OCN NI Centre Learning Grants Application Guide

It is important to read these guidance notes prior to completing your online application. The notes will take you through each section, provide examples and prompts for the information we require.

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Contents

Purpose **3**

Who can apply for funding **3**

How much can you apply for 3

The process **4**

What we fund **5**

The online application form **6**

Frequently Asked Questions **8**

Purpose

This Grants Programme was initiated by the OCN NI Board of Trustees and assists in the fulfilment of our charitable purpose, with the focus of the programme to assist and support OCN Centres and their learners undertaking and/or working towards an OCN qualification. **Particular emphasis has been given to help those who may be particularly disadvantaged and would not otherwise have had the opportunities to engage in education.** The objectives of the grants are to encourage innovation, enhance learning and progression while supporting learners.

As a charity, we are always keen to deliver our charitable purpose of ensuring the **advancement of education for the public benefit** and this Grant Scheme does exactly that. The organisations receiving this grant have ambitious educational and business development goals that include learners who have specific financial needs. These learners are looking to improve their career aspirations through our qualifications and the excellent teaching delivered by the applicants. OCN NI would encourage centres to be innovative in their grant application, by thinking of ways to remove barriers to education for learners, so that they may benefit and access opportunities that may not have otherwise been available to them.

We look forward to supporting those learners who most need it through this new OCN initiative.

Who can apply for funding?

You can apply if:

- You are an OCN NI Recognised Centre;
- You currently have no outstanding debt with OCN NI;
- You have registered learners on OCN NI Qualifications within the last 12 months

You can apply for funding once every 12 months.

How much can you apply for?

OCN NI will offer grants of between £500 - £3,000 to specific projects or activities that advance the mission and vision of OCN NI in a way that provides robust evidence of how learning positively impacts on individuals, families, and communities.

All applications are considered, with special consideration given to centres supporting OCN learners who have significant barriers and hardships preventing them from realising their full potential through education, for example through economic or family circumstances.

**** We do not provide retrospective funding, meaning support for projects that have already taken place.****

The process

The process takes place between May and June each year.

Grant round opens Monday 18th May

- The application form is made available online. No applications will be accepted after the round closes.

Grant round closes Sunday 14th June

- All applicants will be notified by email that OCN NI has received their completed applications.

Grant Assessment Phase June

- The applications are considered by a panel choosen from our Board of Trustees.

Decision Phase June/July

- All applicants will be notified of their application outcome.
- The OCN NI grants panel has the final say on the amount of funding available for grants and who receives grants.

Grant Awarded on or before 31st July

- Successful applicants will be asked to submit signed Terms and Conditions, a BACS form to confirm bank details along with a copy of a recent bank statement or a blank lodgement slip, upon which payment will be made.

Monitoring & Evaluation

- You are expected to retain all information relating to the grant, including financial records.
- You will be required to complete an evaluation form highlighting the impact of the grant.
- You may receive a visit at any time from a member of the OCN Team.

What we fund

Our objective is to enhance educational opportunities for individuals, families, and communities through participation in OCN NI Learning programmes. Through working in partnership with our recognised education and training providers, the centre learning grants will help tackle educational underachievement and remove barriers to learning. Funding **MUST** be used to benefit learners undertaking and/or working towards an OCN qualification and **MUST NOT** be used to cover OCN accreditation costs, student registration fees or OCN centre fees.

The OCN NI grants panel has the final say on the amount of funding available for grants and who receives grants.

Examples of what we fund	Examples of what we will not fund
Supplementary lessons or extracurricular activities which will directly help with the learners OCN qualification (e.g. can be used as an example for their coursework) or indirectly help (e.g. provide mental health benefits)	Administration or salaries for standard classes (e.g. IV costs, administration, printing, core materials for classes such as lesson plans)
Extra equipment which would not be covered in core funding but would enhance the learners educational experience (e.g. podcasting equipment which will be used specifically for the completion of a digital skills qualification)	Equipment that should be provided by your organisation (e.g. a new computer suite, furniture, basic maths and English equipment)
Travel for groups to places or training that would not be covered in core funding (e.g. weekly travel to events and places to supplement lessons in personal development qualifications)	Travel or training that is expected from your organisation (e.g. a yearly trip for learners in a year group that has no relation to their OCN qualifications)
Materials which are essential to the project proposed by the centre (PPE for supplementary classes or one-time use materials for a learner's projects)	Essential materials or equipment that your organisation should provide (e.g. books, textbooks, pens, paper)
	Bursaries for students (the grant is applied for and won by the centre and should not be given directly to learners)

The grant can be used to enable learning for individuals and groups, and may cover the costs of any supplementary activities and materials that will help change people's lives through education and training. In exceptional cases we may award the costs for travel and childcare providers that are registered with the local Health and Social Care Trust.

