

# VocTech Directory 2023

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The VocTech Directory provides an overview of the recent grant-funded projects, venture investments and strategic partnerships that form the foundation of Ufi's work to improve vocational skills and get adults learning.

To access a digital version of this document, and to find out more about the 280+ projects and organisations we have supported, please visit [ufi.co.uk/voctech-directory](https://ufi.co.uk/voctech-directory).


# Contents

|   |           |                                     |           |
|---|-----------|-------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>VocTech Seed</b> .....               | <b>2</b>  | <b>VocTech Ignite</b> .....         | <b>50</b> |
| 2021 .....                              | 3         | <b>Ufi Ventures</b> .....           | <b>52</b> |
| 2022A .....                             | 12        | <b>Strategic Partnerships</b> ..... | <b>62</b> |
| 2022B .....                             | 19        |                                     |           |
| <b>VocTech Activate</b> .....           | <b>28</b> |                                     |           |
| 2023 .....                              | 29        |                                     |           |
| <b>VocTech Challenge</b> .....          | <b>38</b> |                                     |           |
| Levelling up learning .....             | 39        |                                     |           |
| Skills for an Economy in Transition ... | 48        |                                     |           |

# VocTech Seed

The VocTech Seed grant call was our test bed where the first spark of an idea could be scoped and tested in the supportive environment that Ufi funding provides.

VocTech Seed provided grants of between £15,000 and £50,000 for projects lasting from three to 12 months.



We funded projects that were at a relatively early stage, helping to prototype ideas and work out the next steps necessary on the journey to long-term success. We encouraged ideas which had the potential to transform how vocational learning happens, rooted in a real-world understanding of the problems, issues and opportunities in the vocational sector.

Projects needed to show us how the idea was novel – show us that they understood the market they were looking at, and why this was better than anything that had been thought of before. We supported ideas for new tech, new markets, new communities of learners and were happy to welcome new project teams. The emphasis here was on the 'new'. We're okay with risk. VocTech Seed was about sharing that risk and putting in place support to mitigate those risks we could manage together.

***VocTech Seed is now known as VocTech Activate (see page 28).***



**VocTech Seed**

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## A Digital Solution for Life Critical Training in the Maritime Industry

Stream Marine Training Group Ltd



All mariners working at sea have to complete mandatory training, certified to the global Standards, Training, Certification and Watchkeeping (STCW) level. This involves both theoretical and practical elements, which currently require travel to specialist training centres which is expensive and time consuming. This can act as barrier to entry for learners as employers may not be prepared to take people on who do not already have these qualifications. This issue affects around 600,000 learners in the UK.

Following discussions with ferry, cruise and tanker operators and manning companies, there is an opportunity to test whether the same standards required to achieve certification via practical training can be delivered via a digital tool. If successful this will open up the availability of learning by reducing costs significantly (estimated 1/5 of current costs). Learners will be able to access content and complete their studies from home or their workplace without the need to travel or visit a training facility.

The digital content will use immersive environments and e-learning courses to realistically simulate and assess the hazards that learners may encounter at sea. An Artificial Intelligence (AI) engine will pre-assess the learners' current knowledge, learning style and technology capability, and dynamically create courses that best fit their profile.

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## AI-driven learning platform for reception staff at GP practices

Cenigma



Reception staff in GP practices perform a critical function, often beyond their job description. There are 6,813 GP practices in England with 300 million consultations taking place each year, with the majority still booked via telephone. Reception staff are the most visible and the most accessible of all health workers and due to their position at the point of entry to the healthcare system they face the brunt of patients' expectations and frustrations. The physical isolation of the front desk means that many of their colleagues remain unaware of the complex reality of their job – to navigate patients safely to the most appropriate care setting.

The solution will use a Natural Language Processor (NLP) / Machine Learning (ML) agent that can understand recorded or real-time conversations between patients and reception staff over the phone and determine the nature of the patient's enquiry and the response or action taken by the receptionist. All of this will be fully anonymised and compliant with GDPR. Common themes and resulting actions can then be transformed to serve as learning content for reception staff.

This approach will contextualise information and enable targeted bite-sized training to be delivered that is based on the unique needs of the local patient population. It will account for demographic and ethnic variations and enable front-line staff to manage patient requests more effectively and address variations in quality of care.

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## AutonoMe In-Work Support

AutonoMe



Adults with learning disabilities have a significant need for transitional support into work. AutonoMe started as a virtual service combining human support with instructional content to help with the development of independent living skills in the home. They have developed pre-employment support, with a focus on transferable knowledge, mental health and well-being in partnership with LGA, NHS Digital and six local authorities. Content such as “teamwork” and “what to expect in an interview” has been created specifically for this learner group, breaking down tasks into simple, easy to follow steps that prepare them for the move to employment.

This project will further develop and test the model, extending it to stay with learners when they have secured a job. The aim is to develop content tailored to the individual, and their new role, so that learners and employers can access support for up to six months. AutonoMe will test technical and learning design approaches to providing work-based learning for people with learning disabilities, using bite sized instructional video content coupled with dynamic app features, such as notifications/ alerts, to motivate learners. The app will then use the information from the user to tailor content to the individual learner to offer them bespoke support, suitable for their needs. It aims to demonstrate that virtual in-work support can reduce the amount of resource-intensive 1-2-1 support new employees with learning disabilities require and increase rates of sustained employment.

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## Bringing Maths to life in the Hair & Beauty Industry

York College



Students of Hairdressing, Beauty Therapy and Media Make-up can find it difficult to relate to Maths being useful for their chosen career path. York College noticed that students were not attending Maths classes and had all too often been told to “follow a vocational career as they would not achieve high GCSE grades”, creating the perception that vocational education does not require these skills, coupled with a fear of failure.

This project aims to overcome these barriers and, with the help of employers, to demonstrate the practical use of Maths using real-life scenarios. It will create a series of short, snappy media clips, reflecting their learners’ digital preferences. The initial phase of this project will involve around 400 Hair & Beauty learners at York College. These learners will be on a wide range of courses and will come from diverse backgrounds with differing learning abilities and needs.

Resources will be created with employer support and include interlinked industry-related activities. A catalogue will be easily accessible across levels 1-4, encouraging learner progression. Employer engagement will help to challenge the misconception of skills needed in the Hair & Beauty industry. This will help learners bridge the gap between their past experience of exam-focused Maths content and bring context where the subject naturally occurs in the workplace.

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## Creating a gamification platform for retaining essential UK engineering skills




Enginuity Group



The UK engineering workforce is getting older and not being replaced quickly enough as they retire or leave the sector. Around 186,000 skilled new recruits will be needed each year until 2024. The issue of 'tacit knowledge transfer' (learning know-how from existing experts) and skills retention is critical in key sectors of manufacturing. Enginuity will pilot with companies from the Aerospace industry the creation of a knowledge retention game platform to bridge these gaps.

The project will develop a gamified learning platform to capture and exchange best practice, informal and tacit knowledge and expertise from skilled workers – the things you traditionally learn by working alongside time-served engineers. This will enable companies to create their own games, appropriate to their individual workplace, to allow skills to be gained in context.

The primary audience will be level 3 and level 4 engineering staff working alongside those at high risk of leaving the sector. The demonstrator will enable scenario based 'learning by doing' supporting areas of high skills loss which are critical to sustaining and recovery in the industry. The pilot project will engage with 200 engineers from two major organisations (British Aerospace and GKN), as well as supply chain SMEs. It will use a BrightGame Aerospace skills retention game applied to potential level 4 'leavers' capturing best practice and tacit expertise, and enabling sharing of key skills in maintenance and inspection.

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## Home Achievement Academy



AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group

Many social housing tenants are far removed from the labour market, benefit dependent and currently unable to progress towards learning and employment.

AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group are partnering with The Home Group, a UK social enterprise and housing charity with over 116,000 tenants of which 26,000 are 'supported' and relatively housebound. These 'supported' tenants find accessing standard learning provision difficult or virtually impossible. Many 'non-supported' tenants are reluctant to attend traditional settings due to barriers such as confidence and health. There are around 4 million social rented households in the UK who could eventually benefit from this type of learning.

AIM Group will create an online blended learning platform where social housing tenants can access learning directly from home. The platform will host a range of short courses made available to tenants entirely online, leading to online assessment and accreditation. Video content and careers information will give exposure to unfamiliar working environments, helping to raise ambition and support personal development. An online classroom will provide engagement with other learners and support from tutors within the social housing partner to provide ongoing encouragement to the tenants. The learning platform will help increase the confidence of tenants and support progression towards traineeships, apprenticeships and work. The online/anywhere access will allow them to take the training in a time and location that suits their needs.

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## Labredi

### TIRO

The UK's response to COVID-19 was severely hampered by the shortage of skilled Laboratory Technicians. This is not a new issue – the chronic and ongoing shortage of technicians was simply highlighted by the pandemic. The industry is seen by many to be over supplied with graduates who are unsuited to the role and soon leave, and time-served Laboratory Technicians who have limited options to gain recognition for their technical skills and knowledge.

In a survey of senior Laboratory Technicians only 11% had engaged in vocational education. The vast majority (84%) learned on the job. Tiro's proposed solution is to develop digital micro credentials in collaboration with industry, which would recognise technical lab skills and reward participants with digital badges.

The project will develop the micro-credentials with industry leading bodies such as the Pirbright Institute. These will be short, bite-sized courses that will feature cutting edge learning content, coupled with workplace tasks that model experiential in-work learning. Two types of credentials are planned: Foundations credentials to develop skills that are applicable to all laboratories e.g. quality assurance, data analysis; and Technical credentials to develop skills for specific lab environments.

An employer platform will be developed alongside, so that employers can track learner progress and identify skills gaps. Skills accreditation will be integrated into the micro-credentials. Endorsement and accreditation will be sought from relevant industry bodies.

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## TIRO

## Next Level

### The BGI



Black, Asian and minority ethnic young women and non-binary people are massively underrepresented in videogame development education and, consequently, the industry. They don't pursue these careers because of a lack of visible role models and prevailing cultural stereotypes about suitable jobs for women and non-binary people. We want to turn this around and open up opportunities in this fast-growing, well-paid industry. Under-representation is not only a diversity problem, it impacts the art form. Many fans report disappointment at the lack of relatable characters and experiences in games. Change is being driven by both social justice and the market. The missing links are targeted vocational learning, access to information and viable pathways into careers.

The BGI is a charity for games culture, skills and diversity. The project will develop and pilot an online course led by women and non-binary people for young women and non-binary people which will introduce them to videogame creation and careers. Using accessible technology, participants will learn art and animation skills, narrative development, and basic coding. Led by a diverse games developer, learners will work in cohorts of 15 to co-create and publish videogames for the public. The course will build sufficient skills to enter a games studio on a traineeship.

The technical design will use Crayta, a new platform for collaborative game design, to give participants a foundation learning experience. Cloud technology and platform accessibility means that participants can create and learn from home without high-performance devices. Accessible technology also means that the project can be easily scaled in a cost-effective way.

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## NextGen Skills Exchange

### NextGen Skills Academy



The games, animation and VFX (visual effects) sector is booming and working at its creative heart is potentially an attractive career. But there are some complex challenges for those learning the ropes that NextGen SkillsXchange will help them overcome.

This project will develop an online, work-based platform with educational components to help build the real-world skills needed in this fast-moving environment. Using a collaborative hub, learners will tackle real project briefs in settings that replicate real workplaces. The platform will mirror what it's really like to be at work in this industry and provide feedback through bespoke video review tools. By working in groups on briefs, with each learner in a specific individual role, users will practice the relevant technical skills for each role, as well as the 'softer' skills such as communication, teamwork and organisation that are best learned in realistic contexts.

The NextGen SkillsXchange will address the increasing shortage of suitable applicants for creative roles, and, as an online learning hub, will ensure that training is available regardless of physical location. It will also help people applying for jobs to demonstrate the real-world skills needed to deliver in the creative workplace, complementing the technical skills gained through formal education.

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## Online Recovery: keyworker led vocational study as a route out of homelessness

St Mungo's



People recovering from homelessness need opportunities to develop skills for employment to sustain independent living. Current support is often inadequate and fragmented, and people in this situation may have very complex needs which make traditional learning models challenging and inappropriate. St Mungo's supports around 32,000 people a year, and recent surveys showed that 54% would like to be in work. St Mungo's works mainly in London with some other locations in the South of England, however homelessness is a UK wide issue, so the number of future potential learners is vast with an estimated 200,000 known homeless households recorded in 2020.

This project will develop a prototype learning portal accessible online by St Mungo's service users and keyworkers. This portal will encourage vocational skills-building through online courses, tuition and independent learning, all guided by a service user's keyworker. It will record progress so both staff and service users can accurately gauge progression and plan for introducing move-on from homelessness services and next steps at the right time.

When learners have completed their skills programmes and achieved their goals, keyworkers can support them with next steps including moving into independent accommodation, referrals to employment specialists, into volunteering, or into further education.

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## Proof of Concept: School of Sharing

### Library of Things



The School of Sharing is a platform aiming to offer training for people looking for purpose-driven work with a social conscience. Focusing on the 'circular and sharing economy' where more is reused and recycled, digital training will be produced by Library of Things and existing partners such as Bosch and Kärcher. The initial research and programme with volunteers highlighted the positive impact on learner confidence, a critical issue in terms of post-covid recovery.

Within this 12-month project, Library of Things will prove the concept for School of Sharing by producing two learning journeys for its job applicants/local recruits across its locations, around Community Activation and Electronic Appliance Repair/Maintenance. Hosted on an online platform, these journeys will be peer-produced, weaving together milestones, content, self-assessment, peer feedback and accreditation. In addition, it will define training needs among similar community-powered enterprises e.g. toy/tool libraries, makerspaces, bike/laptop repair, to see how the School of Sharing could also benefit them.

