

## Ufi VocTech Challenge Grant Fund Guidance for Applicants

### Contents

1. About Ufi.....	2
2. The Ufi VocTech Challenge 2021 .....	3
3. Purpose of the VocTech Challenge Grant Fund .....	3
4. How to apply .....	4
5. About the Fund .....	5
6. Challenge Fund Criteria.....	7
7. What will Ufi pay for? .....	9
8. Who can apply?.....	10
9. What happens if you are successful?.....	11
10. The design-led element - The 'Define Stage Gateway' .....	12
11. Help with your application.....	15
12. Other Ufi Funding Opportunities .....	15

## Ufi VocTech Challenge Grant Fund

**Open for applications on Tuesday 29 June 2021 –  
Thursday 29th July, 5pm.**

## 1. About Ufi

### **Ufi 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.

We believe we have a particular role in supporting sectors, locations, skill levels and individuals that are not well served by the mainstream.

## 2. The Ufi VocTech Challenge 2021

In November 2020 the big challenge we foresaw was that the communities who are not traditionally well served by mainstream vocational skills and training provision, the focus of Ufi's strategy, were more at risk than ever from being excluded from education and training and being able to access employment.

In response, we kicked off the 2021 VocTech Challenge to explore where Ufi can best use its resources to make change happen. Using design thinking principles, we have set about an exercise of co-creation across the VocTech community to uncover what the underlying reasons were for some of the current challenges.

The output of our 'discovery' phase is captured in the VocTech Challenge Green Paper and our White Paper sets out Ufi's commitment to taking some of the issues identified forward. The documents can be found [here](#). We strongly encourage you to read these if you are planning to apply to the fund.

## 3. Purpose of the VocTech Challenge Grant Fund

One of the key issues highlighted in the Green and White Papers was how confidence, or lack of it, was a major barrier to vocational learning for those most at risk from economic and digital exclusion.

This targeted grant call is looking for projects that use technology in ways that support learner confidence. There are a number of current and emerging technologies that could be developed or deployed to improve accessibility, create a supportive learning environment, offer increased personalisation, and motivation to start or keep on learning.

### ***Ufi VocTech Challenge***

***How can VocTech 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?***

***This Challenge is focused on adults impacted by the digital divide and furthest away from learning so they can gain the confidence they need to get the skills they need for work.***

We are interested in groups that are currently least likely to engage with learning, to understand the drivers and barriers that they face.

It is not about a subtle improvement in what is on offer, it is about creating a step change in improving confidence and motivation so that learners are able to take action to get the skills they need for work.

## 4. How to apply

Ufi uses an online application process. Once you have registered on the Ufi website and created a [MyUfi account](#), you can log-in, access the application form, save your draft and return to it at any time while the funding round is open.

<b>Tues 29 June 2021</b>	The VocTech Challenge Fund open for Stage 1 applications
<b>Thurs 29<sup>th</sup> July 2021, 17.00 (GMT)</b>	Deadline for submission of Stage 1 applications
<b>Tues 14<sup>th</sup> September 2021</b>	Feedback from Stage 1. Successful applicants will be invited to proceed to Stage 2.
<b>Thurs 28 September 2021, 1700 (GMT)</b>	Deadline for submission of Stage 2 applications
<b>Mid-November 2021</b>	Ufi's Board of Trustees will reach final decisions on funding.

**Deadlines :** We do not accept late applications. If you experience technical problems while completing or submitting your application, you must tell us as soon as possible via [info@ufi.co.uk](mailto:info@ufi.co.uk).

### Two stage process

Ufi has a two-stage online application process. Access to Stage 2 is by invitation only, following success at Stage 1. Evaluation at each stage is undertaken by an expert panel, selected to represent experience and expertise relevant to the fund. Final funding decisions are made by the Ufi Board of Trustees.

**Stage 1** requires you to complete an online application form which outlines the problem in vocational learning your idea aims to address, the intended audience / market and potential for scale. You will also need to tell us about your organisation and the funding requested. Applications are assessed on how well the project fits with Ufi's overall mission and the specific objectives of the funding call.

**Stage 2** requires you to provide more detailed information about how you intend to deliver your project. You will be invited to respond to some feedback questions from your Stage 1 application so that we can find out more about your idea. You will also need to provide a technical description of your idea, additional information in the form of a project plan and budget and submit some documents which we require to complete due diligence before we can confirm an offer of funding.

If you are successful in being offered a grant, there is a requirement for a Define Stage to really focus in on user needs and refine your project plan. More information is available in Section 10/11.

