



Learning Without Walls: Beyond 2020

Ufi Strategy 2020-2025

ufi

**VocTech
Trust**

www.ufi.co.uk

Contents

Our Vision	3	3. Supporting the Market	20
Introduction	4	Case Study: Blended Learning Essentials	21
The Four Pillars of our Strategy	5	4. Building the VocTech Community	22
1. Making Change Now	6	Evaluation and Measurement	23
VocTech Impact	7		
Case Study: Kinderly	8		
VocTech Specialist	9		
2. Change for a Better Future	10		
Grant Funding	11		
• VocTech Seed	11		
• Case Study: Layuprite	12		
• Case Study: Retail TRUST	13		
• Case Study: Bolton College	14		
• VocTech Ignite	15		
Investing in VocTech	16		
• VocTech Investments	17		
• VocTech Amplify	18		
• Social Impact Investing	19		

Our Vision

To create a world where vocational skills are celebrated and valued by all as the engine upon which the UK economy is built and where development of those skills is made possible by the best technology solutions, providing easier access, greater opportunity and better outcomes for all.

Our mission

Ufi supports the development of digital technologies that help us all obtain the vocational skills we need to get more out of our working lives.

We do this by:

- Providing funding, expertise and commitment to innovators in vocational technology (VocTech).
- Building an active VocTech community of educators, developers, designers, employers, investors and policy makers – sparking discussion and debate amongst them.
- Using our funding to catalyse change in attitude, focus and investment in VocTech in the UK.

How we make change happen

Ufi is a relatively small organisation with a disproportionately large effect on the sector. We are effective not just by doing things ourselves – we create the right conditions where others can also succeed. We are happy that we cannot control everything and we welcome unexpected outcomes – there is risk in all innovation. Fundamentally, we are interested in delivering positive change through vocational education for individuals, for businesses and for UK society overall.

We are catalysts for a better future

Learning Without Walls: Beyond 2020

This document introduces the medium term strategies that form part of our Theory of Change – the way that Ufi believes that we can deliver our vision and mission. It is supported each year by a Delivery Plan that lays out what actions we will take during that period.

We encourage you to read these three documents together to get the full picture of our thinking.

You will also find case studies on our website that tell the stories of our projects and investments. We believe they explain our work better than any number of words from us ever could. We hope that they inspire you too. We are very proud of what we have achieved so far and there is more to come in the next five years.

This is a living document. We learn as we develop our organisation and we may from time to time update this strategy to add new things that we have explored, new ideas that we want to test, new ways to engage with our community.

Thank you for taking the time to get to know us. We hope that you will join the Ufi family and work together with us to change the future of vocational education.

Better, quicker, digital.

Tom Wilson
Chair of Ufi Board of Trustees

Rebecca Garrod-Waters
Chief Executive



The Four Pillars of our Strategy



Making Change Now

Our long term goal is to support a portfolio of projects that deliver positive change for learners across a wide range of sectors, job roles, geographies and access points.

In order to get there, we need to offer different kinds of flexible funding so that organisations from a variety of backgrounds can engage with Ufi and deliver projects of all sizes.

We use our flexible approach to funding and project management to ensure that all those we work with have the best chance of success. Our project managers are there to help make connections to other resources and expertise that you might need to get the job done.

Our funding will encourage excellent design practice ensuring a clear focus on discovering real user needs. We want to be sure that what we are funding is based on a real understanding of what users and learners really want, and we'd like you to take the time to think that through before you launch into project delivery.

You'll find us very patient if things change from your original ideas. What matters is that you build a long-term, sustainable idea that makes real change happen.

About our funding

There are some common themes across all our funding. We are looking for ideas that:

1. Have potential to reach a large number of learners/users in the longer term. Our funding acts as a catalyst for change and we need to get the ideas to as many people as possible. If your community of learners or users is relatively small, you need to consider how to reach out and make this a universal offer that others could adapt and adopt.
2. Have potential to transform vocational learning. We need to understand how you see your idea having a significant impact in the vocational learning market. With the relatively small number of projects we fund each year, each one needs to have big ideas and goals that can cascade across the sector.
3. Show how Ufi funding can help make a difference. We are not just another funder. We are about building capacity and long term relationships. We would like to hear how you will contribute to the wider Ufi family and what's unique about our support that brought you to us.

VocTech Impact

VocTech Impact provides grants of between £150,000 and £300,000 for projects lasting 18 - 24 months.

This is our launchpad for projects that have a well-developed idea, can deliver to a large number of learners during the project period, and have clear routes to market after the funding ends. These projects provide large scale demonstration of what can be achieved with digital vocational tools. They are our trailblazers for the 'art of the possible'.

