management contractual support including, management of procurement, financial due diligence, funding rule adherence, audit preparation and general support and advice to the training provider
- Where a performance improvement plan is required to ensure the provider meets the expected standards, additional charges will be made to cover any additional costs to the Council, including additional officer time.

2.5 Payments

Payments will be made to partners based on the following criteria:

- The delivery of a qualification aim agreed in the contract negotiation process which is listed on the Find a Learning Aim Government portal and subsequently included in the potential provider's contract profile of delivery.
- Payments will be calculated following the submission of a verified ILR submission to the Department. The ASF funding earned for the agreed course(s) (on-programme and achievement including uplifts) in the relevant period minus the 20% management fee. No management fee will be charged for Additional Learning Support payments.
- Payments will be based on actual submission of accurately completed course / learner evidence, including learner enrolment forms, course registers, qualification achievement evidence, and where applicable, learner fee remission evidence.
- Payments will be made on the actual recruitment, learner funding eligibility, learner employment status and learner evidence submissions. Payments will not be based on profiled starts.
- Learners will only become eligible for funding after they have been retained on programme for the minimum qualifying period and this is predicated by the length of the learning programme.
- Potential providers should note that 80% of learner Adult Skills Fund earnings are secured through learner retention on programme and the remaining 20% is secured through the achievement of the qualification aim.
- Payments for Adult Skills Fund (ASF) delivery are made 30 days after the receipt of all required evidence and an accurate invoice (Following the submission of the ILR each month, providers will be informed of the amount to

be invoiced). All payments to sub-contractors are made in line with Leicester City Council payment procedures.

- Towards the end of the contractual period, a reconciliation exercise will take place. Final payment may be withheld by the Authority until final figures are produced by the ILR to ensure payment accuracy.
- All course documentation and learner evidence must be submitted by the end of September 2027 following the end of the academic year. Late submissions cannot be funded.
- Potential providers should note that all Education & Skills Funding Agency funding is subject to both internal and external audit. Any overpayments identified due to non-compliance will be subject to financial claw back or a reconciliation of outstanding due payments.

2.6 Course Fees

Providers must charge course fees in line with the Adult Education Service Fees Policy and the Adult Skills Fund rules.

- Learners who are eligible for full funding must not be charged a fee,
- Learners who are eligible for co-funding must be charged 50% of the listed funding rate for the qualification.
- No additional fees or admin charges can be made to learners or employers.

2.7 Additional Learning Support (ALS)

Providers are required to meet the reasonable adjustments of learners with disabilities and learning difficulties and this will be funded as per the 2026-27 funding rules. Evidence of assessment, provision of adjustments and support and the impact of ALS will be required.

2.8 Work Placements (19–24-year-olds)

Work placements for eligible 19-24-year-olds will be funded as per the 2026-27 funding rules.

2.9 Learner Support Funds (LSF)

Eligible learners can apply to the Adult Education Learner Support Fund.

3. SHORTLISTING AND ASSESSMENT

3.1 Mandatory Requirements

All applicants must meet the mandatory requirements:

- Application is received on time
- Application form is complete
- [UKRLP](#) registered
- Good financial standing
- Required written policies – Living Wage, Health & Safety, Equality & Diversity, Sustainability
- Public and Employer Liability insurance to a minimum of £10,000,000, and Professional Indemnity insurance to a minimum of £5,000,000
- Cyber Essentials
- Not have been previously barred from delivery by DfE/DWP

3.2 Shortlisting Requirements

Applicants must demonstrate their capacity and capability to design and deliver an appropriate programme to the required standards and comply with legislative and funding requirements.

Applicants must have a strong track record and have experience of recruiting sufficient learners and delivering qualification courses that meet targets and expected standards for learner retention, achievement and progression.

Applicants must demonstrate they have sufficient understanding of the skills needs of Leicester residents and the barriers they may face to participation.

It is desirable that the applicants have a proven track record of delivery in Leicester.

3.3 Delivery Plan:

Applicants must complete the delivery plan spreadsheet in full and demonstrate the following:

- Supports the Get LLR Working strategy, the Local Skills Improvement Plan priorities. [Leicestershire Local Skills Improvement Plan - East Midlands Chamber \(emc-dnl.co.uk\)](#) and other relevant Council priorities.
- Meets the skills needs of the Leicester city residents and does not duplicate existing provision, including Skills Bootcamps and DWP funded programmes.

- All qualifications proposed are fundable under Adult Skills Fund or Free Courses for Jobs in the relevant academic year as indicated on [the Find a Learning Aim](#) database
- Is grounded in a thorough analysis and of the Adult Skills needs of Leicester residents, barriers to participation and gaps in current provision.