## 5. About the Fund

### *Ufi VocTech Challenge*

*How can VocTech 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?*

*This Challenge is focused on adults impacted by the digital divide and furthest away from learning so they can gain the confidence they need to get the skills they need for work.*

### **This fund will have 2 parts**

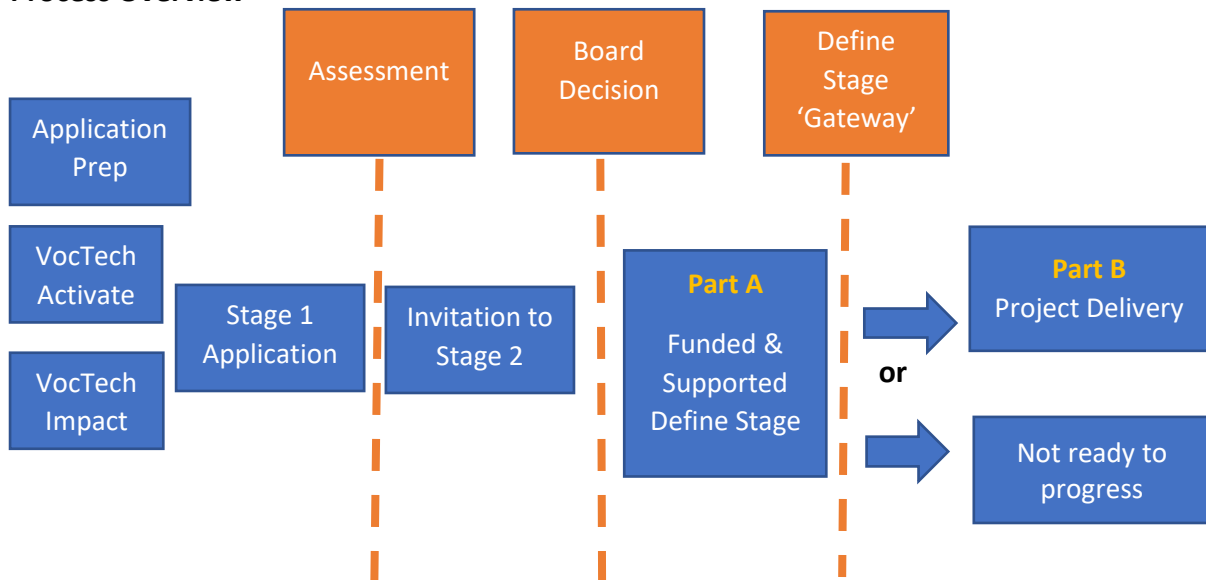
**Part A** - A funded and supported design thinking element – the ‘Define Stage Gateway’.

And

**Part B** - Funding for delivery of a VocTech Activate or a VocTech Impact project

Access to part B is only available to projects who engage fully in the design thinking element and have a clear, user centred plan at the end of that phase that is ready for immediate development.

### **Process Overview**



## **Part A - The Design Thinking Element - 'Define Stage Gateway' - £10k**

This challenge fund has a funded 'Define Stage' at the point where the conditional offer is made. This will be a 'stage gateway' to ensure that the idea has:

- Clear user design and learning design where appropriate, focused on our target users
- A technical approach that will deliver the aims of the project
- A clear understanding of the opportunities to scale up and how those can be achieved

More details about what is required and how this will work can be found in section 11 of this document.

£10k per project is available towards the costs of investing time in the design thinking element, plus a tailored enrichment package. This will include access to expert support to guide you through the process. This funding is in addition to the full project costs that you apply for.

## **Part B - Project Delivery**

We will offer a mixture of VocTech Activate and VocTech Impact type grants to support the funding of projects that ultimately build the confidence and ability of people most impacted by the digital divide to be more active and independent learners.

Our new Activate grants are for projects that are beyond their initial early concept stage, still require significant development to be ready to launch to the market but are at a stage where they can quickly begin user testing to improve their prototype. Our Impact projects are 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.

When applying you will have to state which type of project you are applying for. We reserve the right to offer a different level of funding. It is possible that as a result of assessment, Ufi might also make recommendations on the most suitable funding type for a project.

**VocTech Activate - funding up to MVP (Minimum Viable Product). Networks and relationships already in place in principle, to be able to scale quickly and / or catalyse change in service provision once Ufi funding has ended.**

These projects are likely to require some tech development as well as market testing with our target audience of learners. Part of the project will be the development of the roll-out, scaling and sustainability planning for the idea.

