

From: **Simon Jones, Corporate Director, Growth, Environment and Transport Directorate**

To: **Derek Murphy, Cabinet Member for Economic Development**

Subject: **Kent & Medway Skills Bootcamps Programme**

Key decision **24/00092**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Electoral Division: All

Summary: This report provides an update on a recent Kent County Council bid to the Department for Education (DfE) for a local, sector-focused 'Skills Bootcamps' programme for the 25-26 financial year to support local employers and the Kent & Medway workforce.

Recommendation(s):

The Cabinet Member for Economic Development is asked (subject to receiving confirmation of funding from the DfE) to agree to:

(i) APPROVE the acceptance of the National Skills Fund Grant, subject to final review and consideration of detailed terms and conditions from the Department of Education, for delivery of the Skills Bootcamps Programme for Kent & Medway.

(ii) DELEGATE authority to the Director of Growth and Communities after consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, to review and agree to the required terms and conditions to enter into the necessary grant arrangements.

(iii) DELEGATE authority to the Director of Growth and Communities to take other necessary actions, including but not limited to entering into contracts or other legal agreements, as required to implement the decision to deliver a Skills Bootcamp Programme for Kent and Medway.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Department for Education (DfE) is supporting a National Skills Fund to help businesses find and hire the workers they need; as well as supporting adults to flourish and fulfil their potential through high quality training. This includes through Skills Bootcamps programmes.

1.2 [Skills Bootcamps](#) are intensive, Level 3-5¹ or equivalent flexible training courses up to 16 weeks, with a guaranteed job interview (in the case of a new job), which equip adults with technical skills that enable them to access in-demand

¹ There are nine qualifications levels in England. Level 3 includes A-level, T-Level, level 3 NVQ, advanced apprenticeship. Level 4 includes certificate of Higher Education, higher apprenticeship, level 4 NVQ. Level 5 includes diploma of higher education, foundation degree, level 5 NVQ.

jobs, apprenticeships, new opportunities and an increased level of income over time (including for the self-employed).

1.3 The overall aims of the Skills Bootcamps are:

- to deliver flexible training programmes based on local employer / sector 'in-demand' skills needs which may be either regulated (i.e. qualification based) or non-regulated (e.g. based on alignment with industry standards) enabling adults to do training around work and other commitments, looking to gain work, additional responsibilities, or access new opportunities. The bootcamps will offer a guaranteed job interview for course participants currently not in work on completion of the course or an enhanced job role where a learner is put forward by their current employer.
- to address the training needs of adults (19+) and provide them with wider access to opportunities to retrain, update or formalise their skills or acquire specialist skills.
- to address the needs of local employers and the local economy and to deliver targeted interventions to meet short-medium term demand to fill medium-higher vacancies and drive productivity.
- to bring individuals closer to better jobs, by linking them with line of sight to a job/ different role, additional responsibilities, or new opportunities/contracts

1.4 Skills Bootcamps were initially tested in Autumn 2020 and have extended across England, and across an increasing range of vocational sectors. Kent & Medway is currently one of the only areas in the UK without an active skills bootcamps programme. A bid was not submitted previously due to challenges with securing adequate employer engagement and the possibility of guaranteed job interviews, largely because the local economy is driven by very small businesses which were unable to commit to the latter during the difficult period in 2020-21.

1.5 Kent County Council was, however, invited by the Department for Education to submit a funding application on behalf of the Kent & Medway Functional Economic Area to receive grant funding, to develop and commission the delivery of a programme of a pilot Skills Bootcamps programme during financial year 2025/26 with the last learner enrolments to be confirmed before 31 March 2026 and courses able to run into the first quarter of 26-27 if required.

1.6 KCC's Economy and Community Learning & Skills Teams have worked together and with partners and stakeholders to develop a Skills Bootcamps application which was submitted to DfE in September 2024. The bid requests £1.75m DfE grant funding. The bid was developed as a pilot for Kent & Medway and courses were only included where sufficient buy-in from local employers could be demonstrated to ensure that there was a commitment to providing interviews or enhanced job roles for learners completing the courses.

1.7 The Department for Education is currently reviewing submissions from across England and is expected to inform lead Authorities of the results and their respective allocations by December 2024.

