

Boost for tech startups as competition to run new support programme opens

- Successful provider will receive £12 million Digital Growth Grant to deliver the scheme, which will tackle challenges facing small and scaling tech firms
- Programme will tackle challenges facing small and growing tech businesses, including improving connections with investors and increasing diversity through skills training

Organisations can now apply to deliver a UK-wide programme of activity supporting the UK's digital and tech start ups and scale ups.

The successful provider will deliver a programme from April 2023 to open up access to skills training and advice across the country, and improve regional support networks for startups and scaling companies in the digital and tech sector. This will help create more regional hubs with wealth-generating tech businesses offering high skilled jobs, benefitting startups outside of major cities.

Recent figures show the UK has overtaken China on investment secured by tech start ups, raising more than £12 billion in venture capital funding in the first five months of 2022.

The successful provider and will receive a £12.09 million Digital Growth Grant from the government to run the programme, which will help the UK's early-stage tech firms build on their success. Organisations can apply individually or join together to bid to become the provider.

The programme will tackle some of the biggest challenges facing small and growing tech businesses, such as improving connections between startups and investors with better access to tailored mentoring and advice for founders. There will also be help to drive up diversity and representation in the tech workforce through skills training and sector networks.

Applicants should have a strong presence in the UK and a deep knowledge of the domestic digital sector to provide support for small businesses.

Digital Minister Chris Philp said:

The success of our startups and scaleups has driven the UK ahead of Europe and China to be second in the world for tech investment this year. We want every corner of the country to feel the benefits of tech success and we're looking for an industry partner to help make this possible through the Digital Growth Grant.

The Digital Growth Grant will fund a nationwide programme to:

- Deliver support services to the digital sector, with a focus on emerging technologies like artificial intelligence, advanced computing and quantum. These services should address key challenges faced by a wide range of companies from the seed funding stage to their first or second round of financing.
- Grow regional support networks. Activities should improve local investment, innovation and business growth; be tailored to the needs and tech specialisms of different areas; and be developed in partnership with local bodies and existing tech groups.
- Ensure founders and firms can access digital entrepreneurship training with tailored advice to help start and grow a tech business.
- Clearly signpost startups and scaleups to existing initiatives in the private and the public sector across the UK that can help them access finance, talent and markets.

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport will be accepting applications until midday on 15 August 2022.

Notes to Editors

Further detail about this grant is available [here](#). Interested organisations can attend one of our upcoming webinars about this grant by registering [here](#).

The funding will be awarded from 1 April 2023 for two years, running until 2025.

[Insolvency Live! 2022 – have you got a question to ask?](#)

News story

The Insolvency Service is hosting its annual stakeholder event on 5 July 2022 and we're asking for questions to be submitted to the Q&A panel.



This year's Insolvency Live! 2022 will be the first time the Insolvency Service has hosted a hybrid event where delegates will be able to attend in person and online.

Over the past couple of years during the pandemic, Insolvency Live! has been delivered virtually and in 2021, we welcomed more than 240 delegates who tuned in online.

We're hoping Insolvency Live! 2022 builds on the successes of those online events and this year's agenda is jam-packed with speakers from within the Insolvency Service and from the insolvency industry.

We welcome leading insolvency expert and senior lecturer in law, Dr John Tribe, who will use insight on the cost of living – past and present – and how the personal insolvency framework has helped individuals historically, as well as the possible pressures it may face in the current economic climate.

Other engaging sessions include a presentation on energy sector insolvencies, our customer insight team will talk about the changes they are making to improve customer experience, and the team behind the Director Education Project will showcase the tools they have developed to educate directors and prevent avoidable insolvencies.

The day will end with a Q&A panel, where participants will have the opportunity to put forward their questions to Chief Executive Dean Beale and other members of our executive leadership team.

If you would like to attend the event in person or online, please contact: Stakeholder@insolvency.gov.uk.

We're also welcoming questions to ask our executive leadership team and you can send yours to: stakeholder@insolvency.gov.uk.