The funding from Ufi is focused specifically on building a digital platform for the creation and sharing of learning content. The LoT currently has contracts with 8 London authorities to recruit/train local people and to kickstart the skill-sharing service with a further pipeline of UK councils who have expressed an interest. This project will create a more sustainable digital platform which will be more replicable and more easily accessible.

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## RARPA – The Next Generation

### Wiltshire College & University Centre



It is important for all learners to have their skills and progress recognised in order to increase confidence and give them the best chance to move into work. The RARPA (Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement) national framework, was created to record and track progress and achievement in non-accredited qualifications, but a standard digital system does not exist. Many FE Colleges and other providers have 'engineered' solutions by adapting existing tools, though this can cause problems of accessibility for student groups, the risk of unintended sharing of sensitive information and a failure to support multi-agency engagement with learners. This can create inconsistencies in recording progress and cause problems when learners move between different providers.

Wiltshire College will create a standalone platform designed to be easily accessible to learners so they can actively engage with their own progression and development. It will also help prepare them for further independent learning through the college and on to employment. Easy and secure sharing of information across multiple agencies and with various stakeholders will allow seamless updating of relevant information to all partners involved in a learner's education. The learner's completed RARPA record will ultimately become an exportable, shareable portfolio which can be used as a bridge into employment.

As well as benefiting SEN learners, the platform will also be open to all FE learners on non-accredited qualifications from 16-18 provision, NEETs and Adult Community Learning, having a broad and significant impact on a wide range of learners.

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## TechAssure: Virtual Pest Management Simulator

British Pest Control Association BPCA



The UK pest control industry comprises over 1,500 sole operators/micro businesses. To be considered a pest professional, technicians must pass a knowledge-based assessment, but a written assessment on its own is not always proof of competence. Indeed, it is possible to pass the test without ever seeing rodent or insect pests in an authentic setting.

At a European level, CEPA has endorsed the need for competency-based training, but the sector has not found a way to deliver this using traditional methods. It is not practical for assessment organisations to visit large numbers of small, geographically dispersed customers. Assessments on real sites would likely result in occasions where no pests are identified, making an evaluation impossible.

This project will develop a web-hosted 3D pest infestation simulator, which will offer an assessment platform to test the competency of new and requalifying pest controllers. Learners will assess the situation, identify the pests and decide on the best course of treatment in a simulated 3D real-life environment.

BPCA are experts in the subject matter and the needs of the learners and have partnered with an e-learning agency to supply the digital (3D) content. Initially, the content will cover a small number of the most commonly encountered environments with a range of 2-3 pest issues in each. Post-pilot, the ambition is to expand the content to cover the full range of pests and environments that technicians are likely to come across.

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## The Justice Training Directory

The Wise Group



Individuals in Scotland serving Community Payback Orders (CPOs) as an alternative to custody can choose to engage with 'Other Activity', where they can develop their interpersonal, educational, and vocational skills to support progression to employment and prevent re-offending. But many do not take part as they are unaware of the activities available. This can have a disproportionately negative impact on an already marginalised cohort of society, affecting their employability and housing prospects, which can in turn affect options for family contact. One reason for the limited uptake is that information about available options is extremely fragmented, in the form of emails, newsletters and personal connections.

The Justice Training Directory will seek to address this problem by providing a national platform for making referrals to and booking vocational training and interventions suitable for 'Other Activity'. It will join up the organisations who deliver interventions and skills training with Social Workers who want to refer their clients. It will list courses and activities, manage bookings and provide automated reporting directly back to Criminal Justice Social Work Services (JSW) as the responsible body.

As it will be nationally available and fully online, it will offer easy access and increase referrals to existing interventions, maximizing the use of resources currently available.

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## Timber Technology Engineering & Design (Timber TED)

Edinburgh Napier  
UNIVERSITY



Edinburgh Napier University Development Trust

The UK needs 345,000 new homes annually but is building less than a third of this. Offsite construction using timber could help to build 'better, faster and greener' but we need people with accredited skills in offsite timber construction, which are currently in acute short supply. The construction sector employs 3.1 million people, but qualifications don't yet match industry innovation, with many learners and professionals unaware of new technical knowledge and skills needed for the manufacturing-line approach to building.

Timber TED will provide construction students and professionals with a comprehensive suite of online flexible training modules to upskill in timber offsite construction techniques. This will be underpinned by a competency framework identifying the technical knowledge and skills needed to deliver this new construction method. The training modules will be based on 'learning by doing' activities, stimulating critical thinking and preparing the students for work.

Uniting industry, education and training resources through one course, Timber TED will support learners and employers to harness the new knowledge and skills required and to meet the increasingly stringent quality and environmental performance requirements. The final product will be a recognised, accredited qualification with a bespoke digital assessment tool, suitable for further education as well as employers delivering in-house training, enhancing existing CPD, and apprenticeships co-funded with the Housing Construction & Infrastructure Skills Gateway.

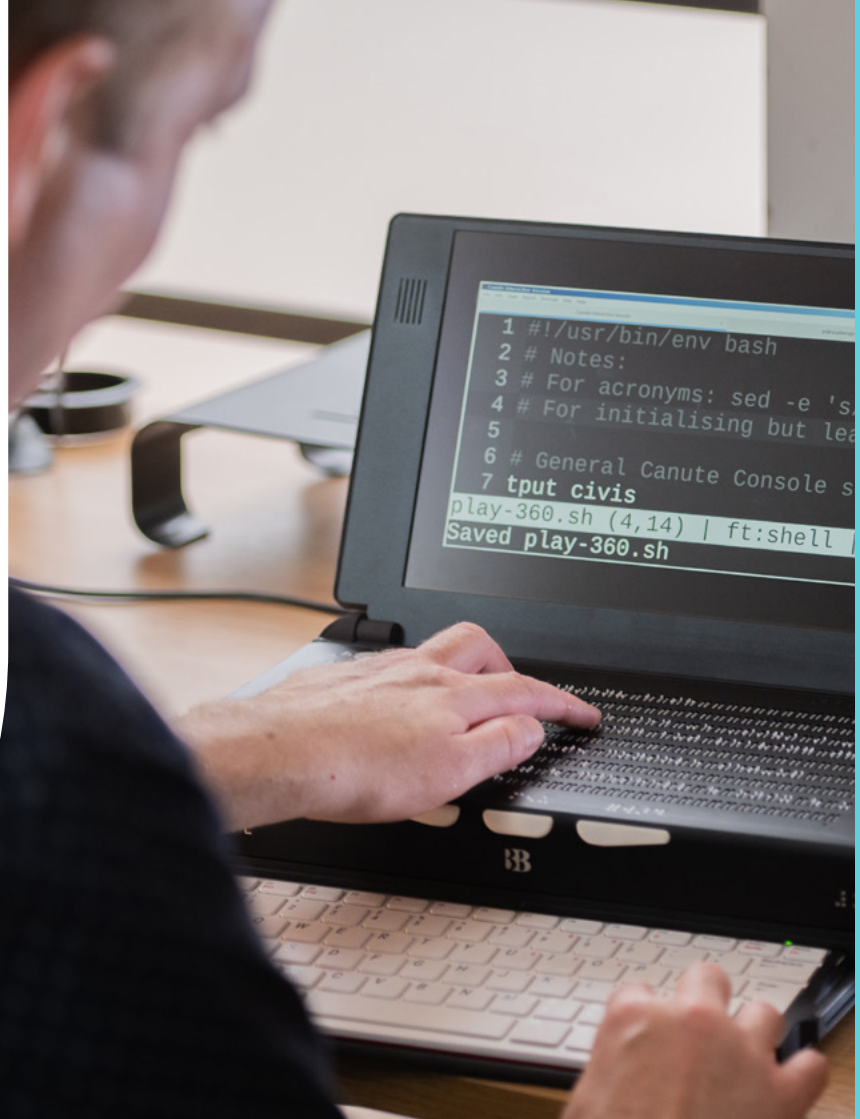
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## Augmented Maintenance

### Totem Learning






In 2020, the National Skills Academy for Rail (NSAR) concluded the UK Rail sector faces 'serious systemic issues with regards to skills shortages that will escalate significantly over the next five years without swift action'. Approximately 28% of workers in rail are over 50 and some 15,000 workers are due to retire by 2025.

Train maintenance knowledge is drawn from existing systems and maintenance instructions but is rarely accessible at the time it is needed. It is time consuming to find and hard to navigate, especially for new recruits. Additionally, a lot of key knowledge is stored in the minds of engineers nearing retirement age. Training currently requires moving specific rigs to specific locations, causing delays and backlogs to training schedules. The Augmented Maintenance project aims to help overcome these challenges.

Initially, the Augmented Maintenance project will produce an augmented reality learning tool relating to fixing and maintaining train doors. It will target UK based rail engineers, 30,000 apprenticeships plus reskilling those already in work. It will allow learners to access the knowledge of experienced, retiring engineers, and will reduce dependency on physical training locations.

There are many training needs beyond door maintenance in this sector and the plan is that more modules will be developed covering other rail asset and sub-system training needs. The Rail Safety and Standards Board concluded that there is an appetite within the industry for this type of technology to create 'good quality, engaging and streamlined learning material' confirming the huge potential for the Augmented Maintenance project to scale up in the future.

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## Canute for Computer Science: Programming & Sysadmin for blind adults

### Bristol Braille Technology CIC






Existing Braille displays are single line and akin to reading a computer through a calculator screen one line at a time. This is hugely limiting when learning technical subjects like computer science that often involve reading graphs and tables.

In response to these challenges, Bristol Braille has developed a multi award-winning Braille reader (Canute 360), that scans much larger volumes of information than is possible with other systems, including spreadsheets and tables. The technology has the potential to widen access to STEM subjects and support the learning of advanced technology skills.

This is an area in which people who are blind or visually impaired can excel, but only when supported by tools and training that meets their non-visual learning requirements. The decline in Braille use coupled with the focus on visual learning methods for computer science have created a barrier to entry which this project hopes to address.

By bringing together existing hardware, software and e-learning content in a new, accessible and scalable teaching solution, the project aims to advance the careers of people who are blind or visually impaired working in computer science.

The project has the potential to open up technology skills and STEM subjects to learners who have previously been unable to access them and will enable literacy and engagement with graphics for the first time.

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## Conan MVP

### Conan Labs




The rapid growth of online, video-based teaching programmes has greatly reduced the amount of regular interaction between learners and educators, leading to a drop in engagement, a key element of educational success. At the same time, learners and educators are unfamiliar with how to replicate natural interaction while teaching and learning online. This problem is likely to affect all organisations that use virtual or blended programmes, from FE colleges to businesses.

To help address this increasingly pervasive problem, Conan Labs' existing prototype uses AI/ML analytics to 'invisibly assess' the quality of learner engagement during live video conferencing classes and feed this data back to the educator. This can help educators understand the quality of interaction during a class, identify strengths and weaknesses, and support their own learning and development.

This project will support the development of a minimum viable product to be deployed at scale over an extended period, providing large volumes of data and enabling identification of trends in learner engagement and feedback from test users.

Ultimately, it is hoped that the approach will result in a product able to predict the likelihood of engagement or disengagement for a given teaching approach and help improve educators' interaction skills.

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## Entitled to learn: connecting providers to lower income adults seeking learning




Entitledtolearn

entitledtolearn

Colleges and independent training providers holding Adult Learning Funding report an ongoing challenge of recruiting eligible learners. At the same time, individual learners lack a single and simple pathway into adult learning and the funding available. Improved connections are required between potential learners on benefits/lower incomes looking to re-skill, and providers/organisations holding Adult Learning Funding.

Entitledto is a website helping more than 100,000 adults each week to calculate the benefits they are entitled to. By combining information collected during their benefits calculations with local information about available funded courses the project presents a unique opportunity to engage in a positive conversation around how to achieve individual progression through learning.

By the end of the project, users will be seamlessly linked to a personalised dashboard where they will be empowered to explore local jobs, vocational pathways and locally available adult learning opportunities.

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## First Responder Critical Safety Training

Bradford College


 Bradford College

More than 190,000 battery-electric vehicles hit UK roads during 2021, representing a 76% increase on 2020 and an 11.6% share of the overall 2021 new-car market. This is predicted to grow by 95% by 2040. Fires in Electric Vehicles are very different to fires in conventionally fuelled vehicles and require a different approach and response to an accident.

Across the UK approximately 44,000 firefighters will need upskilling to mitigate associated fire, explosion and high-voltage risks to protect themselves and others. Due to the nature of the job it is not always possible for responders to undertake classroom-based study and online training is currently limited in impact and depth.

The First Responder Critical Safety Training plans to develop a VR training course with built-in assessment, to be delivered to fire and rescue responders, preparing them to deal with emergency situations involving electric and hydrogen powered vehicles. The flexible and accessible training will enable first responders to test their risk assessment and decision-making skills in realistic, high-risk scenarios, with personalised feedback on progress.

During the pilot, Bradford College will work with two-thirds of the 40 Fire Stations in West Yorkshire with 30-50 Firefighters being directly involved.

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## Gloss Spot Elize Star Nails


THE  
GLOSS SPOT

While beauty salons and nail bars are established on high streets across the UK there has been a reduction in the number of nail technology courses available at colleges for learners wishing to study NVCs in nail technology. In addition, the increasing use of non-specialist beauty tutors and the limited provision of ongoing support has led to a lack of engagement with learners, frustration, discouragement, and increased drop-out rates.

The project will build a mobile app that will help learners to develop the specialist skills they need to develop a career in the nail industry.

The app will provide training using a range of methods including video tutorials, livestreamed workshops and social media tips, all accessible on a mobile phone. By designing the content to be accessed from a mobile app the project will put the learning content directly into the hands of the learners in a format they are comfortable with, and which offers highly accessible support.

A critical objective for the project is to build community around the app which will help learners at varying skill levels and points in their careers; from new-starters to experienced technicians looking to improve their job security and career progression. Unlike currently available online training in this sector, the app will provide ongoing support, frequent updates and views on current trends.

