

Application and Scoring Guidance

Timeline



Important notice:

Late applications will not be accepted. If you encounter technical issues while completing or submitting your application, please notify us at aif@ncfe.org.uk

Three stage process

Stage 1 – Expression of Interest (Eoi)

Applicants will complete an online form outlining the project’s context, problem area, proposed solution, intended impact, organisational details, and requested funding amount. A comparative judgment approach will be used to fairly and robustly shortlist applicants for Stage 2.

Stage 2 – Written application

Shortlisted applicants will complete a written application, expanding on the problem their innovation aims to address, its potential impact, feasibility, robustness, and suitability. To minimise duplication, Stage 2 applications will be pre-filled with information provided in Stage 1 (Eoi). The Expert Panel, composed of NCFE and Ufi VocTech Trust staff along with external representatives from various fields - including academia, awarding bodies, EdTech, and education - will assess all written applications.

Stage 3 – Presentation

Successful Stage 2 applicants will be invited to present their proposal to the Expert Panel. This session will provide an opportunity to explore the solution in greater depth, covering the rationale, methodology, risks, high-level project plan, and budget. The presentation will also allow for open discussion between the panel and the applicant(s).

Data sharing and final approval

By submitting an application at any stage, you agree that NCFE may share the provided information, including personal or confidential details, with our evaluation panel, expert panel, and service providers, including third-party digital evaluation tools. NCFE ensures that appropriate data protection measures are in place, and data will only be retained for as long as necessary.

Funding awards are subject to final approval by the NCFE executive team and the completion of the project onboarding process.

Scoring

Stage 1 – Expression of Interest

Stage 1 applications are evaluated by an Evaluation Panel based on their suitability and potential impact. Applications will be ranked and shortlisted using a comparative judgment approach, where panel members will assess:

“Which application best demonstrates an innovative assessment idea that is likely to solve the problem identified and have a positive impact?”

Each application will be reviewed multiple times by different panel members, ensuring a robust and fair shortlisting process for Stage 2.

Stage 2 – Written application

Stage 2 applications are scored based on the criteria outlined below, each with a specific weighting in the overall evaluation. NCFE reserves the right to exclude applicants from further participation if concerns regarding ethics, confidentiality, or conflicts of interest arise.

| Category | Element | Weighting (%) |
|---|---|---------------|
| Suitability and Impact (50%) <i>(See Appendix 1)</i> | Alignment to assessment innovation strategy | 20% |
| | Potential impact to learners | 15% |
| | Scalability and sustainability | 15% |
| Robustness (25%) <i>(See Appendix 2)</i> | Methodology principles | 15% |
| | Risk and uncertainty | 10% |
| Feasibility (25%) <i>(See Appendix 3)</i> | Cost | 10% |
| | Time | 10% |
| | Delivery | 5% |
| Wider Considerations <i>(See Appendix 4)</i> | Ethics and Confidentiality – If ethical concerns or confidentiality issues are identified, NCFE may exclude the applicant. | Not scored. |
| | Conflicts of Interest – If a conflict of interest is identified, NCFE may exclude the applicant. | Not scored. |

Stage 3 - Presentation

Stage 3 gives applicants the opportunity to present their proposal in greater detail and engage in open dialogue with the Expert Panel.

Each element of the presentation is weighted in the overall evaluation, as outlined below:

| Element | Weighting (%) |
|---|---------------|
| 1. Potential impact to learners (<i>See Appendix 1</i>) | 30% |
| 2. Scalability and sustainability (<i>See Appendix 1</i>) | 20% |
| 3. Robustness (<i>See Appendix 2</i>) | 20% |
| 4. Feasibility (<i>See Appendix 3</i>) | 20% |
| 5. Leadership and team (<i>See Appendix 3</i>) | 10% |

The presentation provides a final opportunity for applicants to demonstrate the strength of their proposal, address any panel queries, and showcase their team's ability to successfully deliver the project.

Scoring methodology

The following scoring methodology will be applied to responses at all stages.

| Score | Commentary |
|-------|---|
| 1 | Response provides NCFE with a weak level of confidence in the applicant's ability to meet its requirements. |
| 2 | Response provides NCFE with a moderate level of confidence in the applicant's ability to meet its requirements. |
| 3 | Response provides NCFE with a strong level of confidence in the applicant's ability to meet its requirements. |
| 4 | Response provides NCFE with a very strong level of confidence in the applicant's ability to meet its requirements. |

What happens following the application process?

Once projects are recommended to the NCFE executive team, a series of due diligence checks will be conducted. Following successful completion of these checks, projects must agree to NCFE's standard grant terms and conditions.

The Project Lead will collaborate with the applicant(s) to further refine the project plan, outlining key deliverables and milestones. Funding will be granted in arrears throughout the project duration, with payments made in alignment with project reporting. Release of funds will be contingent on the successful achievement of project milestones.

What happens if you are unsuccessful?

