

Annual Review of 2022

Championing the power of vocational
technology to improve skills for work





Dominic Gill

Chair of Trustees

2022 was another significant year for Ufi VocTech Trust as bold steps were taken to engage more widely in skills and vocational education policy debates, while also forging relationships with key stakeholders and influencers across the four nations.

It is of great importance to us that our work extends beyond the boundaries of London, and I am pleased to see showcased within this report our many achievements in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the rest of England. We are committed to furthering our reach and impact in these regions, and I look forward to seeing this work continued in the coming year.

As we reflect on yet another busy and eventful year, we would like to take a moment to highlight the Week of VocTech 2022. This event, which celebrates the profound impact of Vocational Technology on learners, employers, training providers, and society as a whole, was hailed by many, myself included, as the 'best yet'.

The week has cemented its position as an annual highlight in my own personal calendar and has become an occasion for us to connect with familiar faces and make new acquaintances, while showcasing the achievements and progress of Ufi-supported organisations and their impact on the myriad learning communities they serve.

As we move forward into 2023 and beyond, we the trustees are confident that our grant funding, venture investment, strategic partnerships and advocacy will continue to help shape the landscape of vocational education and training in the UK.

We hope that you find this annual review informative and engaging, and thank you for your ongoing support of our mission.



Rebecca Garrod-Waters

Chief Executive

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We know that technology can play a powerful role in enabling adults to develop the skills they need to succeed in the workplace, and we remain unrelentingly focused on ensuring that everyone has access to the tools and resources they need to succeed, regardless of their circumstance or background.”

As we look back on 2022, it gives me great satisfaction to see how Ufi's work has made significant strides in supporting improvements in adult skills across the UK. These times of reflective pause are particularly important in a rapidly changing skills landscape as we seek to support people into and at work through the development of digital tools and pedagogies. This annual review provides a welcome opportunity for us to assess our achievements and look to the year ahead.

We know that technology can play a powerful role in enabling adults to develop the skills they need to succeed in the workplace, and we remain unrelentingly focused on ensuring that everyone has access to the tools and resources they need to succeed, regardless of their circumstance or background. I am pleased to report that 2022 was another year of impact; both immediate and longer term. We supported 27 new projects with grant-funding (bringing our total to over 250) addressing current and developing skills challenges faced by a variety of industry sectors. Importantly, each of these projects serves a notably diverse group of learners from right across the UK, many of whom face significant barriers to learning and skills development.

We also made five new investments through Ufi Ventures, bringing our portfolio of companies to 12 and adding weight to the growing VocTech investment market. It's interesting to note that 2022 was the year we witnessed Multiverse become the UK's first 'edtech unicorn', valued at over £1.7b, who were themselves an early recipient of Ufi grant funding in 2016. In recognition of the value of the organisations we support, we were delighted that six of them made it to the 2022 finals of the prestigious Learning Technologies Awards, with four emerging as winners.

Collaboration is essential if we are to tackle the big challenges for the future of work and ensure that learners furthest from education have better opportunity and support. We're looking forward to the continued development of our Strategic Partnerships, including the delivery of our next VocTech Challenge with Learning and Work Institute, both as an opportunity for Ufi to grow and learn, and also to maximise our collective impact and accelerate the pace of change.

We invite you to delve deeper into this publication and take the opportunity to explore our work in greater depth.

