



NOCN Group Foundation



Skills Innovation Grant Programme
October 2026 Grant Prospectus

INTRODUCTION

This is our second year of the NOCN Group Foundation and its Skills Innovation Grant Programme.

Last year, the Foundation funded nine projects which are currently in progress as we write, and we hope to generate and disseminate learnings from these in 2027.

Given the success and learnings from last year, this year's grant funding round is broadly consistent with last year's in terms of the type of ideas we are looking to fund, the eligibility requirements of applicants and timeframes for bidding and award.

As an NOCN Group customer, we encourage you to put forward your ideas to address our core challenges. Developing and trying innovative new ideas in skills development have never been more important in the context of the challenges the UK economy now faces.

A handwritten signature in white ink, reading "Graham Hasting-Evans". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Graham" being more prominent and the last name "Hasting-Evans" following in a similar style.

Graham Hasting-Evans, Chief Executive

WHAT WE ARE SEEKING TO ACHIEVE WITH THIS GRANT PROGRAMME

The Skills Innovation Grant Programme supports trialling new approaches to vocational training that address persistent skills gaps and improve opportunities for learners in line with NOCN Group's Charitable objectives and vision - See Pages 18 and 19.

Projects must demonstrate how they address an identified need - such as engaging hard-to-reach NEETs (16-24 year olds Not in Education, Employment or Training) in skills and employment, supporting retraining of workers in green skills, or promoting the use of technology in engagement, learning or assessment - in an innovative way.

By funding pilots and fresh approaches, we aim to learn 'what works' in skills development to inform both our future qualification development approaches and wider skills policy development. We would aim to share this knowledge sector-wide and with our stakeholders to help drive forward improvements in our skills system delivery.



CASE STUDY

O'HALLORAN & O'BRIEN

O'Halloran & O'Brien is a UK-based construction and civil engineering company delivering building and infrastructure solutions across a wide range of sectors. Alongside its construction operations, the business runs a dedicated Training Academy focused on developing talent and helping address skills shortages across the industry.

Recognising the need to create more accessible routes into construction careers, O'Halloran & O'Brien developed Foundations to Futures, an employer-led pre-employment programme aimed at unemployed adults, young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), and individuals from underrepresented groups.

Supported by a Skills Innovation Grant from the NOCN Group Foundation, the project was designed to connect untapped talent with real employment opportunities in construction.



The project aims to equip learners with the skills, confidence, qualifications and industry connections needed to build sustainable careers in construction. By providing a clear pathway from unemployment into employment, the programme helps participants gain not only practical skills, but also the confidence and understanding needed to progress within the sector.



Foundations to Futures has enabled us to create a practical pathway into construction for people who may never have considered the industry as a career option. By combining accredited training, onsite experience and direct employer engagement, we are helping individuals gain the confidence, skills and opportunities needed to secure sustainable employment while supporting the industry's long-term skills needs.

Our experience of working with the NOCN Group Foundation throughout the project has been extremely positive. The team has been supportive, professional and easy to work with at every stage. Communication has been clear, and any queries have been dealt with promptly, making the delivery of the project straightforward.

- Tracy Botley

Group Training Manager at O'Halloran & O'Brien



For organisations considering applying for a future Skills Innovation Grant, O'Halloran & O'Brien's advice is simple: focus on solving a genuine skills challenge, work closely with employers and create clear progression routes that lead to sustainable employment outcomes.

Through Foundations to Futures, O'Halloran & O'Brien is helping demonstrate how collaboration between employers, training providers and grant funding can create new opportunities for NEET and underrepresented individuals while supporting the long-term skills needs of the construction sector.

**OHB | TRAINING
ACADEMY**

GRANT OBJECTIVES AND THEMES

Applicants must align their proposals to one or more of the following themes:

- Reaching and engaging hard-to-reach NEETs (16-24 year olds Not in Education, Employment or Training)
- Innovative and impactful approaches to Green Skills retraining
- Innovative use of technology in engagement, learning or assessment

Projects should demonstrate the use of innovative approaches, potential for scale, and the potential for measurable impact.