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## KITA: An integrated classroom for teaching coding and digital skills

BlueShift Education



Coding is one of the fastest-growing employment sectors in the UK. The OECD have stated that much of the training required to meet demand will need to happen online and new solutions are needed to achieve this.

Current approaches involve working with numerous platforms and generic tools that are not all fit for purpose or tailored to the needs of learners and educators. A new generation of digital tools for teaching coding that integrate content, scheduling and assessment are required.

This project will build on the prototype KITA platform, a single, responsive interface combining workspace, live video teaching, content and communication tools with one-click access from any browser. KITA captures data around learner participation and engagement, providing teachers with a dashboard of real-time engagement analytics together with objective AI/ML-generated behavioural monitoring.

Working with post-16 vocational learners the project aims to better understand pain points around assessment, certification, student rewards and feedback, to inform further development of the platform.

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## Real Life Training for Classroom Assistants using VR Technologies

Propeer Solutions



The role of the Classroom Assistant (CA) is crucial in providing targeted help to pupils, supporting children with complex mental health needs, managing behaviour and providing pastoral support. However, training for CAs tends to focus on providing academic support and 'hard skills' rather than the management of behaviour and emotional support.

This project will use VR to develop a relevant soft-skills training programme for CAs. The training will cover areas such as how to observe and identify risk, how to interact with children in specific situations, and how to appropriately manage those with autism. In the VR environment learners will experience realistic, emotive situations in which they must make decisions and then experience the results of those decisions.

By using a virtual environment CAs will be able to observe and interact in low-risk scenarios, providing a safe place to learn from experimentation and mistakes and avoiding the risks associated with training in a real classroom environment. The progress of the CA will be recorded in real-time, feedback will be provided, and records provided to staff to assess progress.

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## Reducing Skills Gaps in Land-based Industries

### Landex



Agriculture and related industry occupations present a range of potential hazards for their workforce. They have a poor occupational health and safety record and have consistently shown the highest level of fatalities of any industry in the UK. Employees require a broad range of complex knowledge and skills to work safely and effectively, ideally before they enter the workforce.

Landex, a collective of 39 colleges delivering land-based education and training across the United Kingdom, aims to help address this challenge through a scenario-based training app, bridging the gap between theory and practical learning.

Forming part of a blended learning process, the app will assess where the learner is starting from, familiarising them with potentially dangerous situations. Learners can choose to replay scenarios to gain better scores, while tutors will receive feedback to allow for targeted interventions to support work readiness at individual and cohort levels. The app will also give employers a level of confidence that employees/learners on placements are well trained in Health and Safety.

The app will be accessible to anyone with internet access and will aim to reach 1,000 learners per month studying a technical qualification, apprenticeship or already employed in agriculture or horticulture.

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## Sandbox Theatres

### Arts Theatre & Heritage Ltd



Approximately 91% of stage crew found themselves out of work as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In an industry significantly impacted by lockdowns and restrictions, theatres are now in the difficult position of urgently needing to recruit, however qualified, experienced 'junior' technicians are in scare supply.

The Sandbox Theatres project will address this challenge using VR and AR to facilitate a vocational route into theatre employment for people to work as backstage crew and help them create a CV to launch themselves into a theatre crew career.

From operating a revolving stage, a large lighting rig or safety curtain – all common in large theatres but not in small venues – VR will help enable learners to build their experience. AR will be used to facilitate 'experiencing issues in situ' such as stage fires and building stage sets. The courses will be available virtually, ensuring the project is fully accessible.

Sandbox Theatres already has interest from theatres, employers and 28 local authorities with an initial 680 learners eager to begin – illustrating the significant potential impact of the project.

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## Zenvideo: video notetaking for rapid skill development

Leapian Ltd



Online content is increasingly being delivered using video. However due to its linear nature, using video to learn can make absorption of content, and consequently learning, difficult and inconsistent. Videos are also difficult to search and to extract key points. As a result, learners may remember key content in videos only vaguely, with no easy or efficient way to access and recall information.

The Zenvideo project aims to address these challenges by building a solution that transcribes all spoken text in a video so that learners can quickly develop a personalised, organised learning resource.

Transcripts will be fully searchable with the option to add notes, take screenshots and add bookmarks and highlights for the points a learner has noted while watching.

When a learner needs to recall information and apply skills at work, they can immediately access a body of organised information, making skill development more effective.

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VocTech Seed

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## Case studies simulation for learning about prosthetics and orthotics

British Association of Prosthetists and Orthotists



Prosthetists, Orthotists and their support workers deliver services that provide prostheses (artificial limbs) and orthoses (braces and splints) to people with mobility disability resulting from limb loss or impairment. There are over 1,000 registered Prosthetists and Orthotists in the UK. Their support workforce have skills developed through on-the-job training and experience. However, most support workers have never accessed formal training and there are very limited professional development opportunities for them. It is important to develop new learning resources for support workers to achieve growth in their capacity to provide patient services.

This project will deliver a prototype game enabling users to interact with simulated patient case studies to learn about prosthetics and orthotics. They will be able to listen to and watch case studies and investigate situations by asking questions by speech. At critical moments during a simulation, users will be asked to make decisions about what they should do next in terms of treatment actions. Depending on their decisions, different virtual realities will be explored in the game. The digital concept is scalable to include multiple patient simulations reflecting the wide range of conditions and limb impairments experienced by people seeking treatment from prosthetic and orthotic services. The game will be made available to download to mobile devices by the support workers membership and affiliates of the BAPO. It will include bespoke content developed by experts based on clinical and technical treatment methods.

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## Demonstrating the commercial business value of capability building

UXC Ltd (trading as Daedal).

DAEDAL

There is currently no clear way to prove the value of training on a company's bottom line. The outcomes of learning are often not linked to the business's commercial performance in a tangible way, which can lead to training becoming a 'box ticking exercise' for compliance or a reluctance to invest in employee development. A digital innovation that addresses this gap in confidence will bring real value to the Learning and Development industry.

Daedal will attempt to solve the challenge of demonstrating the value of learning by tying productivity improvements to a learning solution directly, using AI to generate quantifiable data. It will build a functional MVP web application for access by employers and learners, developing baseline productivity measures linked to organisational KPIs against which learning solutions can be assessed, and creating a means of demonstrating that learning solutions can tangibly improve businesses' commercial performance over time.

The initial target users are those employees who work in the consumer-packaged goods (CPG) industry where there are c.400,000 potential UK users employed. Many UK CPG firms are currently interested in improving their employees' capabilities in eCommerce as more and more people are shopping online as a result of the pandemic, accelerating a longer-term shift in shopping behaviour. Demonstrating in this context how learning provision can actually improve business value will strengthen the business case for investing in training, ultimately enabling more learners to benefit from it.

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## Global Maritime Portal

### SeaBot Maritime Limited



The emergence of Robotic and Autonomous Systems (RAS) in the Maritime industry will be a paradigm shift for the workforce and requires a commensurate increase in levels of technical knowledge required for newly emerging roles. Currently, mariners do not have ready access to systems that are able to keep them advised of changes to operating practices and there is no international training standard covering this technology to provide mariners with a recognised means of continuing their vocational training.

The Global Maritime Portal (GMP) is part of an initiative to help transform the UK maritime workforce and encourage human-technology partnership, not competition. SeaBot will develop a multi-platform solution comprising a software toolkit that will underpin maritime industry talent and business asset management and a competency management system fortifying the workforce in a safety critical industry. GMP will provide a portal to new knowledge and new skills not seen in the industry before, helping businesses to meet the challenge of keeping pace with the fast-moving digital age. The GMP will host a new and highly technical certified training scheme, crucially linked to digitised records of vocational experience, personalised training record books, technical guidance, competency management and performance assessment. The GMP will also provide access to a range of tools that allow regulators, individuals and companies alike, to manage training delivery, record operational experience, and ensure skills match the requirements of new technology as it is introduced.

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## Inside Mental Illness – VR Empathy training for the care industry – Feasibility

### ANAGRAM



Many studies show that lack of empathetic treatment for patients with mental health challenges extends recovery times, and lack of empathy and isolation have been linked to shortened life expectancy in this group. Developing empathy for those with poor mental health is particularly challenging given that those with complex conditions find it extremely difficult to explain their inner experience or circumstances. Compassion fatigue is common among care staff, and this can increase staff turnover. Given the scale of the current mental health crisis, the increasing demands on carers, and the difficulty of providing effective training, there is a critical need to innovate in this area.

ANAGRAM will use the immersive potential of VR technology to provide insight into the experience of people with mental health problems. It represents the inner world of the patient, giving the learner a new perspective, which provides the basis for developing empathy. This is complemented by the use of biometric data to monitor learners' responses. This data is fed back to the learner as part of a reflective review process. The learner will develop a set of tangible skills in a way which is impactful, memorable and scalable. The VR is built into a flexible training programme that can be delivered using a range of different learning blends, including group or individual with different technology options. The product will be presented as a physical kit that can be delivered to colleges, hospitals and care homes.

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## Next Level Up




### Into Games



Over three-quarters of games studios plan to expand their workforce in 2023/24, however, 65% of UK games and immersive organisations are finding it difficult to recruit talent and many have pointed to a lack of skills as their main barrier to growth. Access to the industry is also a challenge for those not located near one of the 12 cities hosting multiple games companies, resulting in limited experience of the real workplace.

Next Level Up is a radical online training programme aimed at those who are looking for their first role in games. Our learners are self-taught game makers, university graduates or late-stage career changers. They are linked by their readiness for work. This is not a solution for beginners, or those just starting to explore a career in games, it is for those that are almost ready, but do not have adequate collaboration, networking or portfolio presentation skills. The programme will trial an innovative peer-led learning system and accessible industry guidance to support programmers, artists and designers to create world-class portfolio pieces while developing employability skills like teamwork, critical analysis and collaboration.

The solution will be affordable for those from low-income groups, be accessible no matter the geographic location and will connect them directly to industry professionals for high-quality career development planning aimed at getting participants work-ready as quickly as possible. This will result in more confident, diverse and employable learners for a growing sector.

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## OSCE Simulator

### Klik2learn



The NHS needs to boost the workforce by 50,000 nurses by 2024 and almost 50% of new nurses have trained overseas. The final hurdle for overseas professionals with the offer of an NHS job is to pass is a scenario-based exam – the Objective Structured Clinical Exam (OSCE) – within a limited timescale.

The OSCE is a series of role-playing exercises in authentic clinical scenarios such as a hospital ward, where candidates have to demonstrate appropriate clinical and communication skills. Non-native English speakers can find this second part particularly challenging, such as demonstrating the right tone and register when explaining procedures or having difficult conversations with patients. A critical factor in success is preparation – which is what this project seeks to address.

Klik2Learn will develop a range of simulations in which candidates will be able to react in real time to questions they are asked, giving them the chance to practise their responses. The simulations will have 3D characters and backgrounds which will include open-ended and branched conversations to deal with a variety of candidate responses. The technology will deliver a 3D experience in a 2D environment and will be accessible on all devices including mobile phones. Klik2Learn are working with the NHS to develop these simulations and with Edinburgh University to analyse and evaluate candidate responses against ideal models. The eventual aim is to train algorithms to give real time feedback, to be displayed in Klik2Learn's proprietary LMS.

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## Project Flight Path

### Rubitek Solutions Limited



Apprenticeship dropout rates in the UK are persistently high and the qualification achievement rate has continued to fall over the past 5 years. In 2021, 43% withdrew early or failed. These dropout rates impact female, black and minority ethnic apprentices disproportionately and are often highest in industries that are suffering skills shortages. Research shows that many learners who disengage display multiple warning characteristics over as long as 6 months before they withdraw. The societal impact of non-completion is a concern, with real costs to individuals, employers and society as a whole. Non-achievement impacts long-term motivation and is linked to learning behaviours such as work and challenge avoidance.

Rubitek Solutions Ltd have an established cloud-based platform for apprenticeship management. This project will develop and test new functionality to spot the early warning signs of learner disengagement to help providers get learners back on track. The work completed will comprise of a predictive analytics tool for apprentice employers and training providers to predict likely learner attainment and identify opportunities for earlier interventions by those teaching, mentoring, and supporting apprentices. The tool will visually plot likely learner attainment trajectory and show apprentices their distance travelled, detect potential gaps in learning over the lifetime of the apprenticeship and identify potential moments of disengagement to inform more timely interventions. Stakeholders will be better informed so that they can take the action needed to prevent early leavers, minimise non-completions and reduce costly end-point-assessment retakes.

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## Project Shoutout

### Be the Business



There are 143,000 businesses in the food service sector (leisure, late night, hotel, pubs, cafes and bars, street food etc.). The industry employs 1.8 million people and delivers £40.4bn to the UK economy. Many team leaders, supervisors and managers in the sector have no specific management qualifications and little access to CPD. They also have very little time and no appropriate space in their workplace to study. Research from the ONS shows that small improvements in a company's management can result in significant productivity increases.

Be the Business will build a tool that supports the development of skills amongst business owners, managers and supervisors. Guided Reflection will prompt the learner to think about a real-life issue that they will have encountered, encourage them to respond verbally, then use natural language processing – including analysing tone and sentiment – to direct them to resources or share with a community to gain peer support and advice. By creating a tool to help managers/supervisors to access training in an on demand and engaging way, they can drive improvements through their businesses, build empowered teams and begin to engage in long term planning – which they may previously have discounted or struggled to engage with. Over the period an individual uses the tool, the desired outcome is an increased level of confidence in their decision making and an improved understanding of key management practices relevant to their role.

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## Rail Signalling and Safety Simulator

IN Reality Ltd



Analysts predict a shortfall of 5,000 train drivers in the UK by 2026 due to staff retirement and the planned expansion of the rail network. In order to manage this shortfall, the rail industry will need to recruit and train 10,000 new drivers over the next four years, doubling the current number of new drivers qualifying each year.