Our Strategy

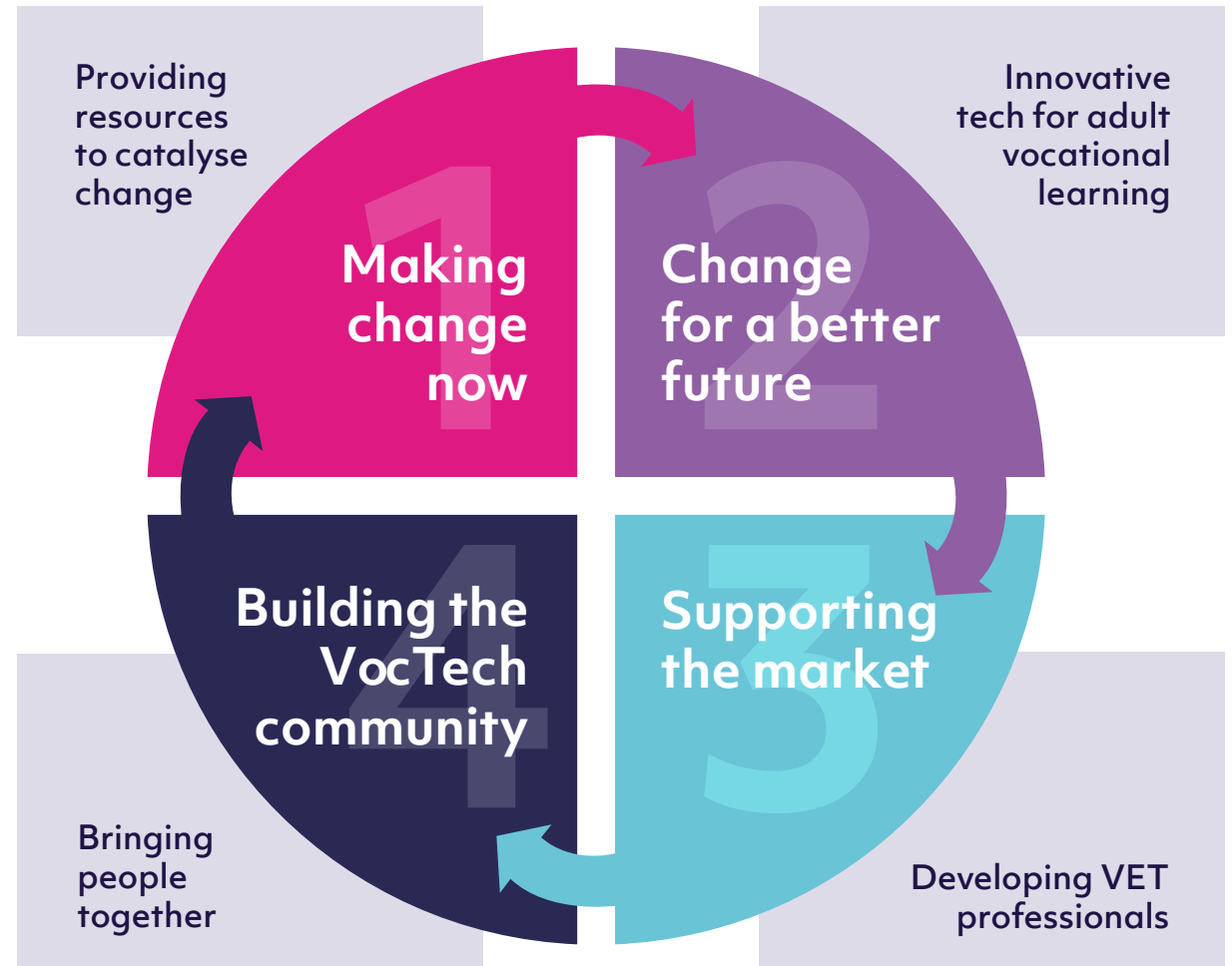
Over the following pages we share some of the highlights from the year, grouped around the four pillars of the Ufi Strategy - the levers we can pull to create lasting behavioural and cultural shifts that create a better future for all.