We are particularly interested in proposals that are targeted at assisting economically disadvantaged groups under these three themes.





FUNDING OVERVIEW



Grant Size per Project:

- Small awards - £500 - £5,000
- Large awards - >£5,000 – £15,000*
- Only one application is allowed per customer. Where a company owns multiple centres, only one application is allowed across the whole group.



Project Duration: Up to 14 months from 1st June 2027**



Match Funding: Match funding is encouraged but not mandatory. However, the level and certainty of match funding will be taken into consideration as part of the application assessment process.

**Larger award applications will be subject to closer review and ongoing monitoring*

*** Longer funding periods potentially available for exceptional cases*

Please see page 12 for more details on eligibility criteria, and our Terms & Conditions document for what we can and cannot fund.



ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

- Any NOCN Group Registered customer (aside from individuals) who delivers in England, Scotland or Wales.
- The customer must have made registrations/booked assessments; and/or purchased cards/tests with NOCN Group or Construction Plant Competence Scheme (CPCS) - formerly known as NOCN Job Cards - in the last 12 months to the 30th of November 2026, equivalent to at least double the amount of grant funding they are seeking.
- Collaborations with employers or other delivery partners are welcome, but the contracting organisation must be an NOCN Group customer.
- Only one application is allowed per customer. Where a company owns multiple centres, only one application is allowed across the whole group.
- Applications from not-for-profit organisations will take precedence over for-profit organisations where the scores are similar.
- Where a company has multiple centres, only one application is allowed.
- Any Grant proposals should be aimed at supporting individuals who are aged 16+.



EVALUATION CRITERIA

Applications will be scored by the Grant Committee against the following criteria:

Impact on Skills Delivery	Defined and significant outcomes that align with 1 or more of the themes (ones that address multiple themes will score more highly).
Innovation and Creativity	Novelty and originality of approach, including use of technology where appropriate.
Feasibility and Realism	Compelling case for the need and ability for the project to succeed; realism of anticipated outputs/outcomes.
Value for Money	Demonstrates efficient use of funds vs anticipated outputs; whether there is match funding (including in-kind match funding) and if so, how much.
Sustainability and Learning	Clear evaluation plan and potential for scale and sustainability.

Strong proposals should address all points clearly. Before an award is made, any proposal will be subject to due diligence and potential for further questions to clarify anything that is unclear.

APPLICATION PROCESS

How to Apply

a) First, please ensure you have carefully read the prospectus, including the eligibility criteria, the FAQs and the core terms and conditions, before submitting an application.

b) Complete the online application form via our grants portal, [Good Grants](#). This includes a pre-eligibility check.

Key Dates



Support

Please email any questions to nocn@nocn.org.uk by 30th November 2026. A public FAQ document will be updated regularly as we go through the application process.

15th December
2026

Application
deadline

January - February
2027

Panel review
applications

March/April
2027

Grant awards
announced

1st June
2027

Funded activity
begins*

**Activity to run until no later than 31st August 2028,
unless agreed on an exceptional basis*

POST-AWARD EXPECTATIONS

Successful applicants will:

- Sign a grant agreement.
- Confirm the commencement of the project.
- Submit progress and evaluation reports during the project as required, as well as at the end.
- Provide access and information to any audits that may be required.
- Include the NOCN Group Foundation Logo in any external publicity.
- Participate in learning events or case study sharing.

SUPPORTING MATERIALS

- The NOCN Group Foundation website
- The Core Terms and Conditions of any Grant
- FAQ Document

Head to our website for more information.



**SCAN
HERE
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NOCN GROUP'S VISION

To be a leading international education & skills charity delivering future-fit skills solutions where they are needed most.



NOCN GROUP'S CHARITABLE OBJECTIVES

The advancement of education of the public in one or more of the following ways:

- 1) by promoting and widening participation in education and training including for those people who have previously been excluded from educational opportunities;
- 2) by improving the quality and flexibility of educational provision for the public benefit, including for those people who have previously been excluded from educational opportunities; and
- 3) by improving access for learning opportunities and facilitating progression to further learning, employment and higher education particularly through the award of credit and credit-based qualifications.



CONTACT



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