

# Expression of interest

# Evaluation for the Employer Led Digital Training Initiatives

**Project reference: DFERPPU 20-21/010**

**Deadline for expressions of interest: 5pm on Friday 30th October 2020**

## Summary

Expressions of interest are sought to support with the design and delivery of an evaluation of the Employer Led Digital Training Initiatives pilots. The contractor will be appointed to conduct a process evaluation of the current wave of bootcamps and to design a possible impact evaluation of the second round of bootcamps. This evaluation will support the Department to understand if these initiatives are meeting their anticipated outcomes and to gather data on their implementation to inform future roll-out.

The evaluation will use monitoring data submitted by providers, alongside qualitative data collected via stakeholder interviews to understand participant, provider and employer experiences and assess if the programme meets its expected outcomes.

**Background**

The National Skills Fund (NSF) is a flagship adult skills initiative to which £2.5 billion has been committed over the course of this Parliament. It aims to boost productivity and will help ensure that businesses can find and hire the skilled workers they need and help people fulfil their potential; it also presents a great opportunity to create a simpler system that individuals, providers, local areas, and employers can more easily understand.

The fund is being developed in a user-centred way, employing a ‘test and learn’ approach. It also builds on the already substantial evidence base gathered in the development of the [National Retraining Scheme.](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-retraining-scheme/national-retraining-scheme) This has included analysis of whether existing government-supported adult skills interventions – including approved qualifications and apprenticeships offered at level 5 and below – meet the need to help workers access training that employers value and that brings them closer to higher quality, higher value job roles.

Through this process, we have identified challenges for individuals and employers around how training is accessed and delivered, what kind of training is publicly funded and how SMEs (in particular) engage with the skills system. As a result we have worked with employers and looked at other models being tested to try to understand what kind of delivery mechanism and what kind of skills and support would work better for adults looking for a new higher-skilled role and employers trying to fill specific higher-skilled vacancies.

One of these potential delivery models – which could make up part of the National Skills Fund – is employer-led training initiatives (otherwise known as digital bootcamps). These are flexible courses, giving people the opportunity to build up their digital skills and fast-track to an interview with a local employer. They information gathered through them will help inform the design and delivery of the National Skills Fund.

The bootcamps were announced in the [Prime Ministers skills speech](https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pms-skills-speech-29-september-2020) on 29 September. The current live areas are:

* The West Midlands
* Greater Manchester and Lancashire
* Liverpool City Region

Bootcamps will also go live in Winter 2020/21 in:

* Leeds City Region
* The Heart of the South West
* Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire

The Prime Minister also announced that we would expand out bootcamps into other sectors and to further areas around the country next year.

The local areas have been selected on the basis that they have a confirmed demand from employers / sectors, and existing infrastructure / procured providers / experience of testing a similar model are in place. Local areas have also been selected where DfE analysis demonstrates an economic/social need in the region (which could be further exacerbated by impact of Covid19).

The training will be available to adults aged 19+, either in employment or recently unemployed, with no prior qualification requirements. Course participants will be selected via an aptitude test and potentially an interview to determine suitability.

The specific training offer being delivered will be determined by employer need in the selected pilot areas and will focus on filling local skill shortage vacancies in a range of technical skills, starting with digital skills and potentially a small number of other technical skills. In the context of Covid19, the offer will start with these skills as they are in demand, can be more easily delivered online and link to employment that can more easily be carried out remotely if required. The training will consist of a 12-week ‘bootcamp’ style course funded for up to 8000 participants, followed by a guaranteed interview with an employer, with the aim of securing a job immediately post-training. If initial results are positive, the initiative will be scaled up to cover other areas of the country and other types of in-demand skills.

## Evaluation aims

DfE plans to carry out a two staged evaluation approach starting with a process evaluation of the currently live areas of bootcamps. Following this we are aiming to develop an impact evaluation for the Winter 20/21 bootcamps.