- Between £15-£50k, requirement for some match funding from those organisations with significant resources.
- Minimum of 50 users to be involved in user design and testing, and an ambition for thousands of learners benefitting within 3 years of Ufi funding closing.
- 4 – 12 months (including the Define Stage).

**VocTech Impact – funding to roll-out an idea where the tech has been tested already to MVP stage. Networks and relationships already reasonably well established. Delivering to a large number of learners during the funding period and ready to further scale and catalyse change after Ufi funding has ended.**

These projects will be characterised by their readiness to roll out, with initial tech development largely complete at the point of application.

- Minimum of 200 users to be involved in the next stage of user design and testing and 1,000 learners engaged during the funding period. An ambition for tens of thousands of learners benefitting within 3 years of Ufi funding closing.
- Up to £150K, requirement for some match funding from those organisations with significant resources.
- 18- 24 months (including the Define Stage).

We are expecting to offer up to 10 / 12 VocTech Activate grants and 3 / 4 VocTech Impact grants.

## 6. Challenge Fund Criteria

### What kind of ideas are we looking for?

This targeted grant call is looking for projects that use technology in ways that support learner confidence. There are a number of current and emerging technologies that could be developed or deployed to improve accessibility, create a supportive learning environment, offer increased personalisation and motivation to start or keep on learning.

We are open to ideas that use digital tools and approaches in new ways to directly improve the confidence and motivation of learners to engage with vocational learning and help people get the skills they need for work.

Confidence has many aspects in relation to vocational learning. Our [Green and White Papers](#) explore the issues that we uncovered during our Discovery. We found that confidence was a barrier to starting to learn, sticking with the learning, and successfully completing learning and moving into work or on to better paid work.

### Key Criteria

Projects **must** have an impact on learners disproportionately affected by the digital divide and further exposed by the pandemic and be able to evidence their choice of user group on that basis.

To do this, projects must have already done some initial discovery thinking to build relationships with a group or groups of learners that can be evidenced to be experiencing digital disadvantage and have clear issues of lack of confidence at some point in the journey into work. They **must** use digital vocational technology do one or more of the following :

1. Support learners who are not engaged in any vocational learning to take steps to develop their skills by overcoming confidence and motivational barriers.
2. Build learner confidence and motivation to access and make progress in their vocational learning.
3. Build learner confidence and skills to become more independent learners and support a culture of lifelong learning.
4. Target known user barriers to learning, offering new pathways and bridges into learning.

We are also open to the fact that:

5. the idea may be part of a blended / hybrid solution, where digital tools and approaches can enhance face to face delivery
6. ideas may also address the confidence of teachers / trainers in deploying VocTech in order to ensure the learner journey is the best possible.
7. the idea isn't a separate 'product' or commercial service. The innovation may well be something that can be embedded or retrofitted into existing offers or changes to practice in order to improve outcomes, catalysing longer term systems change.
8. whilst this call is not focused on digital skills development, there may be a need to address digital skills as an entry point to the vocational skills that projects are seeking to build.

User-centred approaches to learning design will be important. We will prioritise projects that are committed to our design thinking approach in being open to the real lived experiences of users – our view is that designing well for learners with a variety of needs improves the universal offer.

#### **We are not looking for**

Projects that focus solely on the confidence to get online in response to the pandemic or digital skills development without additional vocational context

- Projects working with user groups who are already well served by mainstream provision – you need to show that this is new to the market
- Speculative technologies developed in isolation of the user group – your users will be an integral part of the application
- Ideas with no potential for scale or transformational change in the sector
- Generic 'coaching' or motivational tools.
- Generic mental health support solutions

**A list of what Ufi does not fund can be found [here](#).**

#### **Summary**

**Who should apply?** Groups already engaged with our target learner groups so you can move quickly to scale up

**What is the focus?** How digital tools can build learner confidence to engage, progress and succeed

**What's new?** The 'Define' Stage to crystallise user insights before starting to deliver

**How much funding?** Between £15k and £150k, with additional £10k funding for the Define Stage

**When?** Apply between 29 June and 29 July 2021

**Where?** On the MyUfi portal on our website at [www.ufi.co.uk](http://www.ufi.co.uk)



## 7. What will Ufi pay for?

<b>The Define Stage</b>	
£10k towards the costs of committing time to the 'Define stage gateway'. Activities typically included in this deep dive Stage are listed in section 10 of this document.	
<b>Activate</b> Up to £50k 4-12 months	<b>Impact</b> £100k - £150k 12-18 months
Refinement of basic prototype and extension of early proof of concept work	Larger scale testing and delivery to users
Design and development using user-centred approaches	Refine, re-design and development, ready for immediate roll-out
Development of an MVP with user engagement	Strategies for rapid marketing and promotion
Development of a strategy to scale and sustain the product / service	Development of a sustainable model to scale and sustain the product or service after Ufi funding
Evaluation of how far / whether the project has achieved its objectives – and Ufi's	

For more information on eligible costs, VAT, and how you get paid please see our [Standard Grant Funding FAQs](#).