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Andy Haldane appointed as Chair of Levelling Up Advisory Council

Press release

Former Bank of England Chief Economist and Head of the Levelling Up Taskforce appointed.



Former Bank of England Chief Economist and Head of the Levelling Up Taskforce, Andy Haldane has today (27 June 2022) been appointed as the Chair of the government's Levelling Up Advisory Council.

The Levelling Up Advisory Council will provide independent specialist advice on matters relating to the design and delivery of the levelling up missions.

Andy Haldane is currently the Chief Executive of the Royal Society of Arts and brings a wealth of experience to the role, including his career at the Bank of England, including as a member of the Monetary Policy Committee, and as Chair of the Industrial Strategy Council. His depth and breadth of his expertise will help the advisory council become a powerful platform to provide insightful, challenging advice to government.

Levelling Up Secretary Rt Hon. Michael Gove MP said:

For Levelling Up to succeed we need scrutiny, challenge and transparency to ensure we deliver on our missions to spread opportunity and prosperity to every corner of the country.

I am delighted Andy Haldane has agreed to chair the Levelling Up Advisory Council. His vision and experience were crucial to putting missions at the heart of the Levelling Up White Paper and as Chair I know he will continue to drive forward this vital work.

Commenting on his appointment Andy Haldane said:

Levelling up is one of the signature economic and social challenges of our time, a challenge made all that much greater by the cost of living crisis. So I am delighted to be chairing the government's Levelling Up Advisory Council, with its deep pool of expertise and experience, to serve as challenge and support for the government on this crucial initiative as it is delivered on the ground, and revivifies the lives of people, right across the UK.

Earlier this year the government announced in the Levelling Up White Paper the appointment of a Levelling Up Advisory Council to act as a critical friend to the government on the Levelling Up agenda.

The council is formed of recognised independent specialists, drawn from industry, academia and the voluntary sector. The names of the other members of the council were published in the [Levelling Up White Paper](#).

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Multi-Domain Integration Symposium **Held at Defence Academy**

Students on the Defence Academy's Advanced Command and Staff Course (ACSC) have had an intense five weeks. They are the first course to undertake the new Multi-Domain Integration (MDI) module, which included lectures from world-leading experts, interactive workshops, industry visits, and research sprints, and has now concluded with an MDI Symposium at Shrivenham.

At the Symposium, ACSC research groups faced a panel of senior leaders from across defence, as well as experts from industry and academia, and were asked to present their findings on a range of topics which could have a significant impact of defence's future. These included promoting an integrated culture in defence and wider government, command and control in the information age and integration lessons from the current crisis in Ukraine.

With over 250 students from all three services, as well as civil servants and international personnel from over 50 countries, the MDI module benefited from a huge diversity of thought and opinion. Furthermore, students were encouraged to challenge the status quo and used a wide range of research methods to inform their findings and proposals.

However this exercise was not purely academic, as the valuable insights from students will be presented to senior defence boards, and their work will also help guide the direction of the MDI change programme.

The module was also not purely classroom-based, and there were opportunities for ACSC students to visit industry sites to learn from their approach to collaborative working and explore their technical solutions to integration.

They also spent two days studying the technique of 'useful fiction' – using fictional narratives to bring strategy and concepts to life. This technique will be crucial as we strive towards the culture change required to embed an integrated mindset.

People are defence's most important asset, and the Defence Academy ensures our people are at the cutting edge of military thinking in a changing world. This module is a clear example of the Defence Academy offering innovative solutions to our most pressing defence and security challenges.

[Amanda Spielman at the AELP National Conference 2022](#)

It's great to be here, speaking at such an interesting time for the sector.

I really do want to recognise your work, and to acknowledge the importance of independent learning providers (ILPs) in the wider world of further education and skills.

Of course, I fully appreciate that the AELP is not just about ILPs. It has many other members, including colleges, employers and HEIs.