If you are awarded a grant, it may be a partial reward and not the full requested amount.

The online application form

The grant application form is made available online when each round opens every year. Applicants will be asked to create an account, which allows them to begin the application process and save information as they proceed through each section.

ORGANISATION	DETAIL OF PROJECT
Organisation Details Outline the name of your OCN NI Recognised organisation in full. Any abbreviated formats should be placed in brackets after the full name for example, "Open College Network Northern Ireland (OCN NI)", and provide your organisation contact information. **Main Contact Information** We may contact your organisation to seek clarification on aspects of your application. The main contact should be the person who knows the work of your organisation well and has a good understanding of the proposed project. **Charity/Organisation Details** In Northern Ireland, charity registration is gained through the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland (CCNI). Please record the Charity Number in the corresponding text box (numeric element only). Please also record the Company Registration Number as listed on Companies House Website. For schools please provide the DE Number. **Organisation Type** Please indicated the type of organisation ,i.e. FE College, Third Sector, School, Private Training Provider. **Present Activities** Tell us about the day-to-day activities in your organisation, detailing the services you provide to give us a feel for your organisation's work. Use this section to describe your organisation, why it was set up, and who benefits from it.	**Title of the Project** To sum up your project, give it a title which reflects the project for which you are applying. For example, "Activities for Anytown Older People". **Project Start Date** Enter a realistic start date for your project, bearing in mind it may be up to 4 months before you will hear an outcome of the application. **Please describe your project** Tell us how you identified a need for your project. Outline the purpose for which funds are being sought. Have you consulted with your service users? Did you undertake a survey? Clearly state the overall aim of your project, for example, Aim: "To improve educational outcomes for disadvantaged learners in Anytown". **The focus of the grant programme is to assist and support OCN Centres and their learners undertaking and/or working towards an OCN qualification. Particular emphasis has been given to help those who may be particularly disadvantaged and would not otherwise have had the means to study.. How do you feel this project meets this priority? Describe WHO will benefit and HOW they will benefit.** Describe the type of people your project will support and explain how they are disadvantaged, for example, young people at risk of offending, people with a learning disability, or disadvantaged older people. Also explain how they will benefit from this project.

Objectives
Keeping your overall aim in mind, list up to 2 objectives to describe how you will fulfil this aim. Your objectives should be measurable by including targets to allow you, and us, to monitor the progress of your project and to evaluate its success. For example, using Anytown as set out on the previous example, your objectives might be;

- To increase the number of social evenings for disadvantaged older people from 1 per month to 1 per week
- To provide monthly talks for the older people

Tell us how you would achieve each objective.

People
Explain how you calculated the number of people who will benefit directly from your project. For example, if your project is to provide IT training to 3 groups of 10 students, the direct beneficiaries will be 30.

Council Area
Indicate the main council area in which the project will take place. Note, this may be in a different location to where your charity is based. There is the option to choose Northern Ireland wide.

Measuring Impact
It is important that you measure the impact of your project. In this section you will need to illustrate how you will judge the success of your project in relation to the objectives you have set.

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

Budget
Please provide a budget breaking down the costs required for your project. You may not be requesting the full cost of an item from the grant fund. Give us the total cost of the item and how much you are requesting.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

In order for the application to be considered for funding, the following documentation MUST be submitted with the online application form.

Governing Document (or equivalent)
May be Memorandum & Articles of Association; Constitution or Trust Deed. Must be adopted by the Committee and have a handwritten signature by an office bearer. Ensure the project fits within your objects outlined in your governing document.

Public Liability Insurance
It is important that you have public liability insurance in place when providing a service to the public. Attach the certificate issued by your insurer in this section

Safeguarding Policy
If you support children, young people or vulnerable adults, you must attach your Child Protection and/or Vulnerable Adults policy here.

DECLARATION

The Chief Executive of your organisation will have ultimate responsibility for the grant. They will be required to sign the Terms and Conditions of grant.