### **If your organisation is not a charity:**

Ufi funds projects involving charities, private companies, community interest companies and other not for profit organisations. As a charity itself, Ufi must ensure that any grant given to any organisation that is not also a charity demonstrates public benefit.

This means being able to see evidence of how the proposed approach will benefit learners, how the community of learners has been defined and the total size of the group the project could reach. We also need to see evidence of some match funding from organisations with significant resources.

Projects must always explain clearly why they need Ufi funding to support their project and how Ufi's charitable funding will make a difference.

Finally, we need to make sure that our funding is not more than is necessary to deliver the project and is not replacing private funding.

The questions we ask in our application forms help us understand how your proposal can have a beneficial public outcome, both immediately and in the longer term.

## 8. Who can apply?

We are open to applications from all types of organisations for this call.

We think this call will be best suited to:

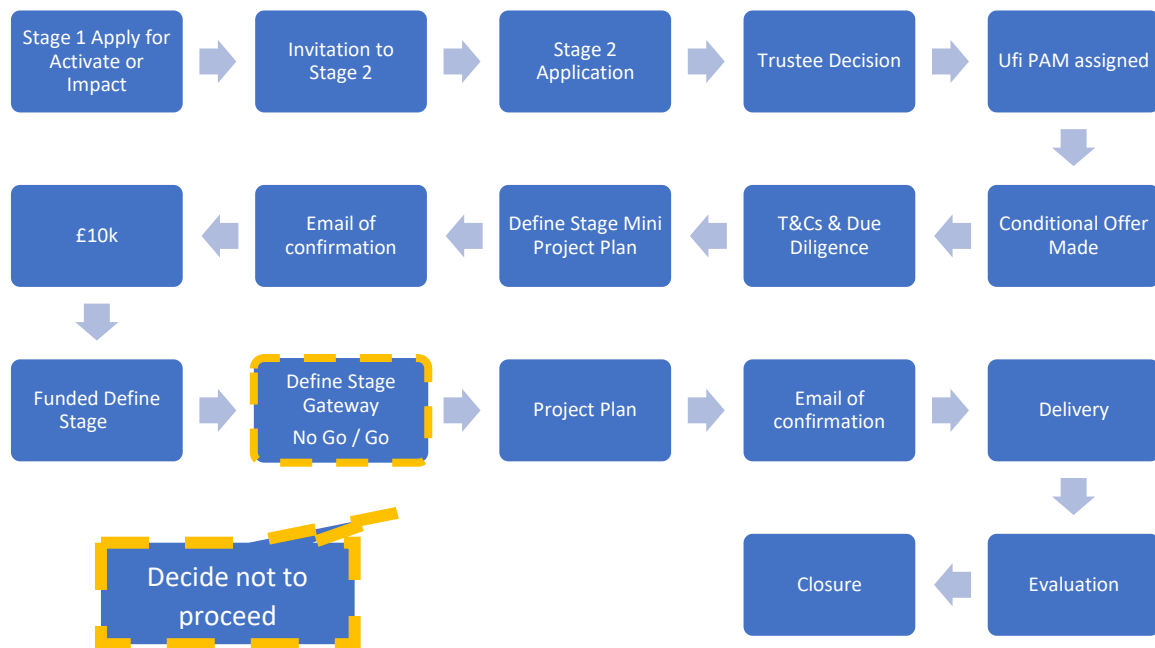
- Organisations with a shared passion for Ufi's mission
- Organisations and teams that are open to design thinking
- Organisations who are able to commit to engaging with Ufi's package of enrichment support and to make the most of the opportunities created by being part of an active project cohort
- Collaborative groups of organisations and employers (with a lead applicant) where **at least** one partner has a strong track-record in working with the target community of learners and **at least one** has a strong tech or learning design background.
- Individual organisations with a strong track-record in working with the community of learners and which have a clear understanding of how to commission the technical solutions they may need.

This call is probably not suitable for start-ups as we need applicants to have experience with the target group of learners and strong networks already in place.