Stage 1 (Expression of Interest):

Applicants who are unsuccessful at this stage will receive limited feedback, based on the scoring by the Expert Panel. Feedback will indicate the applicant's rank relative to all EoIs received.

Stage 2 (Written Application) and Stage 3 (Presentation):

Applicants who do not progress beyond these stages will receive detailed feedback, informed by both the scoring and panel discussions.

Appendix 1: Suitability and Impact Descriptors

Scoring Element: Aligns to the guiding principles and strategy.

All projects must demonstrate how they align with **one or more of the following principles** and clearly articulate their impact on learners, educators, and employers. Proposals addressing multiple principles may receive higher scores based on the breadth of their strategic alignment.

| Principle | Description | Key terms |
|---|--|--|
| <p>Principle 1 Inclusive and accessible assessment</p> | <p>Ensure assessments are fair, accessible, and free from bias, meeting the diverse needs of all learners, including those requiring reasonable adjustments, in compliance with Ofqual’s regulatory expectations.</p> <p>What we’re asking: Explain how your project utilises innovative design and technology to enhance fairness, accessibility, and inclusivity.</p> | <p>Fairness: Ensuring assessments are free from bias and provide equal opportunities.</p> <p>Accessibility: Designing assessments to be usable by all learners, including those with disabilities.</p> |
| <p>Principle 2 Personalised and learner-centred assessment</p> | <p>Support the development of assessment methods that are adaptable to individual learners’ needs, while ensuring that assessments remain reliable, manageable, and comparable in line with regulatory expectations.</p> <p>What we’re asking: Demonstrate how your project balances personalisation with reliability and fairness, ensuring outcomes remain consistent and comparable.</p> | <p>Manageability: Ensuring assessments are practical, feasible, and do not place undue burden on learners, educators, or assessment centres.</p> <p>Comparability: Ensuring that assessments produce equivalent outcomes in meaning and standard across different learners, assessment versions, and assessors.</p> <p>Reliability: The extent to which an assessment will produce consistent outcomes for learners who have demonstrated the same level of attainment.</p> |

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| <p>Principle 3 Data-driven and technologically advanced assessment</p> | <p>Use data and technology to transform assessment processes, providing insights that enhance teaching, learning, and learner success.</p> <p>What we're asking: Show how your project uses validated data models or research-backed technologies to improve the assessment process and provide actionable insights.</p> | |
| <p>Principle 4 Assessment for lifelong learning and employability</p> | <p>Design assessments that enable learners to progress into further education, employment, or lifelong learning, ensuring alignment with real-world skills and employer needs.</p> <p>What we're asking: Illustrate how your project connects assessment outcomes to future opportunities, ensuring clear progression pathways.</p> | |
| <p>Principle 5 Sustainable and ethical assessment practices</p> | <p>Develop assessment solutions that reflect sustainability and ethical standards, ensuring they are aligned with contemporary values and future needs.</p> <p>What we're asking: Describe how your project minimises environmental impact, promotes ethical practices, or supports long-term value in assessment.</p> | <p>Sustainability: Developing assessment solutions that minimise environmental impact and promote long-term value.</p> <p>Ethical standards: Ensuring all assessments adhere to Ofqual's fairness, validity, reliability, and transparency standards</p> |

Scoring Element: Provides clear and impactful benefit to learners.

The objective is to evaluate whether the proposal demonstrates a **clear and impactful benefit** to learners by addressing **all success criteria**.

Proposals must show **meaningful progress** across all criteria, ensuring a holistic approach to enhancing assessment practices. Proposals must also demonstrate scalability (impacting at least 1,000 learners in the project) and innovation in assessment design, delivery, or implementation.

Stronger alignment with multiple success criteria will result in a more compelling case for funding and implementation.

| Success Criteria (SC) | Description |
|--|--|
| SC 1 Delivering assessment excellence | Proposals must deliver assessments that align with widely accepted principles of effective assessment, ensuring they are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purposeful: Clearly designed to achieve specific objectives, such as addressing learning needs, validating achievements, or guiding progression in a way that benefits learners and educators. • Valid: Effectively measures the intended skills, knowledge, or competencies with accuracy and relevance to the assessment goals. • Reliable: Produces consistent and reproducible results across various contexts and evaluators, ensuring fairness in outcomes. • Fair: Ensures assessments are equitable, minimise bias, and accessible to all learners, regardless of their background or circumstances. • Comparable: Ensures that assessment outcomes are equivalent in meaning and standard across different learners, assessment versions, and assessors. • Manageable: Practical and feasible for both educators and learners to implement and use effectively within realistic constraints. |
| SC 2 Supporting Informed and Successful Pathways | Proposals should demonstrate how they empower learners and educators to make well-informed, confident decisions about education and progression, linked to tangible outcomes to real-world pathways. |
| SC 3 Developing agency and future-ready skills | Proposals that support learners in developing wider skills such as problem-solving, adaptability, and critical thinking, preparing them for success in an evolving labour market. |
| SC 4 Inspiring engagement and motivation | Proposals that encourage learners to engage actively in their education and contribute positively to their communities, professions and personal growth. |

Scoring Element: Understands how the solution may provide future public benefit beyond the Impact Project.

