Regional Skills Pilot Apprenticeship Support Programme -

Employer Incentive Scheme Policy 2026

Version number	Purpose/Changes	Author	Date
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Contents

1. PURPOSE

Enterprise Cheshire & Warrington are leading on the delivery of the Regional Skills Pilot – a Department for Energy Security & Net Zero funded pilot project designed to test various approaches to upskilling the local workforce ahead of the shift to clean energy.

As part of the pilot, the development of an Apprenticeship Support Programme will be funded to support businesses to engage in apprenticeships. This programme will deliver a number of supporting activities for employers to enable them to overcome barriers to engagement. The main activity being delivered is the launch of the Employer Incentive Scheme. This scheme will provide employers with access* to funding to support their engagement in apprenticeships and to reduce the financial barriers that lead to non-engagement.

Enterprise Cheshire & Warrington will strive to achieve the most effective use of the funds to support the maximum number of eligible employers within Cheshire West & Chester.

*dependent upon eligibility

2. SCOPE

The scheme is primarily targeted at small & medium-sized businesses and funding is available to support with organisational costs directly related to the employment of an apprentice. All funding must be committed, with apprentices employed and enrolled, by 31st March 2026. Funding is limited to £10,000 per organisation and allocation of funding is on an application and approval basis.

All applicants must be based in the Cheshire West & Chester area and their main business must be within the energy production sector or a carbon-heavy industry, such as Manufacturing, Construction, Agriculture, Mining, Waste Management, Road Transport or Aviation. All funded apprenticeships must be related to the transition to clean energy. This could include direct 'clean energy' jobs or those occupations that are in increased demand in order to build the infrastructure required to decarbonise and deliver on local clean energy initiatives.

Funding from the scheme can be used to support the employer with the set-up costs associated with taking on an apprentice. For example:

- Recruitment costs
- Staff release & backfill costs
- Administration costs
- Equipment/PPE costs
- Travel costs
- Employer fees

Funding from the scheme cannot be used to subsidise apprentice wages. Access to the funding is not an entitlement and allocation of funds is at the discretion of the Regional Skills Pilot steering group. Employers who may be eligible and apply to the fund may not automatically receive it, as funds can be exhausted and prioritised. Payments will be made directly to the approved employer who is responsible for forwarding on any relevant payments (i.e. payment of an employer fee to the relevant training provider).

Enterprise Cheshire & Warrington reserves the right to amend/cease the financial support detailed in this policy should there be any changes to the relevant programme funding contract.

Financial support provided may be subject to clawback if:

- an employer ceases an apprentice's employment prior to 31st March 2026
- an employer fails to comply with the relevant training provider's onboarding processes
- an employer fails to comply with the relevant provider's safeguarding checks & processes
- an employer fails to pay their relevant employer fees
- an employer fails to adequately support the apprentice in the workplace
- an employer fails to release the apprentice for the mandatory 'off-the-job' hours
- information given on either the Employer Incentive Scheme application form or apprenticeship enrolment form is found to be false

3. RESPONSIBILITY

It is the responsibility of the Regional Skills Pilot Programme Lead to monitor and update the procedure. The Director of Skills & Employability will be alerted to any discrepancies.

4. ADMINISTRATION

When making decisions about awarding funding from the Reginal Skills Pilot, the programme team will consider the availability of other financial support available for employers and either provide the relevant advice & guidance or make the relevant referrals (*for example, the Cheshire & Warrington Local Skills Improvement Plan levy-transfer referral service*).

Payments from the fund will be released to the employer upon receipt of evidence of apprentice enrolment & contract of employment.

The application process for the Regional Skills Pilot 'Employer Incentive Scheme' will be completed and managed via the Regional Skills Pilot programme team within Enterprise Cheshire & Warrington. The scheme will be overseen by the Regional Skills Pilot Programme Lead, with governance provided by the Regional Skills Pilot steering group.

A copy of this policy and the application form is available on the Enterprise Cheshire & Warrington website: https://cheshireandwarrington.com/growth-and-skills/skills-and-education/regional-skills-pilot/

Following application approval, employers will be issued with a Grant Funding Agreement for review and signature. Upon receipt of the signed Grant Funding Agreement, payments will be requested by the Regional Skills Pilot programme team and processed by Enterprise Cheshire & Warrington's Finance department.

Enrolments for individual apprentices will be completed by the relevant training provider. Whereby an employer is not yet working with a suitable training provider, the Regional Skills Pilot programme team will provide referral support.

