

News story: Multimillion-pound contracts awarded for apprenticeship training

Hundreds of training organisations across the country are being given a boost as government begins awarding contracts tomorrow (21 December) worth nearly £500m to provide apprenticeship training for learners and small businesses.

The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) is awarding contracts to hundreds of organisations to provide apprenticeship training to non-levy paying employers. Each of these employers does not pay the apprenticeship levy because they have an annual pay bill of less than £3million.

This will ensure all businesses have a real choice of high quality apprenticeship training provision, no matter where they are in the country or what sector they operate in. It will also mean that more people of all ages and backgrounds will have the opportunity to get into skilled employment. Employers looking to find an apprenticeship provider can do so through find apprenticeship training, which will be updated in early January.

Apprenticeships and Skills Minister Anne Milton said:

We are investing in our workforce to make sure there is no barrier on anyone's ambition and that employers have the skilled workforce they need. The investment announced today will ensure that all businesses are able to benefit from high-quality apprenticeship training provision.

The awards follow a rigorous procurement process, designed to ensure the sustainable, ongoing provision of apprenticeship training for employers and learners over the next 15 months. Over 1,000 providers submitted bids.

The initial awards for this procurement total £485m, with successful providers able to bid for more funding over the contract period if they can demonstrate evidence of demand, and subject to the ESFA funding rules and affordability.

In cases where providers have been unsuccessful in the procurement, we are extending contracts by three months so businesses and apprentices have stability while completing existing training.

Contracts for the non-levy funding will run between January 2018 and April 2019.

Press release: Archaeological survey work to continue on A303 Stonehenge scheme

The survey work, which includes surface artefact collection, topsoil tests and trial trenching, is part of the company's continuing commitment to preserving the World Heritage Site and in particular its Outstanding Universal Value.

Highways England Project Director Derek Parody said:

Heritage is very much at the heart of our work at Stonehenge.

As well as removing the traffic bottleneck at Stonehenge and addressing the rat-running issue through local villages, the proposed scheme will remove the sight and sound of traffic from the iconic monument and reduce intrusion in the wider World Heritage Site landscape.

The environmental, archaeological and geophysical surveys we have been carrying out since 2016, and our review of existing surveys, have added to our knowledge and understanding of this unique landscape and helped us develop the design of our preferred route.

Our continuing archaeological survey work, which we are carrying out with experts in the field, will ensure we gather vital information about the environment and archaeology to inform the project as it progresses.

Among the experts is the Stonehenge Scientific Committee, a body of leading independent archaeologists, who have advised on the ongoing survey work, and will continue to do so as the company develops the details of the scheme.

The preferred route for the £1.6 billion A303 upgrade between Amesbury and Berwick Down was announced in September. It includes a free-flowing dual carriageway with a tunnel at least 1.8 miles long and a much-needed bypass north of Winterbourne Stoke.

Following public consultation earlier in the year and further engagement with local communities, heritage groups, archaeologists, historians and engineers, the preferred route was chosen so that the route now closely follows the existing A303 through the World Heritage Site.

This alignment avoids important archaeological sites and intrusion on the view of the setting sun from Stonehenge during the winter solstice.

The Government, as part of its £15 billion road strategy, is committed to

upgrading all remaining sections of the A303 between the M3 and M5 to a high quality dual carriageway standard, starting with three schemes: one at Stonehenge, one between Sparkford and Ilchester and the third on the A358 between the M5 at Taunton and the A303 Southfields Roundabout.

Highways England plans to hold a statutory public consultation in early 2018, and in the meantime, details of the preferred route are available on the [scheme consultation page](#).

Ahead of Friday's Winter Solstice event at Stonehenge, Highways England has issued [travel advice](#) to drivers planning to travel on the A303.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

[News story: Minister Alan Duncan announces an additional £7m in funding for the Colombian peace process](#)

As part of the UK's continuing commitment to a lasting peace in Colombia, Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister for the Americas Sir Alan Duncan has announced an increase in financial support for Colombia's Peace Agreement with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

Over £7m of additional funding from the Government's Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) will support the peace agreement at a critical stage. This includes a new £5m contribution to the UN's Trust Fund, which will help reintegrate former combatants and support recovery in post conflict areas.