IN Reality will develop a prototype for a scenario-based simulator, initially for desktop and mobile (e.g. tablet) deployment. It will provide training for Part A (theory) including rail signalling and safety principles, based on the regulatory Rail Standards and Safety Board (RSSB) rules, and it will be compliant with Train Driving Licensing & Certificates Regulations (TDLCR) which will enable the solution to be scaled in the longer term.

The prototype will consist of a suite of signalling scenarios intended to be used by new and qualified drivers and other rail workers. The learning design will be based on serious games methods, to engage learners, lead them through the cases and present them with realistic challenges which they need to overcome. It will be constructed as a set of modular components so that it can be expanded later to include new content. The delivery team is experienced in the development of complex, high fidelity simulators for the aerospace industry, so it will be highly realistic (built with industry standard 3D software), with levels of interactivity supporting the active learning approach.

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## Skill Bursts: Gamification to validate skills and create career pathways

miFutureGroup Ltd



Learning should be an enjoyable activity, but all too often people have had a negative learning experience that makes them averse to learning as an adult. Puzzles are the most popular genre of gaming apps in the UK with 32% of mobile gamers finding puzzles appealing to learn something that can benefit them outside of gaming. There are particular skills gaps in areas of Wales where a hyper-local solution is needed to address the serious basic skills challenge. Bringing the needs of local employers together with a puzzle game methodology can help to address both issues.

MiFuture will develop 'Bitesized Pick up and Play' skill games for problem solving and creativity. The gamified approach will make learning fun and interactive whilst reducing the learner's anxiety of failing. Skill Bursts are designed to improve skills and cognitive performance through playing the right type of games, based on a methodology proven to foster long-term retention, with a content aligned to local growth sector needs. The program consists of games designed to exercise the soft skills and basic skills employers need – digital skills, creativity, problem solving, flexibility, literacy, and numeracy relevant to work. Learners will improve their skills each day with engaging puzzles, to help them learn at the right level and pace, and unlock new levels while gaining new skills. They will form a habit of skill learning, with game-like features, fun challenges, reminders, quizzes, progress tracking, feedback, and career nudges.

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## STEM Upskilling: Digital Twin to transform the vocational learning experience

Huduma Limited

It is recognised that in the UK, the shortage of adults with adequate STEM skills has led to vocational skills gaps in many industrial sectors. A recent report by the Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET) estimates the cost to the UK economy as £1.5 billion per year. In parallel, one of the UK's traditional agricultural industries is seeking to transform its training practices for beekeeping and apiary management. This innovative project aims to use bee keeping as a learning environment to help address the challenges presented by STEM shortages.

Huduma will develop training materials and toolkits, based on 'Digital Twin' beehives, that will provide a learning environment for the development of STEM skills. One twin will be a real-world beekeeping environment, while the other twin will be an identical, highly accurate and responsive online model reacting to the activities taking place in its real-world twin, and the data provided by it. Internet of Things (IoT) sensors will provide a wide range of data for the online digital twin, so that the latter is realistic in its behaviour. Learners will develop STEM skills by carrying out a range of experiments, exercises and reflections within the digital environment. These will cover applied science, technology implementation and analysis, engineering and maths. Supporting the twins will be a number of blended activities to facilitate collaborative learning, exploratory learning through field studies, personal reflection on experiences and data, and problem solving.

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## Support platform for SEN/D Creative Technologists and Engineers

Kakou CIC



People with special educational needs or disabilities (SEN/D) face a range of challenges in accessing vocations based on STEM skills. Isolation during the pandemic has worsened the situation for these learners, who were already disconnected from mainstream education and training. Nationally, only 6% of those with a learning disability or autism find employment, however there are labour shortages in occupations that require STEM skills, such as engineering and web development. New approaches are needed to open up these opportunities.

Kakou CIC will develop a digital platform with learning resources, including 3D simulations of practical work environments and personalised learner support. It will provide vocational training for SEN/D students by teaching engineering skills based on technical roles within the creative arts sector. This will break down the typical barriers presented to SEN/D learners in traditional learning settings, by allowing them to express themselves through video, music, art, spoken word, design, coding, or creative writing. Learners will be presented with realistic technical projects, designed in collaboration with Chesterfield College, cultural organisations, industry sector professionals, vocational educators and local businesses. The project will be developed as a progressive web app (PWA) so that it will work effectively on a range of devices and can be updated easily as the project evolves. As well as teaching STEM skills, the project will help the development of learner confidence and autonomy, and support learners in engaging with creative and expressive activities.

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## Task Manager for Adults with Learning Disabilities

### Assistiv

Adults with learning disabilities in the UK face multiple barriers to gaining paid employment, often experiencing a lack of good quality support to get and maintain employment, a lack of support to build confidence and skills, employers' attitudes, and a lack of understanding about what people with a learning disability can do with the right support (Mencap 2021). This large and marginalised community has a very low employment rate and yet many people within it are capable of doing work in sectors where there are vacancies. This tool aims to address some of the key issues that prevent this group from entering and prospering in the workplace.

Assistiv will build and test a Task Manager system which will allow the user to tap an NFC sticker located in strategic locations around the workplace. This will automatically direct the employee to a series of personalised prompts which they can access on their phones (image, audio, video) to support them to complete the task independently and to a high standard. A back-office system will record what tasks have been completed, what QA checks have been carried out and how the individual feels at different stages throughout the workday. The tool is focussed on supporting the onboarding process, enabling people with learning difficulties to perform work-related tasks with in-situ support.

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## TeacherMatic

### Innovative Learning Technologies Ltd



Quality teaching requires good planning to map the curriculum to a delivery schedule and detailed planning of each teaching session. An excellent learning experience requires teachers to plan creative and engaging learning activities. Easing teachers of the burden of planning and preparation could allow them to spend more time focussing on the needs of individual and to be able to provide better individual feedback, thus improve learner outcomes. Emerging technologies can now enable this to happen. Open AI's release of GPT-3 (Generative Pre-trained Transformer) in 2020 is set to revolutionise many aspects of our lives including education.

GPT-3 is the natural language interface to the world's largest neural network that generates original content, based on the user asking it to 'do something'. This huge neural network is capable of generating extremely realistic text, making it a powerful tool for many different applications. Transform Education plans to use GPT-3 to build the Teaching Generator Station (TGS) platform. A suite of content 'generators' will help teachers produce materials for their courses including schemes of work, lesson plans, engaging learning activities (e.g., classroom debate topics, assessments such as multiple-choice questions for quizzes). The project will be trialled in different learning environments and will gain input from a range of vocational teachers. The platform will have integrated feedback forms to allow teachers to report on the value of the outputs and a forum for teachers and developers to discuss the platform's functionality and effectiveness.

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## The future of fitness: vocational training for the next generation

Central YMCA



As both a leading provider of qualifications and an awarding body, YMCA is well placed to create an app that revolutionises the way in which people learn and train for a career in fitness. Gym instructing and personal training qualifications make up around 60% of the market for qualifications in the fitness sector. By making these 'digital-first', they aim to empower anyone with a mobile device to develop the required skills and qualifications to practice safely.

This project aims to reimagine online gym and personal trainer learning provision by building a new application which combines learning, peer and coach collaboration and accreditation. Feedback from learners highlights that current online learning is often done alone without access to subject-matter experts or peers, assessments don't reflect real-life work environments and there is little requirement for learners to demonstrate correct application of skills. Fitness professionals, and their employers, need to train clients safely and the app will require learners to 'teach it back' via skills videos to show their competence. A messaging function will give experts and peers the ability to offer support, and bitesize learning modules will be available as interactive videos, audio and written. Intended users are young people and those changing career or needing a new vocation which suits their skills and passion. They will all be able to learn and qualify at their own pace, in a style that suits their needs.

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# VocTech Activate

VocTech Activate is our test bed where the first spark of an idea can be scoped and tested in the supportive environment that Ufi funding provides.

The grant provides support of between £30,000 and £60,000 for projects lasting up to 12 months.

The VocTech Activate grant fund supports the development of early-stage ideas, small scale testing, proof of concept work and the development of strategies to scale once Ufi funding has ended. We encourage ideas which have the potential to transform how vocational learning happens, rooted in a real-world understanding of the problems, issues and opportunities in the vocational sector.

We can support ideas for new tech, new markets, new communities of learners and we're happy to welcome new project teams. The emphasis here is on the 'new'. VocTech Activate has been designed to support innovation and we are ok with risk. This is about sharing that risk in order to encourage the development of creative new digital vocational learning tools, enabling organisations to test new ideas and work out the next steps necessary to plan a route to market and long-term success.

*VocTech Activate was previously called VocTech Seed.*



VocTech Activate

20  
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## AI Translate

### Hull College



The UK has critical skills gaps in technical occupations and a significant influx of potential labour (refugees, asylum seekers, and people with newly settled status). However, this potential workforce face language barriers when accessing vocational skills training in the UK. English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teaching and learning is a key first step towards helping people gain English language skills and integrate into the UK workforce.

The need for ESOL learning is growing as the levels of inward migration increases (440,000 net inward in 2022). The demand for classes in the UK rose to 180,000 places in 2022. Typically, traditional face to face ESOL classes can have adult students who speak 14 or more different first languages. It is difficult to address individual learner needs in such multilingual classes and demands on tutor support typically result in a slow pace of learning. The challenge faced by trainers is how to effectively deliver vocational/technical subjects with simultaneous translation to mixed cohorts, making ESOL agile and inclusive.

This project will trial Microsoft Translator to explore whether it can support live translation for two pilot areas in multiple languages, simultaneously, to increase the pace of lessons and reduce the time to competence for ESOL learners. The project will review how this approach can support learning in the classroom and remote learning, via mobile devices. If successful, the project will create resources for teachers to enable the approach to be replicated and scaled across the sector.

## Breaking the cycle of prison leaver underemployment: Green Vocational Training

### Plan and Site Services Ltd



Only 2% of the estimated 36,000 Retrofit Assessors needed to help the UK meet its net zero obligations have been trained. At the same time, opportunities to access meaningful vocational education while in prison are limited, as evidenced by the serious employment challenges adults face on release (only 23% are identified by the Ministry of Justice as securing work within 6 months of release).

This project will provide Retrofit Assessors training by creating a digital learning solution to enable the study of Level 3 and 4 energy assessment qualifications while in prison. 3D 'digital twins' of physical environments will be created using Light Detection and Ranging technology (using laser light to measure the distance of objects) to create an immersive learning experience. Using the simulation, learners will develop industry-specific skills by undertaking surveys of real world domestic and commercial premises in order to complete retrofit assessments. Learners will be able to engage with, interrogate and accurately assess, real world environments in a virtual context. The solution will be delivered within the prison system's existing digital infrastructure using standard desktop, laptop, and tablet devices.

Course materials will be mapped to City and Guilds Domestic Energy Assessment and Non-Domestic Energy Assessment qualifications. A partnership agreement with Your Consultation Group will provide the training funds and opportunities for employment post release through [www.ycgcareers.com](http://www.ycgcareers.com).



## ChatGPT – Schoolx.ai

Industry 4.0 Consultants Ltd



It is estimated that there are between 30,000 and 120,000 vacancies in software development and associated professions in the UK. These are highly skilled and financially rewarding jobs, however learners from disadvantaged backgrounds are under-represented in the tech sector and face significant barriers to accessing these roles.

Research by The Sutton Trust found that learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, unlike their better-off peers, were not exposed to information about tech roles. In addition, learning coding can be challenging without a tutor to guide and help answer questions when learners get stuck. However, they also report that learners would consider vocational courses in digital development if they understood more about job roles and had sufficient training in the basics.

This project aims to provide adults from disadvantaged communities with software development training. The project will build a platform to teach the basics of coding and provide support via a ChatGPT powered virtual assistant integrated into the learners Integrated Development Environment (IDE). Users will be able to ask questions using ChatGPT based on the programming they are currently doing in the IDE and receive fully contextual responses. The eight-week course for school leavers will give learners the skills needed to continue onto a Level 2 course in digital/software development or continue their learning independently.

 [i40c.co.uk](http://i40c.co.uk)

## Debate Mate Communication Enhancement

Debate Mate Limited



Many adults are entering the workforce without crucial communication skills. According to Salesforce, 86% of employees and executives believe this is the root cause of current workplace failures. In the UK, 90% of talent professionals recognise soft skills, particularly communication, to be as or more important than hard skills (LinkedIn Global Talent Trends 2019). The Sutton Trust reports that just one in five pupils feel the school curriculum helps them develop these crucial skills in the classroom. Current provisions are often inaccessible and can widen existing educational inequalities.

This project will test the hypothesis that AI can identify communication skills gaps and signpost learners to targeted content to improve those skills, for example active listening, persuasion, or empathy. An AI-powered web-based communication diagnostic tool will be developed to analyse a learner's communication ability. On completion, the learner will receive a personalised report and be directed to personalised communication training provided by Debate Mate's adaptive online courses.

The platform will focus on verbal and non-verbal communication skills and will develop a dataset to support development of the AI. If successful, the solution will enable Debate Mate to provide the same high-quality skills training achieved through live facilitation in a more accessible format.

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## FLO: Virtual Reality Learning Platform for Adult Social Care




### Care Reality



The UK adult social care sector faces significant challenges recruiting and retaining its workforce. Skills for Care estimate 11% of jobs remain unfilled and staff turnover stands at 36%. They also found that staff retention can be significantly improved via training. Practical, hands-on learning is also highly valued by the sector. Both the Department of Health and Social Care and Care England emphasise its importance in their guidance.

However, care workers face significant barriers to learning. They are often time-poor, struggling to keep up with the cost of living in a low-paying industry, and unable to take time off work for classroom-based training. This is particularly acute for those in remote and rural areas where the additional cost and time of travel adds another barrier.