5. APPLICATION PROCEDURE

Employers who wish to apply to the scheme will need to download and complete an application form, which is available via the Enterprise Cheshire & Warrington website: https://cheshireandwarrington.com/growth-and-skills/skills-and-education/regional-skills-pilot/ *(see Appendix 1).*

Support for application completion is available to employers by the Regional Skills Pilot programme team. Completed forms should be submitted to rsp@cheshireandwarrington.com along with any supporting evidence. The application will be delayed should the employer provide an incomplete application form or insufficient supporting evidence.

Upon receiving an application, the Programme Administrator will confirm receipt of the application form and complete initial checks on the information received in the application form to ensure that the applying employer meets the eligibility criteria. Following notification to proceed from the Programme Administrator, the Regional Skills Pilot Programme Lead and Assistant Programme Lead will review and score the application *(see Appendix 2).* Applications that meet the threshold score and are recommended for approval will be put before the Regional Skills Pilot steering group for approval. Employers will be advised of their application outcome via email within 15 working days of the date of submission receipt.

If the application is successful, the employer will be provided with a Grant Funding Agreement to confirm agreed funding to be awarded. If an employer's application to the apprenticeship funding is unsuccessful, the employer will be referred to other external support organisations, as appropriate.

All applications to the Employer Incentive Scheme need to be received by no later than 6th March 2026. All applications should be sent to RSP@cheshireandwarrington.com.

6. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Application to the Employer Incentive Scheme must be made by the employer themselves rather than the apprentice who will undergo the requested training or the training organisation who will provide the 'off-the-job' training. The application should be approved by an appropriate member of staff that may include:

- The CEO or Managing Director of the company
- A HR Manager or L&D Manager
- A Senior Manager

Applications to the scheme can be received from any company/employer who meets the following eligibility criteria and provides appropriate evidence through the application process:

- Does not currently employ apprentices within their organisation

- Is classed as an SME (in line with the UK Government's definition of a small to medium sized enterprise) *

- Is based within the Cheshire West & Chester local authority area

- Conducts its core business within one of the following relevant sectors:
  - Energy Production
  - Manufacturing & Engineering
  - Construction
  - Mining
  - Waste Management
  - Aviation
  - Road Transport
  - Agriculture

- Is applying to the scheme to support the cost of employing an apprentice on a clean-energy related apprenticeship. This may include apprenticeships in (but is not limited to):
  - Energy Production (inc. Nuclear)
  - Electrical Installation
  - Mechanical Engineering inc. Fabrication & Welding
  - Electrical & Electronic Engineering
  - Advanced Manufacturing
  - Civil Engineering
  - Digital Engineering
  - Construction Trades
  - Retrofit
  - Project Management
  - Waste Management & Recycling
  - Plumbing & Heating (renewables)
  - Science
  - Science Manufacturing
  - Land-based Engineering
  - Artificial Intelligence and Data
  - Electric Vehicles
  - Smart Home Technology
  - Environmental Science

Applications can be considered for approval from a non-SME organisation provided a strong rationale is submitted that outlines in detail why the applying business is in need of financial support to engage with apprenticeships. This will be considered as a special case.

7. DATA SHARING

Applicants to the Employer Incentive Scheme agree to share data with Enterprise Cheshire & Warrington, the Department for Energy Security & Net Zero and any third parties involved in the evaluation of the Regional Skills Pilot programme. This data will include:

- Employer data (organisation name, address, postcode, size, sector, key point of contact, contact details…)

- Apprentice data (name, address, postcode, date of birth, gender, prior attainment…)

- Training Provider data (organisation name, address, postcode, key point of contact, contact details…)

Responsibility for the acquisition of data from apprentices and training providers resides with the employer who should comply with their own organisation's GDPR/data protection policies. The data collected by Enterprise Cheshire & Warrington will be used to evaluate the success of the pilot programme and inform future policy and investment decisions.

8. FALSE OR FRAUDULENT CLAIMS

Where applicants are found to have intentionally given misleading or inaccurate information Enterprise Cheshire & Warrington will claim back the grant made. A record will be made of fraudulent incidents and subsequent actions taken. In some instances, a referral may be made to the Police with the possibility of prosecution.

9. APPENDIX 1 – APPLICATION FORM

Application:		Internal use only
Applicant's Name:		
Applicant's Job Title:		
Company Name:		
Company Address & Postcode:		☐
Email:		
Telephone Number:		
Size of Organisation - Number of employees/ annual turnover		☐
Do you currently employ apprentices in your business?	Yes ☐ No ☐	☐
If you do not currently employ apprentices but have in the past, please state when you last employed an apprentice and why you no longer employ apprentices?		