Complete full details for the Chief Executive of your Organisation. Ensure you have contacted your Chief Executive and they are happy to be named in the application form and tick the box to confirm they are aware of the application and supportive of it.

Please note: If the Chief Executive has been named as the Main Contact, please provide details of another Senior Manager or Trustee of your organisation.

Submission
If you agree with the statement outlined in the Submission box, proceed to the e-signature section.

Frequently Asked Questions

Can I request a hardcopy of the grant application form?
To streamline our application process, our application forms are submitted online. If you do not have access to the internet, please visit a local library, Job Centre or seek assistance from family or friends.

When are the deadline dates?
Applications will open for our Centre Learning Grant fund on Monday 18th May 2026 and close on Sunday 14th June 2026.

Do you support core funding / What do you mean by core funding?
No. Our grants cannot be used for everyday running costs that organisations face such as, salaries of key people, administrative costs and general running costs of organisations.

Can I use the grant to pay for OCN NI accreditation fees?
No.

Can I use the grant to support learners studying with another awarding organisation?
No. Funding **MUST** be used to benefit learners undertaking and/or working towards an OCN Qualification.

Can I submit multiple grant applications to OCN NI in same year?
OCN NI will only accept one grant application per organisation per year. We encourage applicants to prioritise their needs and submit one application only.

Who makes the final decision about whether I receive a grant?
The OCN NI grants panel has the final say on the amount of funding available for grants and who receives grants.

How long before we hear of the decision?
The grant panel meets during June and July and all applicants will be notified of the outcome before the end of July.

Will we get the full amount we have requested?
Not everyone who receives a grant from us gets the full amount they have requested. This is because there is never enough money to meet all requests for funding in full. However, your application will be considered on its own merit.

Do you match fund?
We are happy to consider applications which ask us to contribute, as one of a number of funders to a project.

What happens if we receive the funding from another source, for the same purpose?
You may withdraw your application and re-submit for another project. You may even be able to re-profile the grant awarded in certain circumstances.

Can our organisation apply if we are currently applying to become a Recognised OCN NI Centre?
No. OCN NI Centre Learning grants are only available to existing recognised centres that have registered learning onto our qualifications with the past 12 months.

What documents do we need to send in with the completed application form?
In order to support our decision-making process we ask that you attach your Governing Document (or equivalent), Public Liability Insurance and Safeguarding Policy.

Will someone come and visit us?
We like to visit as many projects as possible and it is one of the most enjoyable aspects of our work. However, because we expect high volumes of applications each year, it is simply not possible to visit all projects. However, we may make visits during the assessment process, at the evaluation stage and at the end of a grant. Occasionally a representative of OCN NI may present certificates to successful applicants.

Should we send in other additional information such as business plans or estimates for equipment and furniture?
Should any additional information be required, OCN NI will request this, therefore please do not submit any additional information.

What will you ask for if our organisation receives a grant?
All organisations that receive a grant are asked to comply with the Terms and Conditions of as laid down by the OCN NI. This electronic document must be e-signed by the Chief Executive of the organisation. Upon receipt of signed Terms and Conditions the grant will be released. Along with the Terms and Conditions we ask that you return a copy of your most recent bank statement or a blank lodging in slip to confirm account details.

We will also ask you to complete an evaluation feedback form on how your project has progressed within 12 months of receiving a grant. Again, we are able to offer support with completing this.

If my application is unsuccessful, will I be told why?
If your application is unsuccessful, an e-mail will be sent to you informing you of the decision. The most frequent reason for decline is that demand for support always exceeds funds available. OCN NI will endeavour to give you individual feedback, however at particularly busy periods, this may not be immediately possible. The decision of the OCN NI grants panel is final and applicants will have no right of appeal.

Can the grant be used to retrospectively cover the cost of items/activities associated with OCN learning programmes?
We cannot retrospectively pay you for any associated items/activities you have already paid for before you are awarded a grant.

Will my information be shared with anyone?
Your personal information is strictly confidential and will only be used to contact you about the outcome of your application, including relevant subsequent communication if you are awarded a grant.

ocn
northern ireland

For additional information, please visit:
https://ocnni-centre-learning-grants.grantplatform.com/

If you wish to contact us about the Centre Learning Grants Programme, please email:
grants@ocnni.org.uk