VocTech Impact is all about harnessing digital to enable more adults to access the skills they need for work. It's about using technology innovatively to make a difference to how people learn and crucially to increase the number of people gaining new skills.

By creating practical demonstrations of the ability of VocTech to deliver cost efficient learning where real skills are gained, we hope to convince many more employers and vocational learning providers of the advantages of digital delivery of vocational learning - helping us to build a better, quicker, digital future for vocational learning.

We welcome ideas from all business sectors, right across the UK. What is important is that you are building from a strong base already, both in your understanding of your target learners and having some level of prototype or groundwork already in place that you can now build on.

We are particularly keen to showcase how digital technology has the potential to work for communities of learners who are not well served by formal patterns of learning or mainstream provision.

Case Study: Kinderly

Kinderly's journey with us started in 2017 when we awarded them a grant to develop a technology-based platform offering personalised bite-sized learning that would be matched to an individual's professional development needs in the Early Years education sector.

What it developed

The Kinderly Learn platform provides learners with short 'learning bites' in a variety of formats including; animations, quizzes, videos, fact sheets, and interactive activities. Subscribers can take part in monthly webinars and even use a forum to 'ask an expert'.

What happened next

During the 2019 Childcare Expo at London Olympia the new product was showcased to thousands of Early Years Practitioners from a wide range of job functions within the industry and was met with great positivity.



VocTech Specialist

This is our opportunity to try things differently and tackle some of the biggest challenges with an open mind. Specialist calls give us the flexibility to focus on a defined issue or sector and fund projects that explore things from a variety of different viewpoints. This call process also allows us to work with other funding partners when appropriate.

The specialist call approach starts with a careful exploration of the issue or opportunity with our stakeholders and the outcome of this process informs the scope of the call – its objectives, the process and expert input necessary for its delivery. We also decide which of our grant funding opportunities best fit with the idea that we want to explore.

Our first two specialist cohorts have addressed the needs of manufacturing, and the skills needed for the 21st century workplace, responding to employer feedback on skills gaps.

We will not be running a specialist call every year. We will engage in a process of discovery and research to develop the 2021 and future VocTech Specialist calls, learning as much as we can from the 2019 discovery phase experience, and engaging with a range of organisations to help us look again at areas in the VocTech market where we think the focus of a specialist call could make a big difference.

Change for a Better Future

As part of our commitment to supporting the best technologies for adult vocational skills we look to enable organisations to develop and adopt innovative tech. We offer both grants and investments at early stages to enable people to focus on developing and designing products that are aimed at adult skills for work.

We use our funding to provide support for an early stage idea, or to enable the testing or pilot of a technology in a previously underserved or novel environment. This helps us to catalyse change in the ways tools and tech are developed – where adult vocational skills come first.

Grant Funding

VocTech Seed

VocTech Seed provides grants of between £15,000 and £50,000 for projects lasting from 3 to 12 months.

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

We are looking for proposals that are at a relatively early stage, helping to prototype ideas and work out the next steps necessary on the journey to long-term success.

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.

Projects will need to show us how the idea is novel – show us that you understand the market you are looking at and why this is better than anything that has been thought of before.

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'. We're okay with risk. This is about sharing that risk and putting in place all the support we can to mitigate those risks we can manage together.

Ufi normally uses a two-stage process for applications. If you are successful in the first stage, you will be invited to submit a proposal for stage two.

We do not operate a funding 'ladder' where VocTech Seed is the first stage and VocTech Impact the next. We encourage you to apply for the grant that best meets your needs and look for sustainability beyond the project in the wider market.



Case Study: Layuprite – National Composites Centre

National Composites Centre (NCC) applied to Ufi's Manufacturing Skills Fund in 2016 with an idea for how digital technology can be deployed to help tackle the problem of a shortage of people with the technical expertise in this developing sector.

What it discovered

Training in 'craft' skills have traditionally been learnt by observation of existing practices. The seed project helped to identify how such training could be successfully digitised using AR. They also explored how it could be adapted to other areas requiring high dexterity skills.

What happened next

At the end of its next phase, the project will roll-out to offer a fully functioning demonstrator, accessible to businesses across the sector. They also plan to spin the intellectual property (IP) out of the University of Bristol to enable the product to scale. NCC are clear about the potential opportunities available and have clear and exciting routes to market.

Case Study: retailTRUST

Digital Retail Futures

The fast-paced uncertain changes in today's retail industry inspired retailTRUST to explore how skills gaps identified by retail employers can be lessened through the use of digital technology.

