



**Subject:** Union Learn Project  
**Report of:** Head of Inclusive Growth  
**Portfolio:** Education, Inclusion and Skills

## Report Summary

This project is requesting £429,242 to invest in a two-year project piloting new approaches to supporting low-skilled workers, delivered through recognised union representatives in each of the 3 constituent local authorities of Newcastle upon Tyne, North Tyneside and Northumberland. The project also includes a coordinating and outreach role delivered by the Trades Union Congress (TUC) with the purpose of championing Good Work with wider employers across the area and promoting best practice in relation to training and workforce development.

The pilot will reach 40 workplaces and support 450 employees with low skills to access learning opportunities, aligned to our strategic priorities and existing investments.

At its meeting on 8 June 2021, the North of Tyne Combined Authority (NTCA) Cabinet resolved to invite the NTCA Investment Panel to consider a full business case for the proposed Union Learn project; and authorised the Head of Paid Service, in consultation with Investment Panel, the Mayor and the Cabinet Member for Education, Inclusion and Skills, to authorise funding of up to £430K to support the project.

This report summarises the Union Learn business case which was considered and recommended for funding by the NTCA Investment Panel at its meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> July 2021, subject to NTCA receiving a satisfactory response from the TUC regarding the project's position on UK Subsidy Control. TUC have provided a satisfactory response and the funding condition is now discharged.

## Recommendations

The Head of Paid Service (Managing Director) is recommended to authorise grant funding of up to £429,242 to the TUC for delivery of the Union Learn project.

### 1. Background Information, Proposals and Timetable for Implementation

- 1.1 Addressing in-work poverty through the distribution of education and training and through championing Good Work is a strategic priority for NTCA. Trade unions are in a unique position to play a constructive role in driving and facilitating opportunities for workplace learning. Union Learning infrastructure - most notably Union Learn Representatives (ULRs) and workplace learning centres - offer residents impartial, non-judgemental advice and guidance, and practical opportunities to improve their learning beyond what residents would be able to do themselves.
- 1.2 As of 31 March 2021, the national Union Learn Fund supported by central Government ceased, resulting in lost infrastructure and learning for approximately 200,000 employees a year. This change has presented an opportunity for a locally tailored approach aligned to the needs of employers and residents, and delivered in partnership.
- 1.3 At the meeting on 8 June 2021, Cabinet resolved to invite Investment Panel to consider a full business case for the proposed Union Learn project. The purpose of this two-year Union Learn project, as set out in the business case, is to:
  - Develop local capacity with Northern TUC to coordinate Union Learn activities, provide direct support to Union Representatives and to build relationships with employers, particularly focused on the NTCA growth sectors and Good Work activities.

- Expand the capacity available within the Unions to engage employers and employees in skills development initiatives. This support will be targeted within the Local Authority structures as significant employers and anchor institutions within the North of Tyne.

## Funding Conditions

1.4 At the meeting on 13 July 2021, Investment Panel recommended the business case for funding, subject to NTCA receiving a satisfactory response from TUC regarding the project’s position on UK Subsidy Control. After seeking legal advice, TUC have provided a response to NTCA which has been reviewed by the Senior Appraisal and Monitoring Officer and NTCA legal team, and the funding condition discharged.

## 2. Potential Impact on Objectives

2.1 NTCA’s Vision is of a “dynamic and more inclusive economy...[which narrows] inequalities”. We are committed to giving everyone the opportunity to thrive –to achieve a fair wage, and access good jobs, and by working in partnership with business, civil society and our residents to achieve this. Our Inclusive Economy Policy Statement reinforces this by committing NTCA to taking a people-focused approach to support every individual to succeed.

## 3. Key Risks

3.1 Project risks are managed in line with agreed processes and individual project risks have been considered as part of the Business Case.

3.2 The Union Learn project will support the delivery of the Adult Education Budget (AEB) and NTCA Skills for Growth ambitions by facilitating access for low-skilled employees to provision. The NTCA Skills Policy Officer will be part of the Union Learn project steering group to ensure opportunities and risks related to accessing AEB are incorporated in the project risk register.

## 4. Financial and Other Resources Implications

4.1 At the meeting on 8 June 2021, NTCA Cabinet authorised Head of Paid Service, in consultation with Investment Panel and Cabinet Member for Education, Inclusion and Skills to authorise up to £430,000 for the delivery of the Union Learn project upon approval of a business case. The total funding requested for the Union Learn Fund is £429,242.

4.2 Funding will be allocated for two years on the following profile:

Funding source	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	Total
NTCA Revenue	£159,670	£215,179	£54,393	£429,242

4.3 The Union Learn project will be allocated from the Inclusive Economy Innovation Fund leaving a remaining amount of £2,674,569

## 5. Legal Implications

5.1 The Interim Monitoring Officer’s comments have been incorporated within this report.

## 6. Equalities Implications

6.1 As required by Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the Combined Authority has considered its obligations regarding the Public Sector Equality Duty and there will be no anticipated negative impact on groups with protected characteristics from these proposals.

6.2 The Union Learn project will support employees with low skills to access training. Low levels of skills are closely correlated with low paid work therefore, this project aims to advance opportunities for residents with low pay to progress into higher paid roles.

## 7. Inclusive Economy Implications

- 7.1 The Union Learn project will contribute to creating a more inclusive economy in the North of Tyne by increasing participation in education and training for employees with low skills or qualifications, supporting progression to higher paid, more productive roles.
- 7.2 Through the additional promotion of the Good Work Pledge and employer engagement, the Union Learn project will support employers to embed sustained activities for inclusive progression and training within their organisation.

## 8. Climate Change Implications

- 8.1 The Combined Authority has considered the implications relating to climate change in decisions regarding the delivery of Union Learn project and believe there will be no negative impact as a result.

## 9. Consultation and Engagement

- 9.1 The TUC and NTCA officers have consulted local authority stakeholders and union representatives throughout the development of this proposal. A project steering group will be established as part of the project to maintain engagement of stakeholders in decision making.
- 9.2 Consultation with the Mayor, Investment Panel and Cabinet Member for Education, Inclusion and Skills have taken place.

## 10. Appendices

- 10.1 None

## 11. Background Papers

- 11.1 None

## 12. Contact Officers

- 12.1 Leigh Mills, Head of Inclusive Growth, [leigh.mills@northoftyne-ca.gov.uk](mailto:leigh.mills@northoftyne-ca.gov.uk), 07855 100179  
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## 13. Glossary

AEB	Adult Education Budget
NTCA	North of Tyne Combined Authority
TUC	Trade Union Congress
ULR	Union Learn Representative

## 14. Sign-off

1) Portfolio holder: Yes	2) Mayor: Yes	3) Chief Finance Officer: Yes	4) Monitoring Officer: Yes	5) Managing Director: Yes
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