This project will build a 'digital twin' of a care setting to create realistic, immersive learning environments accessible via a VR headset or a desktop. Learning will be repeatable, allowing learners to practice challenging and potentially harmful situations with freedom to learn and make mistakes. Assessment and evaluation will inform analytics and provide learners with feedback and data on their performance, allowing for a personalised learning experience and continuous development. An AI avatar will act as a guide for learners on the platform, giving instructions that can be seen and heard. The avatar instructions can be rendered in 20+ languages, allowing for international scaling and accessibility to those for whom English is not a first language.

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## Helping Front-Line Staff Embrace Innovation in Health & Social Care Partnerships

### The Lens



The NHS, local government, and social care providers are facing unprecedented challenges, and Health and Social Care Partnerships (HSCPs) need to develop new ideas that help people live better at home for longer. Inefficiencies in health and social care are often a symptom of top-down processes where decision-makers have little visibility of on-the-ground challenges. Supporting front-line staff within these organisations to develop and effectively communicate new solutions to solve the problems their clients face is becoming a priority – those closest to the problem are often best placed to respond to it.

This project aims to empower front-line staff with skills to identify challenges and play an active role in designing solutions. It seeks to equip them with the necessary vocational skills to effect scalable change from the bottom up.

A digital platform called PRISM (a web app optimised for mobile, tablet, desktop) will guide learners through a process that helps them develop the skills needed to play an active role in designing solutions to the problems they face in the workplace.

Front-line staff from a pilot of three HSCPs in Scotland will be guided along a skills development journey. The goal is for all cohort members to possess the skills and confidence needed to spark change in the workplace from the bottom up, turning their first-hand experiences into actionable proposals.

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## Immersive Hydrogen Training

### ESP – Energy Skills Partnership



Hydrogen is an emerging low carbon solution with clear policies set out by UK and Scottish Governments in their Climate Emergency planning. Ensuring the UK has the right skills and capabilities will be critical to achieving their hydrogen ambitions and for Scotland to become a leading nation in the production of reliable, competitive and sustainable hydrogen.

There is currently no access to reliable training equipment for those looking to enter the hydrogen industry. Training requires costly specialist equipment to grow the skills required by industry and first-hand experience is not normally available to trainees. As an emerging technology, colleges don't have access to the industrial hydrogen equipment required to build the workforce.

Energy Skills Partnership (ESP) is a collaboration between the Scottish government, colleges, and industry. The partnership was established to help deliver skills for the energy, engineering, and construction sectors with a focus on the Just Transition to Net Zero. Their project will create a VR interactive walk through of a hydrogen refuelling station, giving learners exposure to an industrial environment. The VR will be delivered through headsets and include sound and visuals. Learners will be able to interact with their environment as if they were a Hydrogen technician, testing out prior knowledge and skills safely. The solution will give learners considering entry into this industry an experience of the working conditions and environment.

The learner group consists of students across Scotland's colleges, from school leavers to adult returners, as well as those currently in employment and looking to upskill or reskill.

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## Innovative Education Approach to Motorsport Engineering

### SCU Motorsport Ltd



Motorsport race teams, manufacturers, and companies in the supply chain have identified a need to improve how motorsport qualifications are delivered in the UK. The qualifications need to be made more accessible to non-neurotypical learners who often find it difficult to demonstrate their skills and knowledge via traditional assessment methods.

In 2019, SCU Motorsport undertook research across the motorsport sector which included talking to current and previous students. The research found that students could perform practical tasks but struggled with exams and/or providing written accounts. Motorsports teams are keen to see novel approaches for delivering and assessing training to open access to learners who might be put off by having to write a portfolio of evidence.

This project will develop a VR learning platform to support the training of motorsport mechanics and engineers. It will allow non-neurotypical learners to gain recognition by demonstrating skills and capability through mixed reality, instead of written evidence or an exam.

If successful, this approach will form part of a new motorsport qualification that will be marketed to learning providers wishing to deliver motorsport training.

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## Leveraging large language models to accelerate soft skill development

greenworkx ltd

GREENWORKX

According to the Construction Leadership Council, to deliver the UK's ambitions for retrofit to meet net zero carbon targets, half a million people are needed for green jobs by 2030. A key foundation for these retrofit roles is soft skills, essentially to be able to interact with customers. This is supported by a Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) report which found that over half of construction employers identified communication skills as a key soft skill for jobs needed to help the UK achieve net zero, and that better training would address their skills gaps.

However, existing training routes don't adequately cover these skills. Research by greenworkx showed that organisations find it consistently hard to source talent with the right customer service and communication skills.

Through this project, greenworkx will create a soft skills development product focused on customer service skills for people working in retrofit. It will allow learners to practice conversations with a virtual customer through a chat interface. This will take them through a Q&A about the retrofit process, whilst being given real-time feedback. The aim is to help learners gain the relevant soft skills needed to access employment in a work-realistic way. The initial focus will be on retrofit advisor and assessor roles where there is an estimated need for around 500,000 people. The solution will use new, and highly scalable, break-out technologies including Large Language Model technology such as Open AI.

 [greenworkx.org](https://www.greenworkx.org)

## Project Jackdaw – Vocational Driver Training Simulator

The Road Haulage Association Ltd



The Road Haulage Association (RHA) estimate that the road transport industry faces a continued shortfall of approximately 60,000 drivers, which is expected to continue for 10-15 years. In addition, the level and method of training means new drivers aren't prepared for the modern demands of the transport industry, leading to heavy insurance premiums. Employers cite this as one of the top five reasons they don't consider apprentices or drivers under 25.

The methods currently used to train vocational drivers to gain their licences are outdated, with processes concentrating on acquiring the licence rather than the skills needed to work. Training is expensive for young people and recent changes to tests have increased the time taken to qualify.

The RHA project will use a fully immersive simulator at their Bathgate training centre to increase the hours trainees spend 'behind the wheel' of a large goods or public service vehicle while also reducing road risks. They will introduce logistics jobs to Level 2 students at FE colleges and other training providers.

If successful this project could change the way RHA deliver training by providing trainee feedback that can be reviewed post-lesson, with time to practice in the simulator.

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## Railway Station Security Simulation Serious Game

Chrome Angel Solutions Limited



Security is a major challenge for UK Railway operators and the British Transport Police at the UK's 2,500+ railway stations. It relies on the awareness and vigilance of a huge number of staff, contractors, and third-party retailers who don't all have easy or equal access to training. The cost of training operational staff is also significant and logistically challenging, leading to infrequent classroom training. Current training and development for security awareness is based primarily on communication campaigns (documents, posters, and videos) combined with staff briefings and security audits to test performance.

This project will produce a fully playable VR simulation game that will raise staff awareness of railway security threats. The simulation will help learners build competence and confidence when identifying security threats and following procedures. Set in a realistic and detailed virtual railway environment, users will be challenged to find, assess, and correctly respond to randomised security threats. They will talk to characters, investigate objects, avoid 'red herrings' that will test their unconscious biases and assumptions, and apply industry standard principles to assess threats and implement the correct security response procedures.

User performance will be assessed to win achievements, unlock higher levels of challenge, and move up the leader board. Challenges and competitions will drive engagement, with repetition building competence and confidence. New scenarios can be regularly released, and specific threats highlighted, enabling regular awareness training and assessment at scale.

 [chromeangel.co](http://chromeangel.co)

## The Virtual Maintenance Engineer

Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group (NSCG)



Engineering organisations across the UK use a range of brands, types, and models of industrial machines that are maintained by Maintenance Engineers. To support the training of these engineers, learning providers need to provide a variety of machines on-site for learners to develop the experience they need. This is costly, resulting in many providers offering a limited range of machines and reducing the opportunity for learners to practice and widen their experience. As a result, learners completing their programmes have in-depth knowledge but little experience of being able to apply their knowledge and skills practically across a broad range of equipment. Learners often need to be retrained once they begin employment.

This project will develop an immersive VR platform with 'digital twins' of a range of machines and equipment so that learners can practice their skills on different makes, models, and brands of machines. The platform will provide opportunities that are not available in a standard workshop. It will enable learners to gain a high level of knowledge and understanding of machines, functionalities, and components in a safe and immersive space and receive personalised feedback based on performance. Tutors and assessors will be able to set faults on machines for learners to fix and maintain. The project will work towards developing a catalogue of faults which can be assigned to individuals and groups, dependent on skill level. Content can continue to be developed and enhanced to align with advances in technology and machinery.

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## Workplace Literacy Bootcamps

EdenFiftyOne



As reported by the National Literacy Trust, '70% of employers place literacy skills within their top three considerations when recruiting school leavers'. With 'speaking and listening skills' having been removed from formal English GCSE certification (post-2016), and with written grammatical/technical accuracy accounting for only 20% of GCSE English Language assessment criteria, even the most 'academically validated' school leavers (600,000 per year) are unlikely to have the broad range literacy skillset that employers demand.

EdenFiftyOne™ aim to assist employers to improve the literacy of their employees by providing a tool which will help them to identify which literacy skills are needed by their workforce, and context-specific materials to help meet that need. It is a platform that deconstructs the qualities of reading, writing, speaking, and listening into 51 universal skills of English language and literacy. EdenFiftyOne™ for Business will help employers analyse their workplace literacy requirements by mapping against the 51 skills to provide a focused and specific response without the need to employ generic, external provision.

This project aims to refocus on the vocational sector and offer the technology to employers. Central to that aim will be the development of a bespoke, multi-platform mobile app which will enable employees to engage with and benefit from the instructional content outside of an educational setting.

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# VocTech Challenge

To tackle specific challenges facing adult learners in the UK, especially those furthest from learning, we bring our funding, partnerships and advocacy workstreams together around a VocTech Challenge.

Each VocTech Challenge is focused on tackling an identified issue in vocational learning and designed to catalyse systemic change.

Projects awarded VocTech Challenge grant-funding are invited to explore their ideas using design thinking to really get to the heart of potential users' vocational learning needs and to look at a variety of options for learning design and technology solutions.





**VocTech Challenge:**

## Levelling up learning

This VocTech Challenge explored how vocational technology can address barriers and build bridges to create a step-change in learner confidence and motivation, leading to better outcomes for the learner, for the employer and for society as a whole.

The Challenge was specifically focused on adults impacted by the digital divide and furthest away from learning – helping them get the confidence they need to gain skills for work.

## Bridge Builders – Spanning the Gap from Custody to Community

Inside Connections Support CIC



The Construction Skills Certification Scheme card (CSCS), administered by GQA, is essential for working on construction sites. However, the test is not currently accessible in prisons because of security restrictions around online access. A key objective of this project is to provide prisoners with access to the CSCS test, to aid their entry to employment once released.

Inside Connections is a Community Interest Company working with those who have experience of the Criminal Justice System, either currently serving a prison sentence or recently released from custody. This project aims to bridge the gap between prison and employment by providing learning resources and access to the Construction Skills Certification Scheme.

The project will develop high quality digital learning materials and integrate a number of existing digital tools to support learners in custody and in the community, bridging the gap for prison-leavers, increasing their independence and removing barriers to employment. It will integrate with, and build on, the main learning infrastructure available in the prison sector: Meganexus's Virtual Campus.

The result will be a system that not only benefits learners but also the professionals supporting them. Trainers will be able to access a system with assessment, planning and tracking tools, avoiding duplication and smoothing the transition from custody to community.

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## Confident Communicator – Autonomous AI-based immersive training at scale

Bodyswaps

 **7x bodyswaps**

Overcoming confidence issues in communicating improves with practice.

This project looks at how virtual reality (VR) can help younger adult learners overcome barriers in confidence and motivation in order to improve their verbal and non-verbal communication skills.

Bodyswaps will be working with FE students at Sandwell College to further test and develop VR based communication training simulations. Previous tests have confirmed the need for such a solution and identified the crucial importance of personalised feedback, particularly for learners lacking in confidence.

Students will practise their communication skills (clarity, confidence, assertiveness and emotional intelligence). The focus of the training simulations will be on public speaking – increasing students' confidence to speak in public in professional (work-related) contexts. Learners will act out, with their own voice, realistic workplace public speaking scenarios in VR. Feedback will be given by AI-driven behavioural analytics. Using VR provides a safe environment for learners to refine their skills, allow self-reflection and give feedback to pinpoint areas for improvement.

By the end of the project, Bodyswaps will have tested 'Say Something' with real learners and tutors, demonstrated how their communication skills and confidence have increased, and shown how learners are now ready to apply those skills in a real-life, professional environment.

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## Create Your Own Future




### Saffron Interactive Ltd



Adults in receipt of Universal Credit or furthest from the job market often lack the confidence and motivation to develop or extend their skills to work. Saffron Interactive are developing a digital 'employment journey' for people accessing employability programmes to help address this. An AI enabled, video-based coach will supplement the role of the human work coaches by providing diagnostics, job and training matching, support and action planning.

The AI will personalise the user journey and alert real-life coaches to intervene in the case of specific triggers, for example lack of response, which can be an indication of a user having difficulties. Activity, engagement, and motivation will be maintained through behavioural nudges and personalised pathways. This will allow the human work coaches to provide higher value, impactful support when needed, by allowing them to focus on relevant and timely interventions as opposed to the current high volume of chasing and administration.

The end product will be a system which empowers the individual to realise their own potential and career opportunities in a safe and supported environment. Saffron are piloting the prototype with a DWP sub-contractor, and this solution has the potential to reach many thousands of users through similar partners.

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## GATHER

### MadLab



Developing a supportive platform to link industry mentors and young people getting started in the digital industry.

GATHER is a new and unique 'learning community operating system': working behind the scenes to power MadLab's highly-social, grassroots-powered online digital skills programme; propelling those in underserved communities across Greater Manchester (and beyond) from 'no previous experience' through to junior-level employment and apprenticeship in the tech industry.

During the project, 100+ learners will be engaged in flexible, self-paced learning for three to six months. During this time they will be provided mentoring, technical, and pastoral support 24/7 through the platform and community hub. They will take part in up to five project-based modules covering foundational software developer skills – from programming fundamentals through to data management and web frameworks – alongside live-streamed workshops, short-form coding challenges, pair and group programming, and mini-projects.

