



Skills Access Hub

This project aims to develop a bespoke local Skills Access Hub as a central pillar of business support within the D2N2 LEP Area, implementing an effective skills support infrastructure within a single, coordinated, strategic framework.

Local Economic Context

There are nearly 72,000 small to medium sized employers in the D2N2 area. Unlike large companies the majority of the D2N2 employer base lack the capacity, knowledge and incentives, to engage with education and training institutions. They need practical and coherent routes to engage with these bodies to support their skills needs as part of their overall growth strategies.

Despite making one of the biggest contributions to England's economic output, overall D2N2 suffers from an inefficient economy. Compared to our competitors we produce too little output for the number of hours we work – the so-called 'productivity deficit'. Despite having the 5th largest workforce outside London, we have only the 9th largest economy. Too many of our businesses aren't productive enough.

In D2N2 our workforce is not as well qualified as the workforce in the UK overall, with just 32% qualified to NVQ4 level or above in D2N2 compared to 37.9% in the UK.

This further conceals significant variations in workforce skills between areas with D2N2. Productive firms demand more highly skilled workers who earn higher wages. Our current skills profile limits opportunities for workers and firms in our area.

A new approach to the co-ordination of employer led skills and training needs is required to increase engagement with the skills sector leading to more aligned provision to SME requirements. This approach will be co-ordinated and supported by the development of a D2N2 Skills Access Hub. This Employer led Programme approach to 'business, careers and skills' will enable local employers to be more involved in designing, delivering and enhancing skills for their workforce. This Programme will align the provision of education, skills and training to the needs of employers, sectors and the D2N2 economy.

Local Priorities

Closing the gap between the skills of D2N2 people and the needs of D2N2 employers is essential if we are to achieve our vision of a productive, prosperous and inclusive economy.

We need to drive up productivity in all sectors, so that jobs at all levels support progression and become better-paid. While many jobs will disappear as result of

automation, improved productivity will strengthen business competitiveness, stimulate growth and enable the economy to sustain high levels of employment. The key for success in D2N2 will be to enable our workers, at all age and skills levels, to progress and move up into the more productive, better-paid jobs in the transformed local economy.

The Skills Access Hub will support the delivery of Key Action 6 our refreshed Strategic Economic Plan SKILLS AND LEADERSHIP FOR PRODUCTIVITY GROWTH

The Skills Access Hub will support our businesses to access the skills they need for productivity growth through establishing strong arrangements with the D2N2 Growth Hub, supporting the development of enhanced leadership and management skills in SME's , developing skills to adapt to digitalisation of the workplace, better engagement with the knowledge and assets in our higher and further educational institutions and increased take up of apprenticeships, particularly at higher and graduate levels.

The Skills Access Hub will also pilot initiatives to enhance the role of employers in the co design and co delivery of skills provision particularly in high growth sectors which enhance career and qualification pathways and escalators

Feedback from D2N2 SME's shows that the current skills and training landscape is confused.

To implement an effective skills support infrastructure, the D2N2 LEP aims to deliver business facing skills solutions to SME's within a single, coordinated, strategic framework and has identified the development of a bespoke local Skills Access Hub as an important component of the skills landscape.

The Skills Access Hub will ensure a clear path to skills provision for employers in the D2N2 LEP Area. The programme will;

- Provide employers and individuals with a first stop access point for skills support and advice, including how they will receive referrals from the D2N2 Growth Hub, publicity campaigns and other partner organisations;
- Meet the needs of individual employers or groups of employers through Operational Needs Analysis and Training Needs Analysis, and work closely with the D2N2 Growth Hub to complement the work of Business Advisers;
- Secure added value and efficiency for the employer through access to relevant funding support that is appropriate to meet the skills needs of the employers;
- Gather and promote Labour Market Information which will help in improving careers advice and information;
- Deliver a brokerage service providing information and direct support to SMEs on how to access skills, and qualification support / provision;
- Provide a coordination function for other ESF employer led skills activity;

- Provide a focus on businesses not already engaged in skills development;
- Ensure strong partnership working with the D2N2 Growth Hub and the national apprenticeship agenda.

Strategic Alignment:

The Skills Access Hub will align with the D2N2 Growth Hub and develop joint management processes for

- close working with the Growth Hub complement of Business Advisers.
- receiving/providing business referrals;
- Use and development of the Growth Hub CRM system, adhering to the rules and requirements of the Growth Hub and the statutory data regulations relating to data protection, sharing and ownership.
- open and regular communication with the D2N2 Growth Hub provider.
- Establish partnership arrangements with ERDF funded programmes aimed at supporting businesses as well as other ESF and mainstream funded programmes aimed at delivering business development and skills-based programmes. This will include both current and emerging projects.

The outputs of the Skills Access Hub should include,

- Individuals gaining skills and qualifications relevant to the labour market;
- Increased Apprenticeship opportunities, Traineeships, work experience, internships, work placements and graduate placements (especially the number of SMEs engaged)
- associated activities which link employers to sources of recruitment, training and skills provision
 - Co designed and co delivered skills approaches which enhance career and qualification pathways and escalators.

Contracting and funding allocation

The programme will be procured through the ESF Managing Authority (DWP) open call process.

The ESF funding allocation to support the Skills Access Hub is £ £2,400,000. Applicants will need to have eligible match funding at 50% which must be from a source other than the European Union.

To ensure synergy D2N2 would wish potential applicants to deliver the Skills Access Hub to work closely with applicants to the complementary call for the D2N2 Careers and Employability Hub to ensure that services to SME's are complementary and avoid duplication in delivery.

Proposals should: deliver activities eligible for ESF; cover the whole D2N2 area; and be in line with the D2N2 LEP Core Delivery Principles. The Managing Authority may award more than one contract should applications of sufficient quality and scale be received that in combination provide for LEP wide coverage without duplication of activities or geography. There is a requirement for all contracts to clearly evidence how they will interact with each other to ensure they complement existing and future planned provision.

This document provides the strategic intent for this programme. Full details of the bidding, contracting and confirmed criteria will be provided within the published specifications.

The below provides an indicative breakdown of the funding allocation and targets.

Investment Priority	2.2
	Careers and Employment Hub
ESF	£2,400,000
Match Funding	£2,400,000
Outputs	Volumes TBC
	SME's successfully completing projects (which increase employer engagement; and/or the number of people progressing into or within skills provision)
	Number of supported micro, SME's (including cooperative enterprises, enterprises of the social economy)