Their Ufi project was to create, test, and evaluate a digital learning platform aimed at people at risk of redundancy and support them to upskill or reskill into other job roles within the industry.

The project's long-term plan is to provide access to comprehensive, flexible, accessible online vocational learning.

Case Study: Bolton College

Ada

Students often lack on-demand access to teachers, tutors, coaches, and career advisors which is why Bolton College approached Ufi for funding in the development of their campus digital assistant.

Alongside solving accessibility issues for students, Ada is also a tool that employees can use to streamline administrative tasks meaning that more time can now be spent teaching and offering more enrichment to students.

Bolton College hope to offer Ada to schools, colleges and universities across the UK through an subscription service.



VocTech Ignite

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

We have begun work to pilot the VocTech Ignite process, which allows us to extend our unique 'enriched support' to a small number of organisations who were unsuccessful at VocTech Seed stage, but where we can see the potential for a significant impact on a hard to reach target audience, by linking them up with experts and specialist support.

We will be running a third phase of the VocTech Ignite pilot in 2020 and evaluating the impact of the three cohorts. After that, we will look at the best way to take forward our commitment to work with the widest possible community of partners to extend our reach into new areas.

A VocTech Ignite award does not guarantee a VocTech Seed award.

Investing in VocTech

Our long term goal is to support a portfolio of investments that develop innovative tech for the future, seeding the market with new ideas.

Ufi Ventures, set up in 2019, invests in companies which develop digital technologies to give people and businesses the skills they need for work, now and in the future.

Ufi Ventures aims to be a source of specialist expertise and knowledge of VocTech investing. The Ventures programme combines three mutually supportive activities:

- Market intelligence: starting with the development of an investment thesis to inform our selection of investments, we have an on-going programme to monitor significant developments in the VocTech investment market which we will share widely to encourage more investment by others.

- Direct investment in early stage companies: we have two investment offers, VocTech Investments and VocTech Amplify. Investments makes seed investments in companies with the potential to advance our mission and demonstrate market rate returns. Amplify provides investment to companies within our grant funded portfolio at an earlier stage of commercialisation where we see the potential to raise commercial investment in the future.
- Building a co-investor network: we aim to attract other investors and additional funds to the VocTech market, and so we are building a network of individuals and institutions who are keen to share knowledge and experience of VocTech investing. This will support our aim of attracting substantial additional investment into the portfolio.

VocTech Investments

VocTech Investments is our seed investment funding. Our typical first investments are £150,000 as equity or debt, and 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, and companies may make a proposal to us at any time throughout the year by contacting the Ufi Ventures team. A contact form is available on our website.

If you are interested in a VocTech Investment, your company will need to be or to offer:

Ufi mission aligned

You can articulate the potential and a plan to increase business performance and/or people's access to and progress in work through the use of digital technologies for adult learning and career development.

User & market led

You understand a significant user and market need, and the value chain and competitive landscape in the market.

High impact potential

You have developed, tested and are ready to sell at least one product or service with evidenced benefit to users and customers that exceeds what is otherwise available.

Strong commercial potential

You have tested a business model that delivers good unit economics, is scalable and has defensible competitive advantage.

Credible plan

You have a business plan and financing plan that presents a clear roadmap for any further product development, business growth and the finance required to achieve profitability.

Great team

You have in place a management team capable of delivering the business plan and a functioning board with at least one Non-Executive member.

Co-investors

You are supported by a strong co-investor group, matching Ufi's investment >=1:1 from point of first investment.

Responsible business

You are committed to inclusive and responsible business practices (e.g. policies on accessibility, affordability, public benefit; impact reporting practices; purpose clause in articles; living wage employer).

VocTech Amplify

VocTech Amplify is available by invitation to organisations who have previously received grant funding from Ufi. We aim to provide funding to organisations which are considered to have the potential to raise commercial debt or equity finance from VocTech Investments or third parties but where further development of the business is required in order to raise this finance.



Social Impact Investing

Outside of Ufi Ventures, we also put our money in investment funds. Recognising that all of our investments have a social and environmental impact, we are looking carefully at the impact of these fund investments. Our goal is to invest in funds that contribute towards our mission whilst continuing to generate the financial returns we need. To achieve this, we are assessing our current portfolio, developing our investment policy, and we will then make changes to our fund investments to deliver greater impact.



Supporting the Market

Our long term goal is to equip vocational education and training (VET) professionals with the skills and confidence that they need to adopt 'digital first' into their practice.

In addition to our funding to support the development of new VocTech products, demonstrators and ways of working, there are other actions we can take to support VET practitioners to widen understanding of the benefits of digital technology in supporting vocational skills and grow a professional marketplace for CPD.