By closely following each learner's progress, understanding their preferences and needs, and providing direct timely support at key touchpoints, the MadLab team expects to maintain a retention rate of 80%+, with the majority employed in a technical role within six months of completion.

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## Increasing confidence with personalised support for Functional Skills Maths



### Mathskitchen



Of the 700,000 16-year-olds who take maths GCSE every year, around 190,000 fail to get a grade 4 or higher. They are subsequently required to continue studying maths until age 18, or until they gain a grade 4 GCSE or Level 2 Functional Skills. For those on apprenticeships (and other vocational courses) a Level 2 qualification in maths and English is mandatory. Many will take a Functional Skills qualification instead of retaking their GCSE. New approaches are needed to obtain improved results from students who were not successful first time around.

Maths Kitchen are developing their existing GCSE maths solution into a learning platform covering functional maths skills for adult learners in the vocational sector. The project will develop a mobile app and online platform for functional maths skills that will build a picture of a user's ability, recognising and celebrating what they can already do, as well as identifying areas that need focus. This tailored learning journey could be shorter than traditional pathways, which will reduce the time taken to attain the qualification for some learners. The solution will continually assess learners' abilities and provide intelligent, personalised recommendations in response.

The team will be developing additional learning content and adapting the existing technology for mobile use. They will ensure user-led design through regular engagement with learners and educators. The result will be a solution that builds learners' confidence in their own ability and allows them to see how they are progressing towards their goal, improving their confidence and motivation to continue.

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## Kindred Clothing

### Front Lounge






Kindred Clothing provides a vocational qualification for those with a limited education foundation, as well as growing the confidence and competencies of learners and nurturing their future options.

The organisation currently teaches the garment production process to cohorts of 10 to 15 learners at a time with the objectives of building confidence and reactivating young parents' education through life affirming activities. They also learn about photography, business planning, and how to best present themselves. There is a lot of emphasis on early supportive engagement because traditional routes back into education have a high dropout rate for this group of learners.

This project aims to develop the digital element of an accredited clothes making course aimed at a community of young parent families, creating a blended solution that can house all the different elements of the course and accurately track learning progression. Continuous assessment via the platform will remove the stress of an exam, and accessibility will be improved to meet learner needs.

Kindred Clothing is delivered by a group of industry professionals who have signed up to the Clothes Making Learning Partnership. They also provide access to internships and job opportunities, plus business startup support. Options for scaling at a national level are being investigated to ensure the solution can be offered free to those most in need anywhere in the UK.

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## Numeracy Champions in the Workplace

### National Numeracy



The UK faces a numeracy crisis. The cost comes in widening regional disparities, since numeracy skills are weakest in regions whose incomes are lowest. This project aims to address confidence barriers to improving basic maths skills, by working with partners to develop a network of local numeracy champions. These will support adults to use National Numeracy's proven digital products, leading to improvement in skills and better chances in the workplace.

National Numeracy have already developed a highly effective digital solution, the National Numeracy Challenge, which has been proven to effect a step-change in numeracy confidence levels. This project aims to build on that initiative by creating a network of digital champions who will support maths learners in the workplace, using the National Numeracy Challenge as the anchor and centrepiece. Partnering with Lincs Co-op, Cambs and Peterborough Combined Authority and the Lord Mayor's appeal, the project will enable champions to encourage learners, grow a community and measure impact. Champions will be trained in the skills and knowledge needed and provided with the mechanisms to monitor success. The project will be working with the government's new Multiply fund to further extend reach and impact.

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## Passport to Independence

### YMCA DownsLink Group



The Passport to Independence platform will enable young adults who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless to work through a series of skills development exercises to give them the confidence they need to take the next step to be ready for work. These young adults often have issues with confidence and motivation, have often struggled with formal education, and will have feelings of fear and anxiety around entering the workplace.

This project will develop a web app providing interactive resources to assist young adults living in supported accommodation to learn new skills, improve their confidence, and increase their current and future employment prospects.

Learners will benefit not only from access to the end product but by being actively involved in its development. Engaging users in the development process ensures that what is built really meets their everyday needs. YMCA intends to involve a minimum of 50 people in developing the resource and the platform will be made available to 1,400 residents in accommodation each year.

YMCA is also working to make it available to a wider audience of young people, including care leavers, students and those leaving home for the first time.

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## PlanIT, DesignIT, ConstructIT

Construction Industry Training Board  
Northern Ireland (CITB NI)



Feedback from Construction Industry employers indicates that the gaining practical skills in the workplace is less of a problem than an individual's lack of life skills. CITBNI are creating a scenario-based construction project that aims to improve learners' soft skills by working as part of a construction team building a footbridge, practising their life and employment skills as well as learning technical skills in a safe virtual environment.

This scenario-based project will develop a prototype Augmented Reality (AR) application aiming to improve vital life and employability skills, through a construction-based challenge. The project centres on a new footbridge with each learner assuming a key role in the delivery of the project. The prototype immersive training application will deliver learning outcomes which are applicable to all sectors, in life skills and the six employability skills most sought after by CITBNI members:

- Planning and organisation
- Research and using information
- Interpersonal
- Strategic and business thinking
- Communication
- Leading and managing people

Aimed at NEET learners, the immersive training environment will enable participants to develop and gain insight into their strengths and weaknesses and equip them with the skills they require for varied career choices within and beyond construction.

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## SITE IT Phase 2

NIACRO



Many prisoners face complex vocational learning challenges including poor essential skills, a lack of qualifications and little work experience. Many choose to work in construction on leaving prison. SITE IT prepares them for work, using immersive Virtual Reality (VR) training experience in Construction Health & Safety, delivered in the prison environment.

This project completes the innovative prototype work of SITE IT to develop a VR training and assessment tool for use in prisons. Learners, selected from the prison population, move through three 'zones' within a virtual building site, undertaking tasks along the way, all forming units of an OCN Level 1 qualification in Health & Safety in a Construction Environment.

Delivered through headsets, the application captures the learner's performance, followed by a debrief session with a construction trainer to help them understand their progress and improve their confidence.

The Construction Industry Training Board Northern Ireland (CITBNI) will guide the development process and engage construction employers in the testing, to ensure the content is fit for purpose within the industry. Post-release work placements will be offered to the learners to improve motivation.

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## SMaRT Pathways 2022

### First Step Trust



First Step Trust has worked over many years with the long term unemployed to provide a safe learning space that will enable them to develop confidence and demonstrate skills and competence in a practical workplace environment. Many of the workforce members live with issues such as anxiety and poor literacy which disadvantage them in accessing meaningful employment opportunities.

This project will design and deliver a digital programme in motor vehicle maintenance in collaboration with the Institute of Motor Industry (IMI) awarding body and Halfords Autocentres. Initial prototype work confirmed that many of the workforce members had difficulty with understanding written instructions and proving their competence through written tests. They also lack confidence in their learning.

This project will demonstrate how VR, video and other vocational technologies can be used to develop a training tool that allows users both to learn and to demonstrate success without requiring high levels of literacy. The long-term aim is to enable those furthest from the labour market to show that they have the skills to succeed in stable employment.

First Step Trust will design all a Motor Vehicle Training programme to IMI Entry Level 3. The project will involve blended technologies, peer trainers and work experience placements – all of which address issues of low confidence and motivation. Using technology not previously encountered by learners means they come fresh to the learning with no memories of failing to learn this way. The focus on practical work oriented skills reduces the likelihood of failure as learners do not have to rely on literacy skills to demonstrate competence.

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## Supercharging learner motivation by using AI to transform Initial Assessment

### CENTURY



Taking English and maths GCSE (or functional skills) resits after a less than successful experience in school is hard – both for the learner and the teacher trying to motivate and support them. Learners currently face an initial hard-coded assessment which emphasises what they can't do and reinforces feelings of failure.

CENTURY aim to change that by developing a personalised pre-learning intervention that will use AI and machine learning to personalise the assessment questions. The platform will understand the learner's working level and then link through to recommended courses and learning resources specific to the learner's needs, thereby creating a much more positive and kinder user experience.

This project will take CENTURY's prototype for personalised adaptive assessment through the next stages of design, development and deployment, leading to a fully adaptive version of initial assessment. Current assessments are based on documenting students' failures with the result that students often end the test demotivated and embarrassed about their ability and even less motivated to study.

The vocational learning sector recognises that innovation is clearly needed across the whole area of assessment, and this project has the potential to demonstrate how smarter digital technology can improve the accuracy and experience of the process, with improved outcomes for learners.

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## Thrive Community 2022

### Career Matters



Career Matters is a social enterprise which exists to improve access to career development opportunities for all. Their focus is on 'lived experience' communities including care experience and those with experience of criminal justice system- communities who face a cliff edge of care when they leave. 10,000 young people leave care every year and their progression into training and employment is extremely low. Only 17% gain 5 GCSEs, only 2% go into apprenticeships. 27% of people in the criminal justice system are care experienced. A new, integrated solution is needed to meet their needs.

Thrive provides guided support for communities most removed from traditional pathways into education, employment and training. It connects communities with employers to support inclusive recruitment practices and improve vocational outcomes and career opportunities.

Thrive was co-designed and co-produced with people with lived experience of care and criminal justice to improve the confidence and motivation of individuals who face complex barriers to progression into learning and work.

Thrive Community 2022 aims to further develop the Thrive platform to broaden the hybrid approach with a range of delivery partners across the NHS, Local Authorities, secure settings and within the community to enable the scaling of support through an ecosystem approach. The aim is to evidence the effectiveness of this way of working and to embed Thrive in mainstream service provision of organisations working with the target learners.

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## Unqualified healthcare workers access to nursing assistant apprenticeships

### The University of Derby



The UK's non-registered healthcare workforce, typically employed as Healthcare Assistants (HCAs) and in the broader private sector, are largely 'hidden' to the vocational learning sector despite their potential to address a pressing skills deficit. This project aims to help HCAs move into a Trainee Nursing Associate apprenticeship by providing a route to better engage or re-engage with vocational education.

The project will be a new application of an existing games-based learning technology – Applio – a cross-platform content development and delivery environment that reduces the complexity of delivering games-based learning. Learners will access a series of integrated modules focused on the pain points that deter them from accessing a Trainee Nursing Associate apprenticeship. The support will cover the end-to-end process from becoming aware of the opportunity, developing confidence to apply, reactivating dormant skills and creating new functional skills, application completion and onboarding.

The solution is orientated towards collective learning, generating the ability to 'play' together. Disconnected learners can participate in peer support networks to build confidence and resilience, and also engage directly with existing professionals. The project will focus on content design and development and development of analytics to show progress. The end result will be a community of learning drawing on peer support to grow learner confidence and skills to progress into Nursing.

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## VocTech Challenge:

# Skills for an Economy in Transition

The VocTech Challenge: Skills for an Economy in Transition aims to accelerate the adoption and deployment of technology to help every adult in the UK get the skills they need to participate and benefit from our transitioning economy.

In partnership with



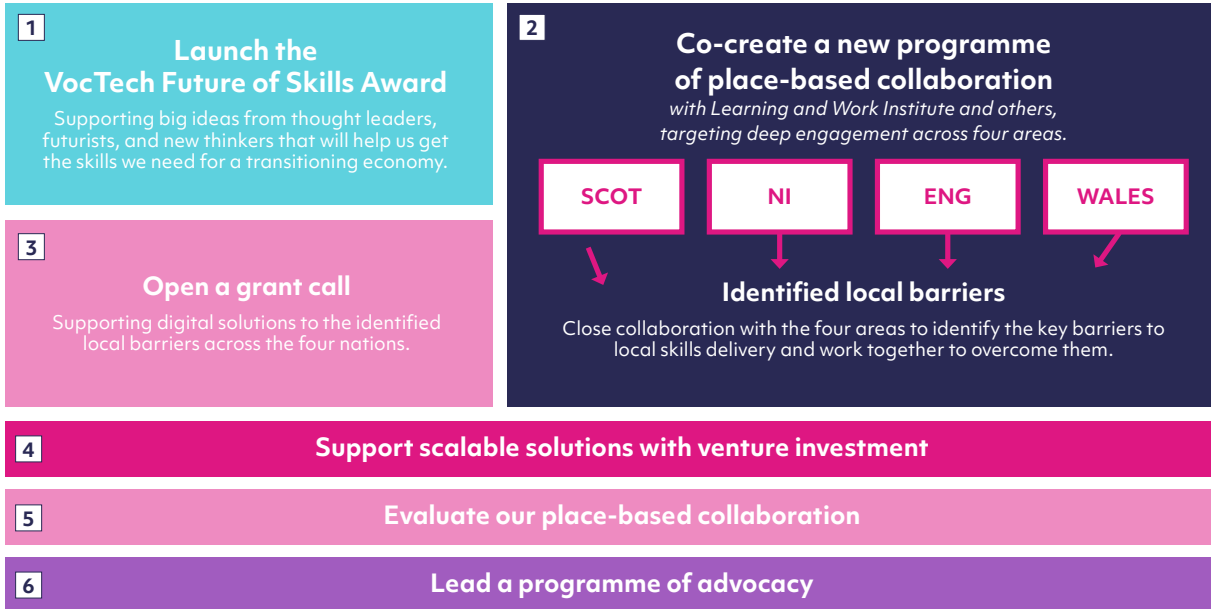
Ufi and Learning and Work Institute have come together at a time of rapid change in the UK economy and labour market, where we see that the UK's needs will not be met unless there is greater and more equitable access to skills.

We know that economic growth comes from a better skilled workforce. This means ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to develop skills for work throughout their lives, building a future economy and labour market where people aren't just playing catch up but have the chance to thrive in new industries and sectors.

Together, we believe that equitable growth will require new skills strategies for an economy and labour market in transition and that technology has a critical role to play in opening access and opportunity, so that no one is left behind.

We have set out an ambitious programme of work to achieve our goal of creating a step-change in adult participation in learning. We are dedicating £3 million to six bold commitments to help get adults learning across the UK.