The majority of organisations we fund are UK-based. We will consider applications from outside the UK if they can clearly demonstrate how they will address vocational learning challenges faced in the UK. We only fund projects that can demonstrate their impact in the UK.

## 9. What happens if you are successful?

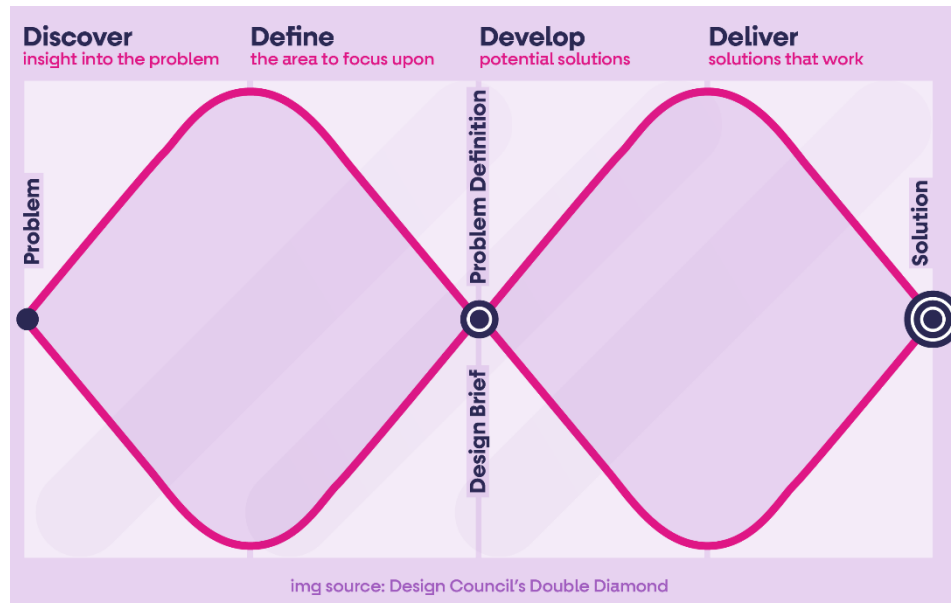
All projects will need to agree to the [Ufi Standard Terms and Conditions of Grant](#). Your Project Account Manager will work with you to create a Project Plan which sets out how the project will be delivered and the milestones which need to be achieved for funding to be drawn down. It is for you to determine how your project is best delivered and to work with your Project Account Manager to agree a monitoring plan. The funding milestones will be set as part of this process. Each project is unique and we will work with you to agree what is most reasonable for your project.



## 10. The design-led element - The ‘Define Stage Gateway’

Ufi has used design thinking in specifying this Challenge and we want to continue to apply the principles right through the process.

The Design Council’s double diamond process describes the four key stages of a project – discover, define, develop, deliver.



In this call, we are looking for ideas and solutions that have already done some initial discovery thinking to build relationships with a group or groups of learners that can be clearly shown to be facing digital disadvantage and have ‘lived experience’ of lack of confidence at some point in their journey into work. You will already have introduced your ideas to your users and have an initial confirmation that there is interest in what you are proposing. We are looking for proposals that have already started the process of engaging the trust of those users.

We understand that there is a real challenge in reaching the types of learners that this call is intended to serve and building the partnerships needed to achieve the step change in outcomes that we are looking for. Those projects selected will not only develop the VocTech to support them but also act as demonstrators for the kind of community engagement that is needed for the solution to scale effectively.

The ‘Define Stage’ provides the time to take a deep dive into the barriers and opportunities relating to the group of users/learners that you will be working with. In our experience with past projects, once you start to dig below the surface, new issues, concerns and opportunities emerge that would have been usefully included in the develop/deliver Stage. This stage/gate process will allow you to take that time, supported by our funding and mentoring, to examine much more closely the assumptions you have made up to this point and to engage in meaningful discussions with users, employers and the wider community.

The overall objective is to find out what customers, clients, users, learners and employers really want and whether your early Proof of Concept or current MVP solution will meet those needs.

### **In summary, what do we want the Define Stage to do?**

1. **Deep dive into the vocational learning issue**/problem/opportunity with a strong emphasis on the needs and confidence of the user group
2. Better understand the needs of the target audience for the proposed solution (approach/product/service) who might buy/use it and how it will be **sustainable and scalable**
3. Confirm **positive access and engagement** with the initial learner/user group
4. Gain an understanding of the potential **risks and mitigations** as well as the opportunities and how to capitalise upon them
5. Identify or **clarify the scope** of the product/service – its size and focus – and timescale to roll-out

As a result of steps 1 – 5 projects will be able to

6. **Refine your thoughts for the develop/deliver phases** of the double diamond, and how any eventual product or service would be scaled and sustained. This will look different depending on whether the proposition is a commercial offering or has a different path to sustainability, however in all cases thoughts on how to develop the business/scale up plan, sales pipeline and (commercial) structure will be important.