This element evaluates whether the applicant demonstrates a clear understanding of how the solution can be effectively deployed to provide long-term public benefit beyond the project's duration.

Proposals must address the following criteria.

Criteria for stages 1 and 2:

- The applicant provides a clear vision for deploying and scaling the solution beyond the project's conclusion, including specific pathways for wider adoption or implementation.
- The applicant demonstrates access to an appropriate learner base for the project, ensuring the solution can be effectively tested and deployed with its intended audience.
- The applicant demonstrates a strong understanding of their customer base, supported by evidence of established market demand for the solution, ensuring it is ready for deployment.

Additional criteria for Stage 3:

- The applicant outlines a viable plan for sustaining and scaling the solution beyond the project's duration, ensuring its long-term continuation, adoption, and impact.

Appendix 2: Robustness Descriptors

Scoring Element: Proposed research methodology would be suitable for evaluating the impact of the project.

To provide confidence that the project's proposed methodology would be suitable for evaluating its impact.

The applicant(s) should demonstrate the following criteria.

- Project questions are measurable and concise. The questions are appropriate for the purpose of the project.
- The design of the project is suitable for answering the proposed project questions. If a project question investigates effectiveness, the applicant has considered how to reduce potential bias by selecting an appropriate project design.
- The applicant has indicated who the sample will be, the indicative sample size and how the sample will be selected. The project tries to ensure the sample being tested are a fair and close representation or approximation of those most likely to use the intervention.
- Considers the outcome measures and how these will provide reliable indicators of the project's success.
- Demonstrates an understanding of the strengths and limitations of the project study and how potential bias could impact the validity of the evidence generated.
- Considers any controls required to meet relevant ethical standards and ensures the project does not discriminate unlawfully or unfairly.

Scoring Element: Risks and uncertainties are suitably mitigated and deemed appropriate within the accepted risk threshold for the Impact Project.

This element evaluates whether the applicant has identified potential risks and uncertainties and demonstrated suitable mitigation strategies.

Proposals must provide confidence that:

- the applicant has clearly identified potential risks and uncertainties related to the project
- the applicant provides robust plans to mitigate identified risks and minimise their impact
- the level of risk is reasonable and deemed acceptable within the context of the project's scope and objectives.

Appendix 3: Feasibility Descriptors

Scoring Element: Has been adequately resourced in terms of budget and that this delivers value for money.

This element evaluates whether the proposal demonstrates appropriate resourcing and delivers value for money.

Proposals must provide confidence that:

- the applicant has provided a clear and realistic budget that aligns with the project's scope and objectives
- the proposal demonstrates how resources will be used efficiently to maximise impact relative to the investment
- the budget accounts for all necessary expenses and reflects a thorough understanding of the project's financial requirements.

Scoring Element: Has been realistically and optimally resourced in terms of time.

This element evaluates whether the proposal demonstrates a realistic and well-structured timeline that ensures the project is delivered efficiently and effectively.

Proposals must provide confidence that:

- the applicant provides a clear and achievable timeline that aligns with the project's scope and deliverables
- the proposal demonstrates efficient use of time, ensuring resources and activities are appropriately planned to meet deadlines
- the timeline accounts for potential delays or challenges, including contingency plans where necessary.

Scoring Element: Have the required experience which will ensure they are successful in delivering the Impact Project.

This element evaluates whether the applicant has the necessary experience, tools, and resources to successfully deliver the project.

Proposals must provide confidence that:

- the applicant demonstrates sufficient expertise and a proven track record in delivering similar projects or initiatives
- the applicant provides evidence of access to the tools, technology, and resources necessary to prototype and implement their solution
- the proposal outlines a clear and robust project methodology, demonstrating the applicant's capability to manage and deliver the project efficiently.

Appendix 4: Further Considerations Descriptors

Non-scoring Element: Ethics and confidentiality

This element evaluates whether the applicant has appropriately addressed the ethical and confidentiality requirements of the project.

Proposals must provide confidence that:

- the applicant demonstrates an understanding of the ethical implications of the project and outlines measures to ensure ethical standards are upheld
- the proposal includes clear plans for maintaining confidentiality and protecting sensitive data throughout the project lifecycle
- the applicant ensures alignment with relevant ethical guidelines, legal standards, and organisational policies.

Non-scoring Element: Conflict of interest

This element evaluates whether the applicant has identified and addressed any potential conflicts of interest that could arise during the project.

Proposals must provide confidence that:

- the applicant has identified any potential conflicts of interest related to the project
- the proposal outlines clear strategies to address and mitigate identified conflicts
- the applicant demonstrates a commitment to maintaining transparency and impartiality throughout the project lifecycle.