## Our commitments to help get adults learning:



Find out more at [ufi.co.uk/challenge](https://ufi.co.uk/challenge)

# VocTech Ignite

Our earliest stage support for those new to grant funding or needing extra help to bring their ideas to life.

The VocTech Ignite programme is offered alongside every open grant call. Ignite allows us to extend our unique 'enriched support' to a small number of organisations by connecting them with expert mentors and specialist support.

In 2023, seven projects are taking part in the Ignite programme and are beginning to work with their mentors. The recipients are projects we could see had the potential for a significant impact, often working with a hard to reach learner group, but were not yet ready for VocTech Activate funding. A VocTech Ignite grant does not guarantee progression to further Ufi grant funding.

| Organisation  | Project idea   |
|---|--|
| <b>The Integrate Agency CIC</b>                                   | The Integrate Agency CIC aim to co-produce a bid writing training platform for young people to develop the skills needed to become charity sector bid writers. |
| <b>Heritage 5G Ltd</b>  | Heritage 5G Ltd are interested in using Mixed Reality technology to train people interested in Museum, Heritage and Archive careers.                           |
| <b>Furbnow</b>  | Furbnow aim to create a user-friendly retrofit surveying tool to help Retrofit Assessors gain skills for work.   |
| <b>ElectroTilez</b>   | ElectroTilez want to produce an educational plug'n'play hardware kit to help learners gain skills in digital electronics.                                      |
| <b>The Disablement Association of Barking and Dagenham (DABD)</b> | DABD aim to create a digital care training package to assist SEND young people and adults to access bespoke vocational skills training.                        |
| <b>Nouveau Wellbeing CIC</b>                                      | Nouveau Wellbeing CIC want to create a digital learning game to introduce adults who struggle with literacy to careers in the care sector.                     |
| <b>Allsports Coaches Coaching Academy CIC</b>                     | Allsports aim to use Virtual Reality to develop training for military veterans to gain soft skills for work.   |

# Ufi Ventures

We are the UK's specialist investor in VocTech ventures, investing in early-stage companies that are building digital technologies to give people and businesses the skills needed for work, now and in the future.

Our typical first investment ranges between £75k-£150k into early-stage companies. We may make follow-on investments up to a maximum of £1m invested in any one company.

We identify investment opportunities guided by our investment thesis but companies can also make a proposal to us at any time by contacting the Ufi Ventures team.

We are keen to be a long-term investor for the companies that we work with, helping them to scale-up and reach wide market adoption.

[ufi.co.uk/ventures](https://ufi.co.uk/ventures)


## Assemble You



Podcast listeners are expected to reach over 500m by 2024, with over 90% of people finding audio an effective way to learn new things, and 86% of people saying they would be more likely to engage with learning if supplied with high-quality audio courses, according to Assemble You. However, audio remains largely underserved in corporate learning programmes.

Assemble You create podcast-style audio courses in a range of topic areas. Their goal is to help screen-fatigued workers learn on the go and provide deskless frontline workers with a means to learn without a desktop screen. They reduce barriers to skills development through producing succinct, structured audio courses, that have the potential to engage users in new ways, increasing learning outcomes for adults.

Ufi invested in Assemble You in October 2022 alongside a group of private investors. Assemble You will use this first round of funding to grow production capacity and market reach, with a primary focus on supporting existing clients and attracting new B2B revenue. The company also delivers bespoke custom content for clients, has established an impressive resell partner channel, and has plans to move into the B2C space.

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## AutonoMe



Everyone should have equal access to the benefits of meaningful employment, however currently only 4.8% of people with learning disabilities and autism are in work, a decline from 6.6% over the last ten years.

AutonoMe is addressing this challenge using mobile technology to help people with learning disabilities and autism develop skills for independent living and employment. The programme combines human support with assistive technology to help adult learners achieve their full potential. By using the app employees develop skills and overcome barriers to gain and sustain paid employment. At the same time, employers benefit from expert support to increase their diversity and inclusivity together with greater insight into the needs and abilities of their workforce.

By accessing personalised support from a Job Coach and employment-specific instructional videos, the AutonoMe app helps learners develop motivation and resilience for job seeking. Learners are equipped with the practical and social skills required to secure meaningful paid work. Once in work, bespoke training and support is tailored to the personal needs of the learners and their employer, creating the right conditions for sustained employment. Learner progress is monitored and regularly communicated with both the learner and employer to ensure any challenges are identified and addressed proactively.

Ufi Ventures invested in AutonoMe in April 2023. The seed investment will enable AutonoMe to provide support to more people and expand its platform with the development of new features to make it more accessible and user-friendly.

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## Bodyswaps






Many sectors are going through significant transformation through automation and digital innovation, not least those which have traditionally been labour intensive such as retail or transport. In this new realm, companies increasingly depend on employees' soft skills to add operational value. Therefore, rapidly developing the soft skills of the workforces is critical.

Virtual and augmented reality has very high potential to enable access to soft skills training at scale. Bodyswaps is developing a Virtual Reality (VR) learning platform and content library offered as a service to businesses that uses VR and Artificial Intelligence (AI) to provide soft skills training similar in performance to expert coaching and roleplaying, but close to the cost and scalability of eLearning. The platform empowers learners to safely practice their skills and measure their progress through a library of VR role-play simulations. The company's most recent innovation is a healthcare module to improve communication with patients, developed in partnership with the Royal Society of Medicine.

With Bodyswaps, organisations of all sizes can boost and scale their training programmes with affordable learning experiences far more effectively than with traditional online exercises or even facilitated role-playing.

Ufi invested in Bodyswaps in September 2020 alongside Haatch Ventures and a group of private investors. This investment fits with our focus on investing to help people learn the essential skills needed for work, now and in the future – including interpersonal skills.

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## CAPSLOCK



By 2030, more than 100m workers in developed economies will need to switch occupations. There are many sectors in the economy with skills shortages, with some of these sectors also perceived as highly challenging to get in to for those looking to re-train. The Cyber Security sector is an example of this, with wide-spread skills gaps and a shortage of new workers. Typically, those looking for a career change have moved into other areas due to the complexities of the space, the high up-front cost of retraining and a lack of a clear pathway into jobs.

CAPSLOCK removes barriers to reskilling in this high demand sector, enabling those looking to retrain to access quality work, without having to pay a penny until they've landed a high-paying job. Learners are taken through online 'bootcamp' learning, delivered entirely within a collaborative digital learning environment that has been built to simulate real working scenarios. Prospective learners are also offered a wide range of financing options to remove upfront cost barriers for retraining. So far, CAPSLOCK have enrolled more than 600 learners, with 65% of graduates securing employment and seeing an average salary increase of £12k in their first cyber role.

Ufi invested in the company in March 2021 alongside GC Angels and Tynton Group. This investment is aligned with objectives of increasing access to work for adults in the UK by improving skills, and addresses issues identified in our investment thesis: removing financial barriers to training as well as improving access to roles in high demand skill sectors.

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## Data Literacy Academy



Businesses spend hundreds of billions of pounds each year on data headcount, infrastructure, and technology but executives, managers and business users fail to exploit the full value, due to poor data literacy. Accenture found that although 75% of the global workforce have access to data analytics software only 21% of employees are confident with their data literacy skills. As workers are increasingly interacting with data as part of their role, the need for a more holistic approach to data literacy is becoming essential.

Data Literacy Academy is a learning platform providing clients and their employees with access to live and on-demand data literacy training. It breaks down the traditional barriers to understanding analysis, reporting and data-driven decision-making. The platform uses live and on-demand classes and courses to upskill employees across organisations and at all levels on how to engage with and benefit from the data their organisation holds, ultimately bridging the gap between data experts and their colleagues. Classes are taught live by leading members of the data community, including data leaders from organisations including Gymshark, Huel, and Sky.

Upskilling and empowering employees to be more data literate has a multitude of benefits, including improved decision making, more innovation and productivity, and better employee and customer experience. Data Literacy Academy aims to help 10,000 businesses and their employees achieve data literacy by 2030.

Ufi Ventures invested in Data Literacy Academy in December 2022 alongside Haatch Ventures and private investors including Jason Foster, Founder and CEO of data and analytics strategy consultancy Cynozure.

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## FlashAcademy



The UK needs to radically improve access to high-quality essential skills training as it seeks to rebuild the labour market after COVID-19. There are 9m workers in the UK with low literacy, limiting their access to work now, and to further training for the jobs of the future. VocTech can help to bridge some of those gaps.

FlashAcademy's mission is to make language accessible to everyone. The platform uses a proven combination of lessons, games, flashcards, tutor videos, and object translation to support people in becoming more confident in using English where it is not their first language. FlashAcademy Workplace was developed with Ufi's grant funding to accelerate learning of technical and non-technical vocabulary in the workplace. For employers, workplace learning helps ensure quality delivery through training and understanding of compliance matters such as health and safety.

Ufi invested in FlashAcademy in July 2020 alongside Midven and several individual investors. This investment fits with our focus on investing to help people in the UK to build the essential skills needed for work, now and in the future, including literacy, numeracy, digital skills, interpersonal and problem-solving skills.

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## Kinderly



There are c.270,000 early childhood education practitioners in the UK who are not using digital tools to support and develop their practice. The wider UK childcare market comprises c.80,000 childcare settings which care for more than 2.4 million children under the age of five. Low usage of digital tools in this sector leads to more time spent on administration, less frequent and lower quality training and development opportunities and ultimately less time available for the children. Kinderly offers two software products to address this challenge.

Kinderly Together makes it quick and easy to digitally capture the early years learning journey, allows childcare providers to enhance parent communication and helps to improve the home learning environment. It also provides reporting and tools to better manage childcare provision by viewing developmental progress of all children at a glance with progress tracking, effective planning and reporting via a personalised dashboard. Kinderly Learn helps early years practitioners to manage their own Continuing Professional Development. All the learning has been designed to be engaging, bite-size, accessible and affordable.

Ufi invested in the company in December 2019 alongside Development Bank Wales and several individual investors. This investment fits with our focus on the opportunities to invest in VocTech for the care and education sectors.

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## Learnerbly



People in work want to feel that they are developing in their career. When they do, this helps companies retain and attract great people, and upskills the workforce. Learning content, a learning budget and personal development plans are all important aspects of a strong learning and development offer but sourcing and organising training for a diverse range of learners and managing tight budgets across a business can be complicated. Fair and equitable access to training can be a real issue and these are challenges that VocTech can help to address.

Learnerbly encourages self-directed learning by empowering employees with personal learning budgets and a personal development plan; guiding them to resources based on what and how they want to learn. They select from curated learning opportunities including books, coaching, courses, conferences, podcasts, and videos. This personalised approach leads to industry-leading levels of engagement and turns the fixed cost of enterprise-wide e-learning/training licenses, with limited utilisation into a variable one – minimising waste of Learning & Development budgets.

Ufi invested in the company in December 2019 alongside Triplepoint, Front-line Ventures, Playfair Capital and several individual investors. We have participated in 2 further funding rounds, through which Beringea became a shareholder. This fits our investment focus on VocTech that aligns impact for employees with business value for employers.

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## Metaverse Learning






Although the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated a move to online learning, very little has changed about how many skills qualifications are delivered. With the rise of immersive technologies, there is an opportunity to innovate skills training and assessment to support learner success in the UK and beyond.

Metaverse Learning is a global leader in the transformation of education, training, and assessment through Extended Reality (ER), including Virtual Reality (VR), Virtual Environments (VE) and Augmented Reality (AR). In partnership with education providers and industry, the company has produced a rich library of immersive programs covering many subject areas. Each program is co-created to fulfil sector-specific learning needs, helping to transform learning, build confidence, increase attainment, decrease costs, and equip learners with the skills they need to access further education, higher education, apprenticeship, and employment opportunities.

Through immersive work-based scenarios, learners develop real-world skills and in safe online environments and demonstrate knowledge and understanding through assessment. Metaverse Learning's virtual programs connect to any Learning Management System, and learners can review their performance and see where they have been successful and where they can improve.

Ufi invested in Metaverse Learning in February 2023. This investment developed a new-to-market Assessor Mode feature, helping tutors gain deeper learner insights, enabling personalised learner journeys, and providing in-program learner support. This investment will also support Metaverse Learning to nearly double their program library within the next year, expanding on their current offerings.

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## Mobilise



With one in five carers finding that they need to stop work to care for loved ones, the service offered by Mobilise is crucial in helping people navigate the complexities and challenges of caring while also maintaining employment.

Mobilise is a digital platform and community providing access to knowledge, expertise, and skills for the 13.5 million unpaid carers in the UK. Their mission is to build a global community in which people with caring roles can support each other not just to care, but to care and thrive.

Mobilise work with Local Authorities to help identify and provide support to unpaid carers in their communities, harnessing their collective knowledge, wisdom and expertise and empowering them to thrive through online skills sharing and support. Ufi Ventures invested in Mobilise as part of a £400k early-stage founding round in 2022, and again as part of their seed round in 2023 alongside investors including Steve Garnett and the Resolution Foundation.

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## MyPocketSkill



MyPocketSkill works at the intersection of Edtech and Fintech, with a mission to empower GenZs to “Earn, Save, Learn”. It was launched in 2020 to address the decline of opportunities for young adults to find skilled work, learn about vocational paths open to them, and receive relevant financial education.

MyPocketSkill supports young people to become more employable and financially capable by using their existing skills and acquiring new ones. The platform connects young people with households and businesses to complete paid tasks, such as tutoring, social media management, music coaching, digital design, and other digital tasks, and manage their earnings through innovative embedded e-wallets. In the process it delivers short financial education videos to nudge young adults towards better financial skills and behaviours. MyPocketSkill, has also partnered with the Department for Education to help deliver digital T-Levels as an opportunity for plugging the digital skills gap. The platform currently has over 100k young people signed-up.