2. Key Features and minimum expectations:

2.1 The DfE states that it requires substantial evidence of demand for the skills developed through the Skills Bootcamp, including evidence of vacancies in local labour market. Any suppliers must cite the evidence they are relying on regarding local labour market needs and demonstrate due regard to the skills analysis and priorities of Functional Economic Areas (Kent & Medway) and their Skills Advisory Panels (Kent & Medway Employment Task Force), Local Authorities (LAs) and show how they align with their Local Skills Improvement Plan(s) (led in Kent & Medway by the Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce).

2.2 Employers will be actively involved by:

- Involvement in the design of the training
- Committing to provide guaranteed interviews.
- Committing to provide work experience, mentoring and/or further training or employment.

2.3 Expected outcomes:

- Individual secures employment in new job.
- Employer skills gaps are filled – at no or a very low cost to employer.
- Self-employed individual gains new skills/new work opportunities
- Existing employees – employee develops skills that allows them to move into new higher skills/higher productivity role.

2.4 DfE has a target of 60% of employers involved in Skills Bootcamp being SMEs.

2.5 Ofsted began inspections of Skills Bootcamps provision in FY 2023-24.

3. The Kent & Medway Bid

3.1 The Kent & Medway bid covers six priority sectors that have been identified as having high skills needs and growth potential locally.

3.2 The bid includes 25 different Skills Bootcamps programmes, each lasting between 2- 16 weeks and providing between 30-200 hours of guided learning hours. The following Skills Bootcamps were included.

Creative

1. Creative & Digital Assistant Production Management Skills Development
2. Creative & Digital Assistant Production Management: Immersive Digital Media Bootcamp

Agri-Food

3. On Farm and Off Farm Operations
4. Horticulture & Environment Management
5. Research & Development

6. Leadership & Management Skills

Construction (NB some construction courses will be delivered at level 2)

7. Management Skills
8. Introduction to Construction – Steelfixing Pathway (x2)
9. Introduction to Construction – Groundworks Pathway (x2)
10. Introduction to Construction – Formwork Pathway (x2)
11. Plant Training NPORs Dumper / Roller (x2)
12. Introduction to the Construction Industry (x2)
13. Bricklaying (x3)
14. Bricklaying Advanced (x2, Level 3)
15. Bricklaying NVQ (Level 3)
16. Multi trades & Retrofit (x3)
17. Construction Skills Certification Scheme & Retrofit (x11)
18. The 'need to knows' about being self-employed in the Construction Sector (four guided learning hours)
19. The 'need to knows' about being self-employed in the Construction Sector (20 guided learning hours)

Retail

20. Elevate your career in Retail

Health and Social Care

21. Understanding the Principles of Dementia Care
22. Understanding the Safe Handling of Medication
23. Principles of End-of-Life Care
24. Working in Health and Social Care

Early Years and School

25. Supporting Children and Young People's Speech, Language and Communication

- 3.3 The proposal is structured to support approximately 530 individuals, with each Skills Bootcamp planned to accommodate 10 to 100 learners, varying according to the specific sector and the course material. The Skills Bootcamps will be delivered by a range of providers (to be procured) and will include a mix of online and face-to-face learning, as well as work placements.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 Under the grant terms KCC will be able to claim a percentage of the total programme budget to cover management, communication, and operational costs (on a full cost recovery basis). The overall budget for 25-26 is £1,753,968 of which KCC will use some £250k to fund the management and operational costs of the programme and ensure that it can be run on a full cost recovery basis.
- 4.2 Grant determination letters and conditions are not yet available and will be reviewed prior to signature to ensure that any financial risks to KCC are minimal.

- 4.3 The full amount of funding can only be drawn down in arrears based on key outcomes being achieved i.e. job interviews for learners so the Economy team is working with procurement to ensure that robust contractual arrangements with training providers will be put in place. The necessary provisions will be required to ensure that any under-performance of a particular supplier will not lead to a financial loss to KCC were the full amount of grant funding not reimbursed.
- 4.4 Prior to each boot camp commencing, KCC will ensure that employer buy-in is reconfirmed to ensure that expected outcomes, on which payments will be dependent, are able to be achieved (job interviews for learners etc.)

5. Options considered

- 5.1 Not developing a DfE-funded Skills Bootcamps programme for Kent & Medway: This would miss an opportunity to support known needs of local businesses and local people seeking employment or career development opportunities and leave Kent & Medway behind other areas successfully running bootcamps programmes such as Hampshire. Other areas have now been running the scheme since its launch in 2020 demonstrating that it can be a very effective tool for upskilling the workforce where employer buy-in is strong.