DfE requires a contractor to:

1. Analyse monitoring data as part of the process evaluation.
2. Conduct qualitative interviews as part of the process evaluation.
3. Consider options for an impact evaluation of Winter 20/21 bootcamps.

**Process evaluation**

The process evaluation will focus on the following broad research questions:

* How the pilots are being implemented, does delivery vary across areas / providers? Was the implementation of some pilots more successful than others and why?
* What challenges were encountered during delivery? Are there any lessons learned for further roll-out?
* What does the monitoring data collection (participant rates, drop-out rates, completion rates) suggest about the success of the pilots and their suitability for further roll-out?
* Do employers engage with the pilots e.g. are employers are willing to guarantee interviews, are they confident in the training content and delivery model, including the co-investment element?

We have already made arrangements to collect monitoring data on take-up, completion rates and levels of engagement with training from providers via a data submission spreadsheet (this has been written into provider contracts as a requirement).

The process evaluation will also collect in-depth qualitative data on implementation through interviews with key stakeholders (including providers, employers, and learners).

**Impact evaluation**

The impact evaluation will take place during the Winter 20/21 pilots if a suitable methodology can be identified. The key aim of the impact evaluation will be to measure the extent to which the training intervention impacts on an employee’s likelihood of being in employment and their wage returns, both immediately following and several years after the training takes place.

In order to establish a counterfactual, the contractor should explore options of running a randomised controlled trial. We anticipate that the courses will be significantly oversubscribed, which would provide an opportunity for randomisation at the individual level. However, we are not yet sure whether oversubscription will be the case, and the contractor will use monitoring data from the initial process evaluation to inform our options for the impact evaluation.

The contractor may also look to establish a counterfactual by signposting those who haven’t gained a place on the course to another equivalent government funded course or apprenticeship and we will track progress made by these individuals. We are discussing the options with policy colleagues as a final decision on signposting has not yet been made.

The aims of this impact evaluation are to investigate the digital skills bootcamp policy objectives which include the following:

* Does the subsidised nature of this bootcamp style training mean that a wider / more diverse group of the population are able to access learning (when compared with participants on other digital skills courses)?
* Does the bootcamp help SMEs to recruit suitable candidates? What proportion of participants go on to be recruited by SMEs?
* How have the employer co-investment elements of the model impacted on the pilots?

We are considering two possible options for a counterfactual:

1. Comparing take-up, completion rates, and employment and wage outcomes of bootcamp participants to those of similar people who did not do any training.
2. Comparing take-up, completion rates, and employment and wage outcomes of bootcamp participants to similar people who did alternative training with a similar focus, but not a bootcamp e.g. L3 computer Science or digital technologies or an apprenticeship.

This would enable us to explore the following questions:

* Does the bootcamp model of training attract participants to digital skills training who would otherwise not have accessed similar non-bootcamp training (e.g L3 Computer Science or Digital Technologies or Apprenticeship), and how do participants’ employment and wage outcomes compare to those of similar people who haven’t done government funded training in digital skills?
* Compared to similar people who access other forms of digital skills training (e.g. L3 apprenticeship), what are the longer-term employment and wage outcomes of bootcamp participants? Do they derive more or less benefit?

## Methodology and requirements

We will require support from the contractor to deliver the process evaluation and to design and deliver an impact evaluation of the Winter 20/21 pilots, if a suitable methodology can be identified.

Outlined approach: Process evaluation (Sept 2020 – June 2021)