Activities we might expect projects to undertake in the Define Stage could typically include:

#### **User Consultation and Engagement**

- Uncovering underlying key barriers and needs and how they are currently met or not met or prioritised
- Interviews, focus groups, surveys to deepen understanding of the lived experience of the user group
- Developing 'Personas' to explore how initial findings can be scaled out more widely during/after the project
- Sharing prototypes or concepts with target users to gauge real interest and fit with needs
- Understanding user behaviour on any current systems or competitor offers – analytics or via interviews
- Really understanding and being able to articulate who the target users are, their attitudes and needs, at test stage and for roll-out at scale
- Exploring the mechanisms for reaching and engaging learners furthest from vocational learning beyond your initial test group
- Working with teachers/trainers to ensure that the solution also meets their needs if they are to be engaged in delivery
- Engaging employers and learners with early stage concepts to understand any unexpressed underlying needs before crystallising the delivery plan.

#### **Competitor and Market Assessment**

- Is there genuinely space in the market to develop this to scale?
- Who are potential competitors / collaborators and how does your idea sit against those?
- Are there products / services that do part of / are similar to your idea?
- How do they work? What are their strengths and weaknesses? Who are their customers / what is their business model?

- Could your idea be incorporated into other systems rather than being a stand-alone product/service?

#### **Stakeholder engagement and team building**

- Key customers – understanding who these are or who they could potentially be including employers that might provide work opportunities for target users.
- Technical teams – understanding what the technical opportunities/constraints could be of different VocTech solutions to user needs.
- Learning design team – does your network have the capability /capacity to adopt and implement best practice in digitally supported learning and if not, how will you develop it?
- Marketing and sales – how will the solution be rolled out and marketed to achieve sustainability after the funding stops?
- Exploring wider partnerships – delivery / sales / marketing - what do you need to ensure this rolls out at scale?

#### **By the end of the Define Stage projects should**

- Know more than when they started and have confidence in user engagement
- Know what they don't know and develop a strategy for dealing with that (which could include accepting that it will remain an unknown during the develop Stage)
- Make a decision about what to do next.

#### **Expected end points for the Define Stage**

- Do nothing – the Define Stage helps the team conclude that the idea isn't worth pursuing at this time.
- Do further work – the Define Stage highlights more work that is needed by the team to refine the idea before a decision can be made about whether to pursue it further.
- Develop the project to the next stage– the Define Stage has helped confirm thinking about the idea, the needs of the audience and target market and a full Project Plan can be created.

## 11. Help with your application.

There is information and guidance on our website.

Please look at our funding strategy, [Learning Without Walls :Beyond 2020](#) , and our [Theory of Change](#) to understand more about Ufi, our mission and the beliefs that shape the way we think.

We are running 2 types of virtual workshop to support applicants. Sign up [here](#).

1. **Grant Funding Call Workshops** - Hear more about what we are looking for and ask any questions you might have. The webinar also offers the opportunity for networking and small group discussions about your ideas with members of the Ufi team and other applicants.
2. **'Exploring the Challenge' Workshops** – join the Ufi team for a series of expert panels to explore, in more detail, the issues around confidence and motivation in vocational learning, and how digital tools can help to overcome these.

Read our [VocTech Challenge Green and White Papers](#) to fully understand the context for this grant funding call.

Read our standard [grant fund FAQs](#) and our [VocTech Challenge Fund FAQs](#).

Read our guidelines on [Technology Considerations](#) for achieving scale

Review our [Grant Terms & Conditions](#). These are non-negotiable so please only apply if you can accept them in full.

Take a look at our [VocTech Directory](#) to understand the wider context of the projects we have funded in previous years.

You can also email us with general questions about the fund at [info@ufi.co.uk](mailto:info@ufi.co.uk). Please note that we cannot discuss your specific project in detail during a workshop, in the online Chat or by email.

## 12. Other Ufi Funding Opportunities

To keep informed about grant funding rounds, please sign up for our [newsletter](#).

To find out more about our Ufi Ventures investment fund, please visit <https://www.ufi.co.uk/ufi-ventures>.