Is the core business of your organisation within one of the following sectors: • **Energy Production** • **Manufacturing & Engineering** • **Construction** • **Mining** • **Aviation** • **Road Transport** • **Waste Management** • **Agriculture**	Yes ☐ No ☐	☐
If Yes, please state which		
Is the apprenticeship that you are applying for funding to set up within one of the following skill areas: • **Energy Production** • **Engineering & Manufacturing** • **Construction, Building Services or Retrofit** • **Project Management** • **Waste Management & Recycling** • **Science** • **Digital, Artificial Intelligence & Data** • **Electric Vehicles** • **Environmental Science & Land Management** • **Smart Home Technology**	Yes ☐ No ☐	☐
Please provide the apprenticeship standard that you are applying for funding for (if you do not know the exact standard please list the relevant occupation or subject-area)		

Do you currently work with a training provider who can deliver training to your apprentice in question?	Yes ☐ No ☐	
If yes, please provide the name of the training provider, the main point of contact and a contact email address.		
If you do not currently work with a training provider, would you like referral support to introduce you to an appropriate provider?	Yes ☐ No ☐	
Would you like to be referred for coaching & mentoring peer support via an existing apprenticeship support network?	Yes ☐ No ☐	
Please state how much funding you are seeking (applications are limited to an ask of £10,000 per organisation):		
Do you currently contract to a larger, levy-paying organisation? If so, please provide the name of the organisation.		

		☐
In no more than 500 words, please provide a rationale for your application and explain why you are seeking funding. **In your response you should make reference to the following:** • Your current barriers to engaging with and employing apprentices (specifically this should reference current affordability with full explanation) • What direct costs the funding you are seeking will support • How you will support your future apprentice in the workplace • How the apprenticeship will enable you to address your organisation's skills & recruitment needs • Specifically, how will the apprenticeship address either your organisation's own decarbonisation goals or your increased business demands as a result of the transition to clean energy		

10. APPENDIX 2 - APPLICATION SCORING FRAMEWORK

Criteria	Expected Response/Evidence	Max Score
Mandatory Eligibility Criteria		
Applying company is based within the Cheshire West & Chester area	Yes	1
Applying company is classed as an SME *	Yes	1
Applying company is not currently employing apprentices	Yes	1
Applying company's primary sector is either energy production or within a carbon-intensive industry	Yes	1
Apprenticeship standard that funding is being applied for is related to clean energy	Yes	1
TOTAL POINTS REQUIRED FOR APPROVAL		**5** *if applying organisation scores 4 but is not an SME, proceed & consider as a special case based on rationale
Rationale Scoring (max points available - 15)		
• Application fails to sufficiently answer the questions outlined on the application form rationale section.		0
• Application lists current barriers to engaging with and employing apprentices. • Application lists direct costs the funding being sought will support. • Application briefly outlines support that will be put in place for the future apprentice in the workplace. • Application briefly outlines how the apprenticeship will enable their organisation to address skills & recruitment needs.		5

• Application briefly outlines how the apprenticeship will address either their organisation's own decarbonisation goals or their increased business demands as a result of the transition to clean energy.	
• Application explains current barriers to engaging with and employing apprentices and gives reasons, with specific explanation re: affordability. • Application lists direct costs the funding being sought will support and provides a simple breakdown. • Application explains what support will be put in place for the future apprentice in the workplace and gives at least one specific example. • Application explains how the apprenticeship will enable their organisation to address skills & recruitment needs and provides short term expected impact. • Application explains how the apprenticeship will address either their organisation's own decarbonisation goals or their increased business demands as a result of the transition to clean energy, and provides at least one example.	10
• Application describes current barriers to engaging with and employing apprentices and gives detailed reasons, with specific & detailed explanation re: affordability.. • Application lists direct costs the funding being sought will support and provides a detailed breakdown. • Application describes what support will be put in place for the future apprentice in the workplace and gives at least two specific examples. • Application describes how the apprenticeship will enable their organisation to address skills & recruitment needs and provides both short term and longer term expected impact. • Application describes how the apprenticeship will address either their organisation's own decarbonisation goals or their increased business demands as a result of the transition to clean energy, and provides at least two examples.	15
TOTAL MINIMUM POINTS REQUIRED FOR APPROVAL	**15**