Building on everything we learned through Blended Learning Essentials (see case study), we will support a new VocTech Essentials programme to help develop the blended teaching skills of staff in FE/VE by allowing staff to share experiences, offer product advice, guidance and reviews of resources used, and will help to shape products offered by suppliers in an online marketplace. The first phase will launch early in this strategy period and be enhanced and updated over time as new technologies become widely available.

We know that an important part of the success of Blended Learning Essentials was the digital champion network and we will be developing activity that builds on this. This will support vocational trainers to acquire and develop the digital and pedagogical skills they need to thrive in vocational education through working together. It builds on the successful networks developed through the digital champions and engaged vocational teaching and training community.

We will continue to develop this offer over the next five years with the aim of creating a vibrant, active community that can cascade its knowledge widely across the sector. We believe that people learn best from other people and real-life examples when there are big changes to make.

Case Study: Association of Learning Technologies (ALT)

University of Leeds

UCL

Blended Learning Essentials

The Blended Learning Essentials MOOC encouraged and supported teachers and trainers in FE and Vocational Education who wanted to make better use of blended learning in their practice.

What was developed

With over 80,000 sign-ups, evaluation showed that participants' awareness of digital tools and technologies, and their confidence in using digital tools significantly increased. It established a developing community of teachers and trainers, building knowledge of how to make best use of digital tools and optimise blended learning.

What happened next

From January 2019 the MOOC has been taken forward by University of Leeds and University College London (UCL).



Building the VocTech Community

Our long term goal is to catalyse change by reaching out, influencing, engaging and working with others who can help us achieve our vision of change at scale.

Communications

As we were developing this strategy, we spoke with the VocTech community and you told us that how we came over in person was different from what you saw in our publications. You saw us as welcoming, open, responsive to your needs and going the extra mile to support your projects. We want all our comms going forward to reflect that much more clearly.

Looking at the needs of our main audience – those interested in our funded projects and investments – we have identified some core needs that we will focus on in our comms to make sure you have the information you need to engage with us and help us spread our message:

- General support – practical help with plotting out the delivery of their idea; a sounding board; advice on which expert support to bring in at each stage.
- Specific expertise – access to expertise specific to their idea (sector or technology) and expertise to bring their idea to market (commercial, legal, IP).
- Networking – knowledge sharing opportunities with others working in their field; strategic partnership introductions to bring their ideas to market.
- Time – time to get it right, time to try new things, explore, make mistakes, learn and produce something exponentially better.

We will address these needs through our:

- Internal communications – helping our team to network better themselves, have the resources they need to do their jobs, offer the best possible service to our users, share their expertise in blogs and speaking at industry events.
- External communications – being clear on what our offer is in a simple, timely way that allows our applicants to make good choices of which Ufi service fits best with their idea.

We have begun to build our social media communities and appreciate all the LinkedIn group members, re-tweets and shares of our website content that we have already built up. There is more we can do to build community here over the next five years.

We have commissioned a new VocTech podcast and will continue to look for new channels to share our message and amplify our voice.

Our messaging will be clearly focused on our core belief – that we are catalysts for the future of VocTech.

Evaluation and Measurement

Our Theory of Change sets out the assumptions and beliefs that we have made in creating this strategy. We are aware that we are setting stretch goals for big change, and that is often difficult to measure, as many factors come in to play in the economic, social and political spheres that impact on our world.

What we can do is measure the impact of the work that we directly fund. We can capture the stories of our projects and our learners and follow them over the longer term to see what change happened in their lives.

We have commissioned an evaluation of our first five year strategy and what has happened to our first investments. We have been learning 'on the job' over that period. We have made big improvements already in how we work and the clarity we can share on what 'good' looks like in VocTech. But we think it is important to have an external, independent view on what we have done.

We are developing a framework that builds out from our Theory of Change so that everything we do has a logical link back to our vision and our goals and has short term KPIs to enable us to measure success. We will be working on this throughout 2020.

Measuring long term success is something we will continue to work on. For us, we will see it in the size of our Ufi family, the strength of the connections between VET professionals innovating with digital technology, and the way that 'VocTech' becomes a well-used phrase in the sector.

We will measure how people receiving Ufi funding see it as a real recognition of achievement, a badge of honour they are proud to share. Ultimately, we will know we have succeeded when we are no longer needed because the VocTech market is vibrant, dynamic and self-sustaining. #VocTech.



**VocTech
Trust**

Ufi Charitable Trust
10 Queen Street
London
EC4R 1AG

info@ufi.co.uk

ufi.co.uk