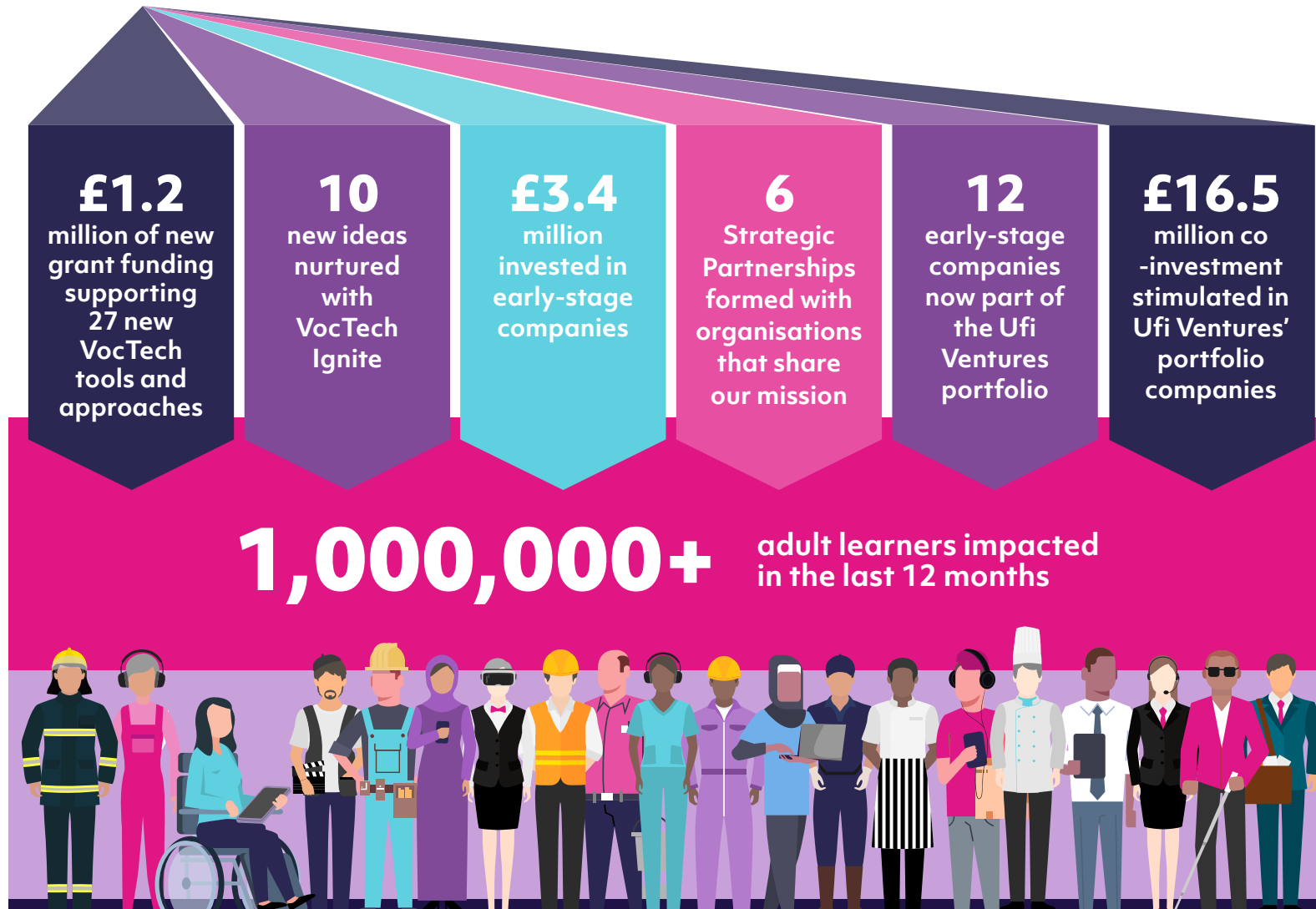
We've included stories and links for further information about some of the organisations we have worked with.

Document key

 = Click to explore

 = Click to watch





Making change now

Developing our VocTech Challenge approach

Our VocTech Challenge programmes have continued to develop, forming a dynamic ecosystem of activity uniting our grant funding, advocacy and partnership work streams to create new insights and solutions to tackle specific challenges to adult learning.

By aligning the tools in our strategy, we continue to leverage our combined knowledge and reach to catalyse change.

 [Explore our VocTech Challenge programmes.](#)

The VocTech Challenge: Levelling up vocational learning for those most impacted by the digital divide

Launched in 2021, this Challenge programme focused on improving access to skills and employment for learners at significant risk of being 'left behind', especially for adults who have traditionally been excluded from traditional educational pathways. The programme included a specific grant fund focused on overcoming barriers to confidence and motivation, projects with our Strategic Partners, and events and advocacy work.

The projects, some of which are introduced overleaf, demonstrated the value and benefits of VocTech in improving access to learning, routes to employment and progress at work in industries facing change.

Crucial to the impact of this VocTech Challenge was attracting organisations to apply that were deeply embedded within their learner communities. We know that real change can only be achieved through a person-centred approach, and all of the projects engaged in the programme have demonstrated that they are trusted parts of their learner ecosystems with direct access to the lived experience of the users they support.

 [Explore our insights from the Challenge programme.](#)

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Technology may be a disruptor that allows us to do things differently, but when addressing the confidence and motivation of learners across a wide spectrum of geographies, subjects and skills, the key to progress remains in empowering people to have agency in their own lives.”