We also understand that AELP and ILPs aren't just about apprenticeships, although ILPs do teach most of the apprenticeship provision in the sector. ILPs are contributing to increasing the breadth of specialist study programmes for 16 to 18-year-olds. And you are doing this for a great many adult learning programmes as well, including traineeships and skills boot-camps. And so it is good to see a thriving ILP sector providing more choice for learners and for employers.

I want to say here that the ILP sector has performed reasonably well at inspection, with around 80% of providers judged good or better. But I do want to sound a note of caution. We are now seeing that some new ILPs aren't doing so well at inspection. And this is starting to reduce the proportion of ILPs that are judged good or outstanding.

But on a happier note, I am very pleased to see some great recent inspection outcomes this year, where several ILPs have been judged as outstanding. Well done to them! And there are many strengths in this sector. But while I am congratulating you, I must also talk about the fact that there are some serious issues in system quality.

I'll come on to that later, as first I want to highlight some of those strengths.

You have a valuable common set of goals, such as wanting high-quality courses and good outcomes for your learners. You want your learners to enjoy their courses and to go into jobs that are right for them.

We saw a really good example of this in a recent inspection in the East Midlands. Inspectors found an adult training provider had developed an ambitious curriculum that benefited most learners. It had introduced additional qualifications and activities to improve learners' readiness for work and to encourage them to study further.

For example, learners were working through a useful set of teacher-devised materials, which gave them a grounding in areas that would make them more employable, such as interview skills, managing their finances and setting up their own business. These were offered along with options to prepare learners for their first steps in the world of work. Many learners return to the provider to study further or at a higher level, always a sign of satisfaction. This is really a great example of a provider going the extra mile to plan its curriculum carefully to meet learners needs.

We know that the very best providers are doing an amazingly good job. But that isn't the full picture. There are still too many who don't have the reliable data collection, the information sharing with employers, and the joined-up working practices to ensure that apprentices get full benefit from their training.

And we are aware of some system difficulties that also affect both providers and learners. Take apprenticeships for example. Some achievement rates are very low, on one apprenticeship standard as low as 16%. We often find that the apprentices who finish the course and take their end-point assessment do very well. But too often, too many leave before the end of their training.

But why is this? It could be down to money, because in the current labour market, you may not need an apprenticeship to earn more. But it could be because of pressures at work that mean apprentices do not get enough learning opportunities. Or it could be because of poor quality provision.

Now, more than ever, the answer to this 'why' question is so important. Are apprentices going into better-paid roles in entirely different sectors? Are they getting new roles, thanks to their learning, for better pay, but ending their apprenticeships early? These may be great outcomes for apprentices, but what about the wider picture? There is a real danger that poor retention rates, low achievement rates and a lack of information to demonstrate the value of training programmes will undermine the value of apprenticeships and diminish the prestige of the brand.

We are all aware of the pressures of the current economic climate, post-COVID, post-Brexit and with rising prices and inflation. It's important that policy makers know how factors like these are affecting retention rates and opportunities for young people, especially now when there are plenty of well

paid, low-skilled jobs on offer.

We know from our own series of reports on COVID that many young people have struggled in the past couple of years. Some with loneliness; some with having less peer support; some with worries that their next steps won't give them the future they want. And of course, worries about money, and about having to study at home, where conditions may be far from ideal.

They've had to get used to their journey to the world of work not being what they'd expected it to be. Many young people are only just taking their first external exams. Many didn't have the framework of support and the milestones that older cohorts took for granted. Providers need to be mindful of the needs of learners, who might currently need a bit of extra help.

When we inspect an individual provider, we're making a judgement about how it's performing at a point in time, and report that publicly. But that isn't all we do. We also aggregate our inspection evidence to produce in-year and end of year reports, drawing on that detail collected by inspectors. We inform the sector and government via thematic reports and data publications. These have information that can show you how you are performing relative to others and about how the system is performing. And the wealth of information in these reports may well help you bring about more rapid and greater improvements, and apprenticeship achievement rates at system level certainly do need to improve.