6. Policy Frameworks

- 6.1 The Skills Bootcamps programme will support Securing Kent's Future through securing external funding to deliver a programme based on full cost recovery.
- 6.2 The proposed decision supports 'Framing Kent's Future Our Council Strategy' 2022-2026, specifically Priority 1: Levelling up Kent.
- To work with partners to develop a skills system for Kent that delivers skills that are resilient to changing workforce needs and opportunities and supports people to higher level skills.
 - To see significant improvements in the economy, connectivity, educational attainment, skills and employment rates and public health outcomes in deprived communities in coastal areas so that they improve faster than the rest of Kent to reduce the gaps.
 - To work with our partners to hardwire a preventative approach into improving the health of Kent's population and narrowing health inequalities.
- 6.3 The bid will support the following ambitions and action areas set out in the [Kent and Medway Economic Framework](#):
- Ambition 2 which focuses on the skills and talent of the workforce, supporting greater employer engagement and leadership in the skills system, joining up the offer and ensuring continued investment in the skills that are needed to respond in the long-term. The **action areas under Ambition 2** also include embedding the Local Skills Improvement Plan, investing in Kent and Medway's skills infrastructure to harness the potential of the transformational

trends identified to support the growth of our sectoral strengths, supporting young people into sustainable and rewarding work, and collaborating to make the most effective use of skills budgets focused on shared priorities.

- Ambition 4 which focuses on ensuring that the benefits of economic growth are shared across the county, and that economic opportunity is linked with wider social outcomes such as health and wellbeing. The **action areas under Ambition 4** include developing a county-wide approach to economic inclusion, supporting access to employment so that “everyone who wants a job can find work”, progression for disadvantaged groups, and embedding economic opportunity at the centre of local regeneration.

7. Legal Implications

- 7.1 KCC will be required to enter into a grant agreement / Memorandum of Understanding and will be expected to deliver against the plan submitted with the application. There will be full data return, quality assurance and reporting expectations against progress and a likely clause that the funding could be reclaimed if delivery is not as documented.

8. Equalities Implications

- 8.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA) screening has been completed and no high negative impacts have been identified. The EQIA will continue to be developed and reviewed as this project progresses.

9. Other Corporate Implications

- 9.1 In the development of the Skills Bootcamps and sub-contracting arrangement, there will be a need for support from Procurement, Finance and Legal. There will also be a need for support from HR to support the recruitment / secondment of a small project team. This will sit within the Economy team in Growth & Communities (Growth, Environment & Transport Directorate) with support from and links to the Community Learning & Skills team (Children, Young People & Education Directorate).

10. Governance

- 10.1 Oversight of the development and successes of the Skills Bootcamps programme will be undertaken through the project management and monitoring approach of the Growth & Communities (G&C) Division within the Growth Environment & Transport (GET) Directorate and the Community Learning & Skills Division within the Children, Young People & Education (CYPE) Directorate.

11. Data Protection implications

- 11.1 The Data Protection Impact Assessment will be completed once it is known whether we are successful in our submission for grant funding.

12. Background Information and appendices

12.1 Appendix A: Proposed Record of Decision

12.2 [Equalities Impact Assessment](#)

13 Recommendation(s):

The Cabinet Member for Economic Development is asked (subject to receiving confirmation of funding from the DfE) to agree to:

(i) APPROVE the acceptance of the National Skills Fund Grant, subject to final review and consideration of detailed terms and conditions from the Department of Education, for delivery of the Skills Bootcamps Programme for Kent & Medway.

(ii) DELEGATE authority to the Director of Growth and Communities after consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, to review and agree to the required terms and conditions to enter into the necessary grant arrangements.

(iii) DELEGATE authority to the Director of Growth and Communities to take other necessary actions, including but not limited to entering into contracts or other legal agreements, as required to implement the decision to deliver a Skills Bootcamp Programme for Kent and Medway.

Contact details:

Report Authors:

Jude Farrell

Head of Community Learning & Skills

jude.farrell@kent.gov.uk

Steve Samson

Interim Head of Economy

steve.samson@kent.gov.uk

Relevant Director:

Relevant Director: Stephanie Holt-Castle

Director for Growth and Communities

stephanie.holt-castle@kent.gov.uk