Caroline O'Donnell
Project and Partnership Manager, Ufi





Celebrating the continued impact of our grant funding

We aim to build long-term relationships with our grant recipients and are proud to watch them continue to flourish long after our funding ends. 2022 was a significant year for many of our past projects.

In 2022...

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2022 has been an important year for a number of projects funded by Ufi in previous years that have gone on to scale and have a significant impact on adult skills in the UK.”



Jane Holmes
Head of Grant Programmes, Ufi

iDEA



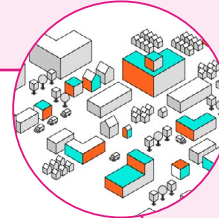
iDEA awarded their 10 millionth digital badge to learners building their functional digital skills.

We continue to work together through our Strategic Partnership.



First supported in 2017

RSA



The RSA Cities of Learning programme continued to grow across the UK, with over seven cities and counties now working to create new pathways into learning and employment.

We continue to work together through our Strategic Partnership.



First supported in 2018

CENTURY



Century is now used in 65% of Further Education colleges across the UK helping approximately 170,000 young people achieve the standards required to continue their vocational studies.

We currently support Century through the VocTech Challenge 2021 grant fund.



First supported in 2017

National Numeracy



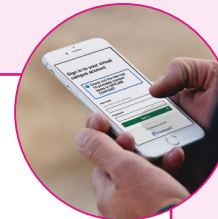
The National Numeracy Challenge platform supported half a million learners to build their confidence with numbers.

We currently support National Numeracy through the VocTech Challenge 2021 grant fund.



First supported in 2017

MEGANEXUS



Meganexus enable people in prison to gain skills by providing a secure means for learning and employment support.

They now support more than 100,000 service users across every prison in England and Wales.



Project first supported in 2017

Change for a better future

The VocTech Seed Grant Fund: a test bed for new ideas

Our VocTech Seed Grant Fund is designed to support the development of new digital tools and approaches with the potential to transform how adults gain skills for work.

We know that with innovation comes an element of risk and are proud that our VocTech Seed grant fund provides a supportive environment in which new ideas, new approaches and new technology can be developed.

As well as access to funding, our grant recipients benefit from our commitment to provide enrichment support, leveraging our extensive experience and expertise, and giving all our projects the best chance of success.

In 2022 we ran two VocTech Seed grant calls, providing a total of £1.2m of grant funding and support to 27 organisations. From upskilling prosthetists and orthotists to preventing knowledge loss in the rail sector, every project is focused on improving skills acquisition for professions, industries and skill levels that are undervalued or under-supported and where technology can have a big potential impact.

You can explore the 2022 VocTech Seed grant funded projects in our online VocTech Directory. We have included some examples of the following pages.



Explore our 2022 VocTech Seed grant cohorts.

As of 2023, the VocTech Seed grant fund has been re-named VocTech Activate and increased to a maximum of £60k grant funding per project.

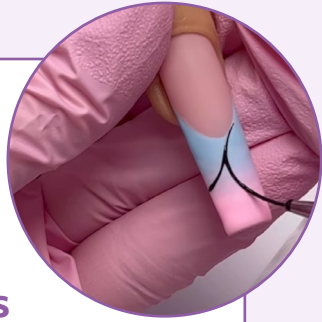
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We've been really impressed by Ufi's flexible, knowledgeable support, that extends beyond simple funding, keeping our focus on our learners while encouraging us to experiment and test our approach throughout. Thank you."

Jon Feaver

Head of Training and Competence,
Seabot Maritime

THE GLOSS SPOT



Building careers in the nail industry

PROBLEM: Beauty salons and nail bars are ubiquitous on UK high streets, but there has been a decline in nail technology courses at colleges. Non-specialist beauty tutors are overutilised and limited ongoing support is causing disengagement, frustration, discouragement and higher drop-out rates amongst learners.

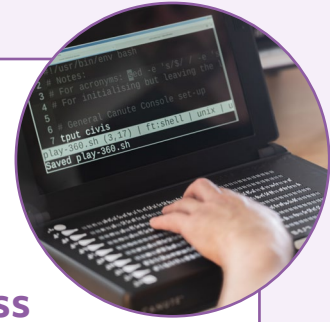
SOLUTION: Gloss Spot will support the creation of a mobile app to help learners develop the specialist skills needed to build a career in nail technology. Users will improve their skills with a versatile training programme featuring video tutorials, livestreamed workshops and social media tips all accessible from a mobile phone.