Ufi invested in MyPocketSkill in April 2023 alongside investors including London Business School’s E100, the Capital Angel Network, and the SyndicateRoom EIS fund. MyPocketSkill has been grant funded by the Money and Pensions Service and Innovate UK. It has also received recognition for its approach and for its founders, such as winning Deutsche Bank and ATOS’ Female FinTech competition in 2021.

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## Purlos



Student access to, and outcomes from, Further Education (FE) are tightly linked to engagement. However current methods of engaging with prospective students, like email and phone calls, don’t work at scale and often aren’t their preferred communication channel. As a result, many students don’t receive the help they need to understand which courses are available and overcome barriers to enrolling.

With the FE sector under financial pressure and an anticipated 90,000 additional 16–19-year-olds to enter further education by 2025, the conversion of applications to enrolments and then retaining enrolled students is absolutely key. Improving and automating student engagement before and during College is crucial, as is capturing where students go next.

Purlos is an experience management platform for student enrolment and destinations mapping on behalf of FE colleges, Local Authorities and training providers. Applicants and learners text message and ‘WhatsApp’ their way through the administrative tasks of applying and enrolling. Purlos supports FE colleges and training providers to help convert and retain students more effectively and helps learners find, access and succeed in the right course. Local authorities engage with Purlos to increase the number of people able to access further education and training.

Ufi Ventures invested in Purlos in October 2022 as part of a £450k fundraising round.

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## Slinger





The UK hospitality industry faces significant challenges to recruitment and workforce development. Although many people are attracted to working in hospitality, traditional recruitment processes are slow, outdated and expensive and career pathways unclear.

Slinger is on a mission to transform hospitality recruitment, supporting people to find quality work and develop their careers in the hospitality industry. To help hospitality staff find their next job, Slinger has replaced traditional CVs with video submissions, provides a frictionless route to signing-up, and only lists job opportunities paying a UK Living Wage or above. Shifts are claimed on the platform within an average of just 60 seconds.

Slinger is also focused on helping people move into hospitality and raising awareness of the variety of career paths available. To support career development, the platform is developing a programme comprising mentorship, up-skilling, interview preparation and work experience.

Ufi invested in Slinger in October 2023 as part of a £500k pre-seed funding round led by Fuel Ventures with co-investment from Resolution Foundation, Cornerstone VC and angel investors. The investment will support Slinger to focus on developing their digital career programme, increasing their client acquisition and growing their team with a specific focus on customer care and community.

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## SonicJobs



60% of jobseekers search for roles via mobile devices while employers' application processes are often optimised for desktop technology. In 2019, only 4% of candidates that clicked on a job on mobile ended up completing the application. Job seekers often struggle to recognise and articulate the skills and experience they have, don't explore the full range of jobs that they are suited to or need help to communicate with potential employers. There is a mismatch on both sides of the market.

The SonicJobs mobile app helps jobseekers recognise the skills that they have, find and apply for relevant high-quality jobs, and develop new skills to improve their employability and career progression. SonicJobs has now brought on over 1m+ candidates and over 500,000 jobs; supporting workers to build careers in a range of sectors including health and social care, driving and warehousing, office and admin, hospitality, retail and customer services. Over 250,000 applications are made per month – a candidate applies through SonicJobs every 10 seconds.

Ufi invested in the company in June 2020 alongside JetSynthesys and the British Business Bank. This investment fits with our focus on investment opportunities which help people to navigate the retraining and recruitment market especially in sectors and roles going through radical change e.g. retail, transport.

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## Springpod



Even those young people in the UK who can demonstrate high levels of education and qualifications are often seen by employers to lack the necessary experience of work. Only 50% of employers say students are properly prepared for work when they start. Workplaces are crying out for stronger candidates with relevant skills and are looking to engage with young talent at an earlier stage than ever before.

Springpod empowers young people (16-24) to prepare for and secure their next step through their all-in-one platform, with the ambition of reaching one million young people in the next two years. The platform connects students with employers, apprenticeships, Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE) earlier than ever before. Young people use Springpod to join virtual events, get advice from employer ambassadors and complete meaningful virtual work experience ahead of applying for their next steps, whether in employment or education.

The company has grown their user base to more than 500k learners and is working with more than 50 leading employers in the UK ranging from AstraZeneca to Vodafone.

Ufi invested in the business in July 2021 alongside Triple Point. This investment fits with our focus on investing in increasing access to high quality work experience for young people. With young people set to suffer disproportionately as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, we believe it has never been more important for students to be connected with and well informed about the full range of future opportunities available to them whether in work, training or education.

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## TaskHer



Only around 3% of professional electricians, plumbers and heating engineers are female. Given the chronic skills shortage across all skilled trades this presents a huge economic opportunity that is currently being missed due to a lack of visibility and outdated gender norms.

TaskHer is helping professional tradeswomen win more work and encouraging more women to enter the skilled trades through its booking platform and career hub. TaskHer allows customers to book and pay for tradeswomen online, as opposed to being a directory where customers can find tradespeople but then have to contact them, discuss the job and negotiate prices. For tradeswomen there's no pitching, no costs and no admin, they simply accept the jobs they want to take on.

With more than 30% of customers so far making a repeat booking through the platform, and tradeswomen receiving market-leading rates of pay, the number of users joining the platform is on the rise.

TaskHer are also focused on developing a careers hub, where using content produced by tradeswomen and apprentices the company are aiming to rebrand and demystify skilled manual trades and encourage more women to develop careers in the sector. Ufi invested in TaskHer in December 2022 alongside fellow impact investors Bethnal Green Ventures and Resolution Foundation.

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# Strategic Partnerships

Working together to maximise our impact and accelerate the pace of change.

We know we can't achieve our mission alone and so we work in partnership with organisations who share our ambitions, to create conditions for success and accelerate the pace of change.

Our strategic partnerships are not about single projects or activities, instead they focus on catalysing systems change and creating the conditions for the adoption and deployment of VocTech in the UK.

From inspiring leadership-level engagement to commissioning research and supporting the sharing of knowledge, partnership is crucially important.

[ufi.co.uk/strategic-partnerships](https://ufi.co.uk/strategic-partnerships)



## AELP

### Supporting independent training providers to deploy the best digital tools and pedagogies



Ufi and the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) are working together to develop insight into the sector, exploring how technology can be used to enhance high-quality delivery. The partnership seeks to influence the strategy and practice of organisations across the sector, producing a long-term shift in the adoption and deployment of high-quality digital pedagogies.

Together we have convened discussions and undertaken national research to explore how independent training providers are using or planning to use technology and digital pedagogies in their delivery. We seek to understand barriers to adoption and how the funding and regulatory landscape can support innovation.

Our partnership enhances the SectorShare platform, initially developed by Ufi and AELP to support independent providers with resources for online delivery during the pandemic, so that it provides greater support to the sector.

 [ufi.co.uk/strategic-partnerships/aelp](https://ufi.co.uk/strategic-partnerships/aelp)

## ALT

### Championing the development of learning technology professionals in vocational education



Our partnership with the Association for Learning Technology (ALT) is invested in helping vocational educators to discover, share and discuss the resources, training and support they need to develop their digital pedagogical skills and enhance how vocational learning in the UK happens.

Together, ALT and Ufi are working to build and nurture #AmplifyFE, a free network to connect and amplify communities of practice for digital learning, teaching and assessment in vocational education.

The partnership is also underpinned by research to support the continuous professional development of learning technology practitioners. This includes the Communities of Practice Sector Audit, and action research with Ufi's project portfolio to gather evidence, theory and good practice on how to develop and deploy learning tech to best support adults impacted by the digital divide and furthest away from learning.

 [ufi.co.uk/strategic-partnerships/alt](https://ufi.co.uk/strategic-partnerships/alt)

## Learning and Work Institute

### Championing the role of technology in helping more adults in the UK to engage in learning for work

Together with Learning and Work Institute (L&W) we are working to get adults learning. For more than a century L&W has been working for a prosperous and fair society in which learning and work provide opportunities for everyone to realise their potential and ambitions throughout life.

There are large inequalities in access to learning by age, socioeconomic group, region and nation, and prior educational attainment. This is a significant problem if we are to deliver the skills we need for the future. Together, Ufi and L&W are working to show how a tech-enabled skills system can help close these gaps, working to develop new ways of thinking, to influence policy and help implement new approaches.

We are delivering the current VocTech Challenge programme, Skills for an Economy in Transition, in partnership with L&W. Ufi are also supporting an award in L&W's flagship campaign, Festival of Learning, and we are collaborating on both L&W's Lifelong Learning Week and Ufi's Week of VocTech. We have also supported the development of new question in L&W's decades-long Adult Participation in Learning Survey, designed to provide a deeper understanding of role technology has to play in adult learning.



## NCFE

### Driving forward innovation in the assessment of vocational skills



NCFE and Ufi's shared goal is to harness the transformative power of technology to improve the assessment of vocational training and skills. We aim to foster innovation and advance learning around the role technology can play in creating assessment methods and models that can adapt and respond to the needs of the changing UK economy.

Through our partnership we will develop and deliver an Innovation in Assessment Grant Fund that seeks to encourage the development of learner-centric, inclusive and adaptable assessment solutions that meet the needs of learners and employers.

We will use what we learn to advocate for policy and regulatory change in the UK assessment system.

## Catch22

### Mobilising the power and energy of tech ventures to drive reform in public service delivery

Reform through social enterprise has been at the forefront of Catch22's work for over 200 years. Together we are working to catalyse systems change in the adoption and deployment of vocational technology with a focus on the business to government market.

The Social Tech Amplifier was launched in October 2022 by Catch22, the Social Tech Trust and Ufi VocTech Trust, with support from Hatch and Microsoft. The amplifier programme supported 11 early stage companies to unlock opportunities in the public sector supply chain and bring their solutions to the business to government (B2G) market.

Our shared objectives continue with the launch of GoodTech Ventures. The programme is designed to make it easier for early-stage, impact-led tech ventures to design, build and deploy game-changing digital technologies into social and public service delivery.

 [ufi.co.uk/strategic-partnerships/catch22](https://ufi.co.uk/strategic-partnerships/catch22)



## iDEA

### Creating a step-change in digital skills and confidence for vocational learners in the UK

Launched in 2017, the Inspiring Digital Enterprise Award, known as iDEA, is an international award-winning programme that helps learners develop digital, enterprise and employability skills for free. Through a series of online challenges, learners can earn career enhancing badges, unlock new opportunities and, ultimately, gain industry-recognised Bronze, Silver and Gold Awards.

The iDEA platform demonstrates exceptionally well how scalable digital tools can open access to a very large number of learners. Together, we have extended the iDEA offer with the launch of the Gold Award, as well as supporting more organisations to use the platform with their learners through the creation of the specific Organiser Badge. We continue to focus on improving access, motivation, and retention for learners most impacted by the digital divide.

Our partnership is leveraging the reach of the iDEA platform to seek wider insights into learner behaviour and experience in support of our shared mission to utilise the power of digital to open up access and enhance learning.

 [ufi.co.uk/strategic-partnerships/idea](https://ufi.co.uk/strategic-partnerships/idea)



## Resolution Foundation

**Backing a new wave of innovators to improve the prospects, power and progression of low-paid workers**

With the Resolution Foundation we are driving forward the development of technology which can play a crucial role in building workers' skills and employability, improving their pay and conditions, and raising their collective voice.

The Workertech Partnership – a £1.3m programme backed by Ufi VocTech Trust, Resolution Foundation, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Friends Provident Foundation, Accenture and Trust for London – has been developed to back a new wave of innovators who are harnessing technology to improve the prospects, power and progression of low-paid workers.

Several early-stage investments have been made, supported by a strong ecosystem bringing together the various partners and offering support through shared resources and introductions to a wide network of contacts.

**Resolution**  
Foundation

## RSA

**Uniting people, places and ideas to show how tech can help tackle the UK skills crisis**

Our partnership with the Royal Society for Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA) provides a unique opportunity to lead the public debate on how to design better tech-enabled systems for adult learning – with people at its heart.

Drawing on The RSA's deep policy, research and systems change expertise and Ufi's practical, actionable insights from the organisations it supports, together we aim to unite people, places and ideas to show how tech can help tackle the UK skills crisis.

We are working together to showcase how digital tools can help cities and regions to design and deliver inclusive lifelong learning, through the RSA's Cities of Learning programme. The programme creates place-based pathways into learning and employment by connecting formal, informal, and in-work learning opportunities that exist across cities via a system of digital open badges.

Further to the Cities of Learning programme, Ufi and the RSA are exploring new ways we can work together to raise the profile and quality of digital credentials in a time when the assessment and qualification landscape is going through significant changes.

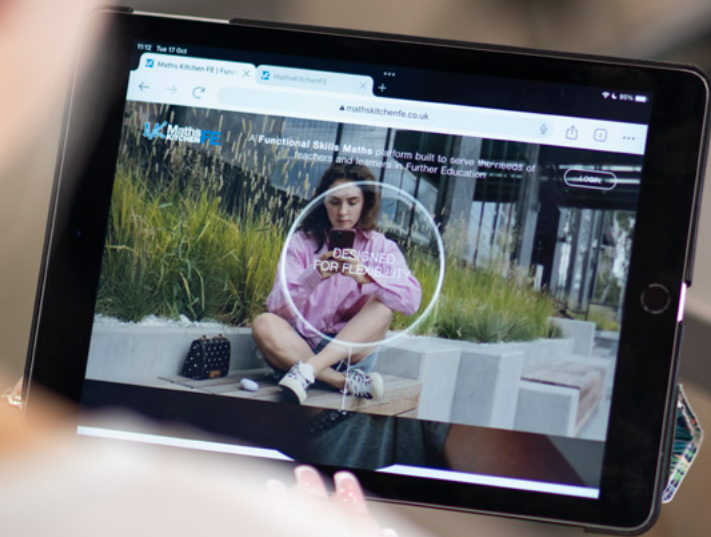
**RSA**

**ufi** VocTech  
Trust

Vocational  
skills of the  
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eco









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