Sir Alan Duncan, Minister for Europe and the Americas, said:

I am delighted to announce that the UK is increasing support to Colombia's Peace Process with over £7m of additional funding, bringing our total support in 2017/18 to almost £12m.

There has been significant progress since the signing of the peace agreement in November 2016. The FARC have laid down their arms and

become a political party. But there is more work ahead. The implementation of the peace agreement is now entering a critical and complex stage, which is why we are increasing our support.

The new funding has enabled the UK to contribute an extra £5m to the UN Trust Fund, which will support projects that help stabilisation in post-conflict areas, and the reintegration of former combatants back into normal life.

The funding will also provide additional support to the Organisation of American States Peace Monitoring Mission in Colombia, and to the work of the UN Office for Human Rights. We remain committed to helping Colombia implement the peace agreement as swiftly and comprehensively as possible.

News story: Accelerator Innovation Network Event: Regenerative medicine at the front line

Suppliers who attend the event will hear presentations about the [regenerative medicine at the front line themed competition](#) which seeks to make a real difference by saving lives and reducing disabilities.

The competition is looking for proposals for regenerative technologies that can be applied very early after severe, traumatic injury resulting from combat or acts of terrorism.

Recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan saw step changes in trauma care that led to great improvements in survival following blast or ballistic trauma. This has meant, however, that people survive with increasingly life-changing injuries.

Our belief is that the very early use of approaches in regenerative medicine, one of the [UK Government's 8 great technologies](#), has the potential to further revolutionise front line trauma care to save lives and to improve the quality of life for survivors.

This competition has 2 challenges:

1. bioengineered blood and blood components
2. the preservation and regeneration of soft tissue using biophysical approaches

The outputs from this work would be developed for use by the UK's Defence

Medical Services and other organisations who deliver trauma care in challenging environments. These approaches should also reduce the burden on later care supplied by both MOD and the NHS.

Up to £500,000 is available for Phase 1 of this themed competition and at least a further £500,000 will be available for Phase 2.

This competition closes at midday on 11 April 2018.

[News story: Changes imminent to how ARSAC licenses research](#)

The Administration of Radioactive Substances Advisory Committee (ARSAC) is urging researchers who administer radioactive substances to read up on imminent changes to the way that approvals are granted.

New regulations under The Ionising Radiation (Medical Exposure) Regulations 2018 (IR(ME)R), due to come into force on 6 February 2018, will replace the current process for the administration of radioactive substances with a new licensing system for practitioners and employers.

Public Health England will manage all applications for licences. Fees may be charged depending on the type of licence applications for employers and research approval. There will be no fees for practitioner licences.

ARSAC will still need to approve research studies involving the use of radioactive substances. There will be no change for research sponsors, such as a pharmaceutical company or university, who should continue to apply to ARSAC for authorisation.

Submit all applications for site-specific research certificates by 16 January 2018.

Nasreen Parkar, Scientific Adviser to ARSAC said:

When the new regulations come into force early next year, any valid research certificates will be considered to be a licence for both the practitioner and the employer at the identified installation. This will allow administrations of radioactive substances to continue in line with the research study protocol.

New or uncertificated research studies will require both the employer and practitioner to have an appropriate licence that includes the procedures within the research protocol.

Currently each research study requires a research ARSAC site certificate. Under the new system, this will no longer be the case.

Once an employer has a licence in place and there are licensed practitioners entitled under the employer's procedures, administrations can be performed under the procedures detailed in any ARSAC-approved research study within the scope of the licences.

Installations that currently submit more than one research certificate application a month may need to apply early for employer licences and practitioner licences. There is nothing in the new regulations to stop employers or practitioners applying for licences any time after the new regulations come into force.

At present 80% of research studies involve the use of bone scans, MUGA scans, GFR studies and FDG tumour imaging. Once these and any other routine procedures have been included on employer and practitioner licenses, no further amendment is required to take part in a research. Researchers will need to notify practitioners about the research protocol and the employer will need to confirm that each installation has the capacity to perform the procedures.

Louise Fraser said:

It's really important that research sponsors and sites understand how these changes will affect their local processes. We encourage everyone to look into what the changes will mean for them so that they are aware of what, if anything, they will need to do.

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