Upskilling UK rail technicians

PROBLEM: The UK Rail industry faces a formidable and systemic challenge as a result of the current shortage of skilled labour. With almost 28% of the rail workforce above the age of 50, nearly 15,000 employees are projected to retire by 2025. If left unaddressed, the situation is predicted to worsen significantly within the next five years.

SOLUTION: This project will generate an augmented reality educational resource, initially focused on repairing and servicing train doors. It will be tailored to the needs of UK-based rail technicians, comprising 30,000 apprentices and those reskilling while employed. By facilitating access to digital learning and capturing the expertise of retiring veteran engineers, the project will overcome the reliance on physical training rigs, reducing training time and costs.



Widening access to STEM subjects

PROBLEM: Existing Braille displays are single line. This is hugely limiting for adults who are blind or visually impaired studying technical subjects that involve reading graphs and tables.

SOLUTION: Bristol Braille are developing a Braille reader that scans and displays much larger volumes of information than is possible with other systems, including spreadsheets and tables. By bringing together existing hardware, software and e-learning content in a new, accessible and scalable teaching solution, the project aims to advance the careers of people who are blind or visually impaired, widening access to STEM subjects and supporting the learning of advanced technology skills.



Ufi Ventures

Stimulating investment in adult vocational technology

2022 was a busy year for the Ventures team as we continue to provide direct investment to early-stage companies developing adult vocational technology.

Led by Helen Gironi, our new Director of Ventures, we increased our investment portfolio from seven to 12 companies, providing initial and follow-on investments at pre-seed and seed level to support growth and impact as well as to demonstrate market rates of return.

Evaluating the impact of our investments is crucial, and so in 2022 we increased our focus on diversity within the portfolio, making sure that we consider a wide range of perspectives and experiences.

In addition to our financial investment, we have also continued to develop the enrichment and support we offer to our portfolio companies. In September, we held our first Portfolio Day, providing an opportunity for our companies to connect, collaborate and share insights. We look forward to hosting another next year.

2022 also saw the launch of our quarterly investment reports exploring VocTech market activity, in partnership with Tyton Partners. As well as helping to inform our own investment strategies, the reports, which have been well received by industry, provide a valuable resource for the growing market investing in vocational technology.

You can sign-up to receive our reports on the link below. In addition to our reports we also continued to share our expertise and insights at several major industry events including the EdtechX Summit, OEB Berlin and London Edtech Week.



Sign-up for investment reports and the Ventures Bulletin.



**£3.4m total investment
More than £16.9m
stimulated co-investment**

Ufi Ventures offer a five-day turnaround on initial decisions for investment; encouraging more companies to pitch their ideas and see if our investment could be a good fit with their needs.

If you are looking for early-stage investment please get in touch and send us your pitch deck.



Visit Ufi Ventures.

Strategy pillar **2** Change for a better future



Podcast-style audio courses helping workers to learn on the go.



2022 Investment



Providing data literacy skills for businesses and employees.



2022 Investment



Supporting unpaid carers with knowledge and skills.



2022 Investment



Transforming the way students engage with providers.



2022 Investment



Marketplace to book skilled, verified tradeswomen.



2022 Investment



Immersive soft skills training using VR.



Removing the barriers to a career in cyber security.



Supporting early years practitioner learning.



Personal learning budgets within workplace learning.



Technology that makes language learning accessible for all.



Helping job seekers find high-quality employment.



Careers platform to experience the world of work and training before you apply.



Supporting the market

VocTech Ignite: Providing expert support to explore next steps

We have continued to offer our VocTech Ignite programme alongside every open grant call in 2022. By invitation only, VocTech Ignite is designed to support unsuccessful grant applicants whose ideas have real potential to make a difference, but who lack the experience or know-how to develop the idea into a digital solution.

In 2022 we supported ten organisations to work with Ufi to take a deep-dive into their concept and help develop its potential. Not all of them go on to apply to us again – sometimes the Ignite process itself is enough to show them how to take their idea to market, to decide now isn't the right time, or even to go in a different direction entirely. In 2022, two previous "Ignite" organisations went on to successfully apply for Ufi funding. Their work during Ignite has helped them get off to a flying start.