I now want to talk a little more about system quality, and to acknowledge that there is a lot going on in the sector. We hear a lot about the levy in many conversations. For instance, in a recent episode of our podcast – it's called Ofsted Talks, please have a listen if you haven't already! – we heard from an ILP CEO who believed the levy had given them great opportunities and was very valuable. Ian Bamford from Paragon Skills talks in the episode about working with the southern apprenticeship hub to expand Paragon's programme with levy funding.

But we also hear of providers and employers wanting change. We've heard from some employers that want more freedom for their levy spending. Some providers are unhappy with aspects of the apprenticeship system. And frustratingly, we are still finding evidence that the levy is warping parts of the system, and that this may be one reason for poor-quality training.

We hear about how it's enabling some organisations to take the cash with little substantial learning or training in return. And we're also aware that in some cases, apprentices are on a course that is too easy for them, perhaps accrediting what they can mostly do already.

And despite recent hopeful figures, there's still a concern about the range of training and whether it's right for the skills needs of the economy. We are crying out for staff in the higher skilled service industries, construction and many other areas. Have we got the right training in the right places? There's no clearly signposted overview of what apprenticeships can lead to. And they need better careers advice and guidance; apprenticeships are not a second-class route to success.

It is right that policy makers consider whether the levy system is meeting the needs of apprentices, employers and the economy. But it is equally important they consider what the effect of any change will be to avoid any unintended consequences.

And now I want to say something about what we are seeing on inspection and during our monitoring visits to new providers. Of significant concern are the staffing difficulties that many of you are having, especially in relation to recruiting and retaining specialist teachers and trainers, including in subjects like English and maths. We are also seeing fewer learners achieving revised functional skills qualifications.

These and other matters are absorbing leaders' time and drawing their attention and focus away from thinking longer term about the learner experience.

We're watching with interest the introduction of Ofqual recognition for end point assessment organisations. We think that confidence in the system will grow with this change, though there could be some short-term instability. In the medium and longer term, Ofqual recognition should lead to higher confidence in the end point assessments on offer.

And now onto new provider monitoring visits: it does concern me that around a quarter of new providers are still not making sufficient progress in a least one theme.

The best practice we see is from providers who perhaps focus on one or two areas, have a clear intent, employ and retain expert staff, provide high quality off-the-job training and have strong relationships with a small number of employers.

Providers like this make a real difference to learners' lives and provide the training that employers and the economy need. There's so much in this sector that's valuable and we will continue to support your good work. It's making a great difference to the lives of many, many people.

And apprenticeships are a multi-layered system. I've talked about the economic need for higher skilled workers. But apprenticeships are also a way in, especially for young people who didn't do particularly well at school, people who need to retrain, and others who are furthest from joining the workforce for many different reasons.

Good literacy skills are essential here. If you can't read and write, you can't read the job ad, fill in the form or study on your own. So you won't get the most from the opportunities on offer. In some cases, you won't be able to access them at all.

And having mentioned the complexity of the apprenticeships landscape, I want to end by talking briefly about [our new 5-year strategy](#), which we published in April. There are several commitments that relate to FE and skills. Perhaps the most interesting of these for this audience is a commitment to review the inspection methodology in further education and skills providers – not an

easy task, given the complexity and diversity in the sector.

We will review how we gather the evidence on inspection, how we deploy our inspection teams, how many inspectors we allocate for different sizes and types of provider, and what we write about in reports. But what we are not proposing is changes to the education inspection framework (EIF) itself. We know it works well – it's a strong, quality-focused framework, using data and metrics to inform judgements but not to determine them. I want to reassure you that we will continue to inspect through EIF.

Within the strategy, we have a commitment to inspect all of you with a full rather than a short inspection by summer 2025. We know it's helpful for you when we express our views and concerns to ministers, policy colleagues at the Department for Education, IfATE, ESFA and employers' representative bodies.

We understand the challenges you face. We will continue to do our job and inspect and report on what we find, without fear or favour. The strong and productive working relationship that we've built with you helps us do this important work every day. Please, let's keep the dialogue going!

And thank you again for everything that you do.