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| **Item** | **Type** | **Sub-type** | **Detail** |
| 1.a. | Qualitative  | Case studies | * We are considering a case study per area including follow up interviews with learners to understand the experiences and challenges of individual areas. The contractor would be required to work with DfE on the design of the case studies and to carry out the data collection and analysis.
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| 1.b. | Qualitative | Interviews | * The contractor should undertake qualitative stakeholder interviews with a sample of learners, providers and employers. These interviews will identify any challenges and lessons learned for future roll-out. They will also provide important feedback on the ‘bootcamp’ style of learning provision compared to alternative flexible / modular learning options, including what the benefits were of bootcamp learning and how it could be improved
* DfE will provide a draft topic guide to be agreed with contractors promptly after the contract has been awarded, so that the fieldwork can begin as soon as possible. We are currently asking potential participants to opt in to being contacted by a research contractor and to share their details with a third party, meaning DfE can provide the contractor with a list of contact details for recruitment and sampling.
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| 2.a. | Quantitative | Survey | * We are considering the option of a short end of course survey with participants to understand their personal experiences of the initiative and their individual course outcomes (including details on any employment gained from the guaranteed interview scheme). The contractor would be required to work with DfE on the design of this survey and would be responsible for administering it to participants and analysing the findings.
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| 2.b. | Quantitative | Monitoring data collection and analysis | * Providers have been asked to collect and submit baseline data and monthly monitoring data via a data submission spreadsheet provided by DfE throughout the delivery of the pilots as part of their contractual obligations. DfE will be undertaking regular analysis of this data to monitor providers and will require support from the contractor with further analysis and writing-up of the findings. DfE have asked providers to submit data on the following aspects of the course:
* Employer engagement (type and levels of co-funding)
* Applicant information (data on total number of applicant learners and their characteristics (demographics, past employment / education).
* Participant information (data on total number of participant learners and their characteristics (name, contact details, NI number, demographics, past employment / education).
* Course participation rates (Data on course participation including attendance / completion rates / success at interview)
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Outline approach: Impact evaluation from January 2021 – December 2021

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| **Item** | **Type** | **Sub-type** | **Detail** |
| 1a. | Quantitative  | Impact evaluation scoping study | This scoping work would need to be undertaken as early as possible within the contract. DfE will provide any information available. The contractor will be expected to provide expert advice on the possibility of conducting an impact evaluation and potential design of a study.  |
| 1.b. | Quantitative | Impact evaluation | Pending the outcome of 1a. the contractor would be expected to deliver an impact evaluation from January 2021, of the Winter 20/21 bootcamps. There will be a break clause in the contract (in Spring 2021) if an impact evaluation is not taken forward, but we will still require the contractor to proceed with a process evaluation until Summer 2021. |

## Timing

* Deadlines for EOIs- 5pm 30th October 2020
* ITTs issued by DfE – 4th November 2020
* Deadline for ITTs – 5pm 25th November 2020
* Preferred bidder notified – 30th November 2020
* Contract awarded and set up meeting (held online) – W/C 7th December 2020
* Fieldwork to begin – as soon as possible

## Assessment criteria

Expressions of interest will be assessed against the following criteria:

* Understanding of the Department’s requirements
* Understanding of the overarching policy context within which this work is being taken forward.
* Technical expertise and experience in designing and running process evaluations, impact evaluations and randomised control trials in education.
* Experience in working closely with policy makers and multiple stakeholders.
* Ability and capacity to deliver to declared timescales.

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| Scoring: |
| 1.    No/very poor evidence |
| 2.    Poor evidence |
| 3.    Some evidence |
| 4.    Good evidence |
| 5.    Excellent evidence |

**Each one of these criteria has equal weighting.**

**Expressions of interests submitted must be no more than 1000 words – anything longer will be disregarded.**

| **Closing date for EOIs:** **5pm 30th October 2020****Send your EOI form to: Sophie.aisbitt@education.gov.uk** |
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## How to submit an expressions of interest

You must submit an expression of interest (EOI) in order to be considered to be invited to tender. To do so, please complete the ‘NEW EOI form’ form which can be found under attachments in the ContractsFinder listing. A submission of an EOI does not guarantee an invitation to tender and the Department does not routinely advise organisations that they have not been successful in being invited to tender. Feedback is however available on request.

All contracts are let on the basis of the Department’s Terms & Conditions, a copy is available attached to the ContractsFinder listing. You are encouraged to check these before submitting your expression of interest, as these form part of your contractual obligations.

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