Find out more about VocTech Ignite.

Grant Funding done differently

Throughout 2022 we have continued to offer our projects significantly more than just financial capital. Using our supportive approach to grant funding we create rich opportunities for our grant funded projects to obtain critical knowledge and social capital at every stage of their journey.

This year we have offered expert-led sessions in how to pitch ideas and to create key messages for target audiences; how to navigate intellectual property rights, trademarks and sub-contractor agreements; and webinars in how to design effective learning strategies, define learning outcomes and measure learner progress.



Thanks for all your help. You really aren't 'just another funder'!"

Spencer Holmes
Director, Totem Learning



Supporting the growing community of VocTech professionals

Our focus on supporting the professional development of learning technology practitioners has continued, helping to connect and amplify the growing voice of VocTech professionals across the Further Education and training sectors.

The 2022 sector audit conducted by the AmplifyFE network mapped more than 260 communities of practice supporting teaching and learning, the use of technology, and subject specialism in the vocational education and training sector. This is more than double the figure in 2020, a clear indication of growth in the sector and one which reinforces the importance of continuing professional development.

To support this growth, we have worked with our Strategic Partners the Association for Learning Technology to launch the AmplifyFE Community Space, an online community of practice for Further Education practitioners which has already engaged more than 2,200 practitioners.



Explore the sector audit and join the AmplifyFE community.

Sharing best practice and increasing our reach

As in previous years, we have continued to nurture strong relationships and partnerships from across the learning community, helping to share best practice where we see it and advocate for the impact of vocational technology.

Events provide us with a good opportunity to promote vocational technology and during 2022 we spoke at more than a dozen events including the EdTech X Summit, London EdTech Week, and OEB in Berlin. Many sessions were delivered in collaboration with partners including the Association for Learning Technology (ALT), Tyton Partners, Resolution Foundation and the RSA, helping to increase our reach and amplify our joint messages.



Building the VocTech Community

Strategic partnership to increase our impact

We know we can't achieve our mission alone and so partnership is crucially important. From inspiring leadership-level engagement to commissioning research and supporting the sharing of knowledge, we have continued to develop Strategic Partnerships with organisations who share our mission.

During 2022 we continued to work with our existing partners as well as launching new Strategic Partnerships with the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) and Catch22. The following are our highlights from the year.



Our Partnership with AELP is focused on improving digital teaching practices and supporting more than 800 independent training providers to deploy the best digital tools and pedagogies.

Together we are undertaking a major piece of research on the use of technology in the FE sector and its future in work-based learning. We are particularly focusing on how the use of technology is changing and how staff are ensuring they have the required CPD to take advantage of emerging technologies.



Our Partnership with Catch22 is working to mobilise the power and energy of tech ventures to drive reform in youth employment services.

Together with the Social Tech Trust, Ufi and Catch22 launched the Social Tech Amplifier to unlock opportunities in the public sector supply chain and prepare new ventures for scale through development activities and access to investment.



RSA


2022 was a busy year for our partnership with RSA as we continued to unite people, places and ideas to explore how tech can deliver adult skills.

As part of our VocTech Challenge (see page 6) we launched new research "Rebalancing Adult Learning" at the Adult Education All-party Parliamentary Group (APPG), supported the continued expansion of the Cities of Learning programme, and shared our vision for the future of skills during the RSA President's Lecture and Dinner with guests including Julia Gillard, Chair of Wellcome, and former Prime Minister of Australia.



In addition, Ufi have ongoing Strategic Partnerships with:



 Explore all of our Strategic Partnerships.



Public Advocacy

2022 saw a substantial increase in our public affairs activities, helping shape the future adoption and deployment of digital tools and pedagogies.