3.4 Learner recruitment and support:

Applicants have a clear learner recruitment strategy and understanding of the barriers to participation in Leicester.

Applicants have an effective learner inclusion and support strategy.

3.5 Quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment:

Applicants have a comprehensive and effective approach to ensuring and improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. All proposed provision should be able to meet the 'expected standard' or above in the [new Ofsted toolkit](#).

Applicant's quality improvement plan adequately addresses any areas for improvement identified in the most recent Ofsted report and/or self-assessment report.

Applicants are approved by the relevant awarding body to deliver the proposed qualifications

3.6 Capacity, resources and mobilisation

Applicants have in place staff, venues and resources required to support the delivery plan.

3.7 Data and Administration

Applicants have experience and understanding of the data and administrative requirement of Adult Skills Funding.

3.8 Risk register

Applicants identify realistic risks and mitigations

Applicants understand the Adult Skills Fund funding methodology and the factors affecting financial viability of courses.

3.9 Supporting evidence

Applicants may include the following evidence to support their application:

- Most recent Ofsted Report

- Most recent MATRIX report for Information, Advice and Guidance
- External Quality Assurance report(s) for the qualifications proposed
- Retention and achievement rates for recent delivery of the proposed qualifications (within the last 3 years)

4. APPRAISAL PROCESS

Application forms will be scored and assessed as follows.

The maximum score for each question is 5, based on the scoring framework below, but some are weighted through the multiplication of the assigned score. For example, a score of 5 weighted by a factor of 4 will equal a total score of 20. The maximum score and multiplication weightings are shown on the application form in the dark grey box to the right of each question.

Scores will be awarded low to high based on the framework and within the scoring range for each question.

Score	Assessment	Description
0	Unacceptable	<i>Response to the question is unacceptable or no response received. Does not give the Fund confidence in the ability of the bidder to deliver the contract.</i>
1	Poor/Weak Response	<i>Inadequate detail provided or some of the answer not directly relevant to the question. Is supported by none or a weak standard of evidence in several areas giving rise to concern about the ability of the bidder to deliver the contract.</i>
2	Below Expectations	<i>Limited information provided, and/or a response that is inadequate or only partially addresses the question giving rise to concern about the ability of the bidder to deliver the contract.</i>
3	Satisfactory Response	<i>Acceptable response in terms of the level of detail, accuracy and relevance. Is supported by a satisfactory standard of evidence in most areas but a few areas lacking detail/evidence giving rise to some concerns about the ability of the bidder to deliver the contract.</i>
4	Good Response	<i>Comprehensive response in terms of detail and relevance to the question and supported by good standard of evidence. Gives the Fund confidence in the ability of the bidder to deliver the contract. Meets the Fund's requirements.</i>
5	Very Good Response	<i>As Good, but to a better degree in terms of precision and relevance. Is comprehensive and supported by a high standard of evidence. Gives the Fund a high level of confidence in the ability of the bidder to deliver the contract. May exceed the Fund's requirements in some respects, for example, added value such as integration/synergy with other projects.</i>

5. MODERATION

Leicester City Council may use discretion to ensure a broad range of deliverable Adult Skills programmes are supported in order to support a cross range of sector / skills provision.

Where applications tie on scores, further moderation criteria will be applied.

Following moderation, a shortlist of providers may be invited to present their proposals during a visit to the proposed delivery location.

The selected Application Forms once initially shortlisted by a panel of Leicester City Council officers will be approved and agreed by the Head of Adult Education and the Assistant Mayor.

6. NOTIFICATION OF INVITATION TO BID OUTCOME

Once the outcome of the assessment process has been notified to all applicants, organisations can request feedback on their applications and scoring.

The timing for delivery is the academic year 1st August 2026 - 31st July 2027.

7. TERMS & CONDITIONS

If successful, LCC will then issue a formal Grant Funding Agreement to the selected applicant which will need to be agreed and signed by both the Authority and the successful applicant.

- You must complete all sections of the Application Form, including the Declaration and Company Information section.
- The Authority reserves the right to reject any Application Form(s) that is not fully completed.

By continuing with this Application Form, you are confirming that:

- Your proposal is located in the Leicester city geographical area and the benefits will be delivered to this area.
- Your proposal does not include second tier sub-contracting of any provision or services.
- Your proposal complies with all of the [Adult Skills Fund: funding and performance management rules](#) and associated policies.
- You have a United Kingdom Provider Reference Number (UKPRN)
- You are approved to deliver the proposed qualifications by the relevant awarding body.
- You must not have been found to be in serious breach of funding rules by the Local Authority or a government department following formal investigation within the previous 5 years and not currently be under investigation.
- The Application Form must be fully completed and received within the timeframe.