Through our consultation responses, research and stakeholder engagement we continue to make the case for broad reform of the UK skills system to better support and integrate with the learning technology required by adult learners. Highlights from the year include:

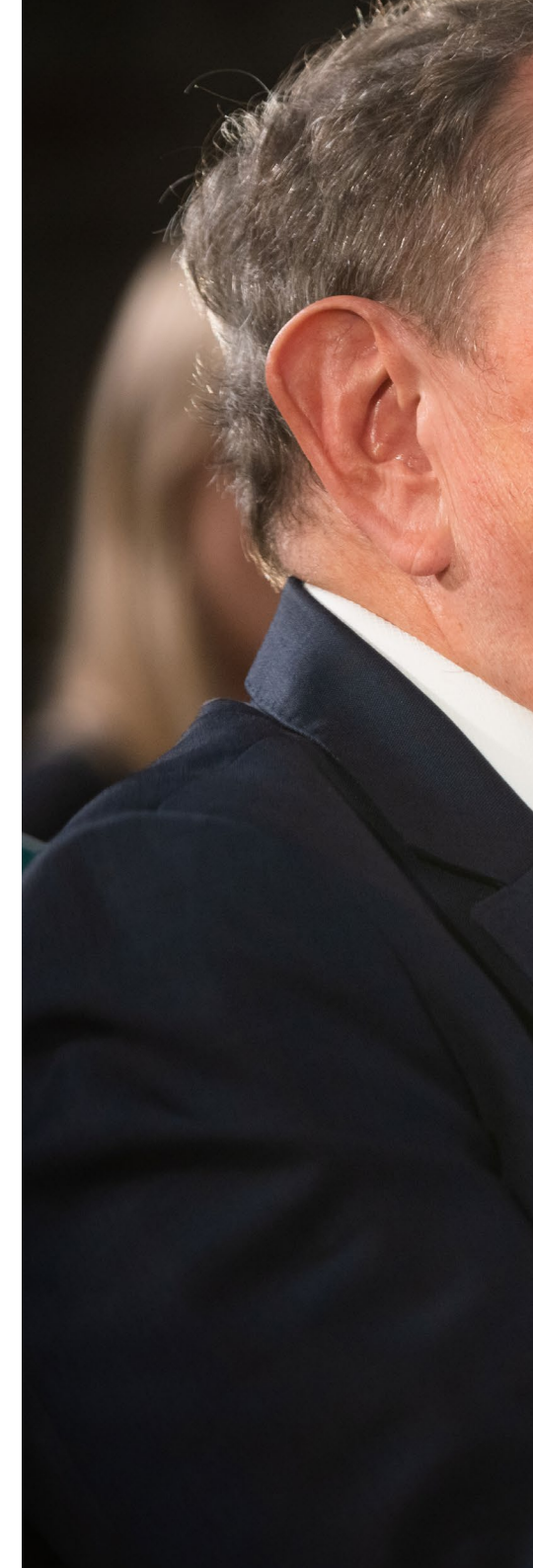
- Bringing together key stakeholders from the Welsh skills sector for an event in Cardiff, including Rhun Ap Iorwerth, MS, Chair of Digital the Cross-Party Group on Digital.
- Submitting formal responses to consultations on Education in Transport, Education in Prisons and The future of Post-16 Education.
- Convening an “in-conversation event” between Ufi’s CEO and the RSA CEO, Andrew Haldane, exploring why equitable access to skills is vital to building a thriving economy. Delivered as part of our Week of VocTech, guests included The Rt Hon. the Lord Blunkett, Tom Bewick, CEO of Federation of Awarding Bodies and others.

“

I’m looking forward to continuing to build Ufi’s voice and credibility, increasing the numbers of people who consider technology critical to addressing the UK’s skills shortages and getting adults learning.”



Josh Smith
Public Affairs Manager, Ufi





Click to watch the discussion between Rebecca Garrod-Waters, CEO of Ufi and Andrew Haldane, CEO of the RSA.



What's coming next? 2023 and beyond

By the time we publish our annual review we have already begun delivering next year's activities. Highlights of 2023 programme of work include:

- Sharing the external evaluation of our 2015 – 2019 grant funding programmes
- Enriching our financial support with networking, connections, and access to expertise, giving all Ufi-supported projects and ventures the best possible chance of success.
- Launching the VocTech Activate grant call
- Partnering with the Learning and Work Institute to deliver our next VocTech Challenge programme "Skills for an Economy in Transition"
- Exploring the development and deployment barriers facing independent training providers with our Strategic Partners the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP)
- Strengthening links across the four nations, including stakeholder events in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

To stay in touch with all our latest updates and news from the VocTech Community, please sign-up to our newsletter.





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