

The Manufacturing Growth Fund is backing innovative business projects in the region with funded specialist advice

by Andrew Edwards

AN INNOVATIVE SCHEME TO meet the challenge of the North West's manufacturing productivity gap is available to as many as 270 businesses with the vision to stimulate growth. The North West was given a shot in the arm with the introduction of the Manufacturing Growth Fund – a specialist grant-backed scheme to help firms deliver projects to improve their businesses and create jobs.

More than 70 manufacturers have taken advantage of the scheme across the region so far, and firms are now being encouraged to cash in on a further 200 available opportunities.

Manufacturing Growth Funds in the North West's five Local Enterprise Partnership areas are looking to back innovative business projects that will improve productivity, increase growth and generate employment.

Businesses with eligible projects can claim fully-funded specialist advice on site by expert sector advisors and receive help along the way in delivering the programme.

SMEs can apply for expert support to identify new opportunities and barriers to growth. The expert adviser works alongside the SME to help create and plan a specification for a new growth project.

Typically, a project value is around £10,000. The Manufacturing Growth Fund grant will contribute 30% towards the cost.

The Manufacturing Growth Fund recognises that the sector in the North West has always been a leading contributor to the economy.

It's the same at a national level. Manufacturing employs 8% of UK workforce and contributes 10% of the national GVA (£168bn).

However, there is also a clear gap in productivity that the fund is there to help reduce.

The post-recession UK economy has not experienced progress in terms of productivity. UK productivity fell, as one would expect, during the recession but rather than recover it has remained broadly flat ever since.

Labour productivity is now 16% lower than anticipated and output per hour is 20% behind the G7 average – the worst position since 1991, according to the NWBLT Productivity report, 2016.

The North-West Manufacturing Growth Fund is designed to give business the teeth to combat these key issues. The expert guidance sets this fund apart by reassuring the business they're investing wisely and maximising return on investment.

So far 16 businesses have benefited from completed projects, creating

Look at what's on offer



21 jobs in the process, safeguarding 27 more and introducing ten new products.

A further 26 businesses are currently implementing their projects with the grant funding agreed. These will see 34 new jobs created, 84 posts safeguarded and the introduction of a further nine new products by the end of 2017.

Samantha Nicholson, Head of Manufacturing and Low Carbon at the Greater Manchester Business Growth Hub said: "It is widely recognised that the North West is one of the UK's largest regional economies and has the greatest manufacturing output, producing 9% of the UK's total exports.

"The region continues to set new standards for UK manufacturing in sectors such as aerospace, automotive, chemicals and biomanufacturing. We believe the region should remain the cornerstone of Britain's industrial pro-



Samantha Nicholson says the region is the cornerstone of Britain's industrial production

duction and we're supporting our five LEPs to take on this challenge.

"We have a clear vision to create a more progressive and innovative mindset with businesses across all manufacturing SMEs in the North West and support them with funding and access to our expert advisors, which will undoubtedly help enhance their productivity and growth.

"We have the scope to take on around 200 more projects and would urge businesses to get in touch with their local fund and get the process started."

The initiative is working collaboratively with the five local Growth Hubs in Cheshire & Warrington, Cumbria,

Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Liverpool City Region, so each area benefits from having its own specialist advisor who can also connect manufacturers into the wider range of services which may complement and follow on from their Manufacturing Growth Fund project.

Funding for the scheme comes from the European Regional Development Fund and is guaranteed until at least the end of 2018.

To enquire about the Manufacturing Growth Fund visit manufacturingnorthwest.com

Case study: JPL Flavours

Jake Lavelle launched his Wirral-based JPL Flavours manufacturing business in March 2016, employing seven people and specialising in alcoholic, soft drinks and flavour profile boosters.

But the firm hit a barrier when it came to expanding

Jake says: "We were performing well, but for the business to grow we needed to start working with large food and drinks manufacturers. Despite liking our product this proved impossible because we weren't accredited to the right standard."

Jake knew from his previous experience in the sector that accessing the major end users and high end supply chains was essential for the business to grow.

"We needed British Retail Consortium (BRC) accreditation, but the cost to achieve this was prohibitive, which was when we heard about the Manufacturing Growth Fund," he said.

He contacted Phil Anders, a specialist Manufacturing Adviser in Liverpool City Region who met with Jake to

understand JPL Flavours' growth plans.

He said: "JPL Flavours had made brilliant strides in their short time operating and they were already working to a high standard. It was clear from meeting Jake and the team that they had ambitions to grow the business and they were prepared to work hard to achieve this."

Together Jake and Phil devised a consultancy project, of which 30%

of the cost would be grant funded through the Manufacturing Growth Fund.

Jake procured the services of a consultant who specialised in quality systems and BRC accreditation to deliver the project, and over a three month period the business implemented new processes, upskilled the workforce and identified new equipment to improve productivity.

Jake said: "It was really helpful to



Jake Lavelle (left) with his manufacturing adviser Phil Anders, with whom he devised a consultancy project

speak to an expert about our plans. The BRC accreditation was a large investment, and it was important to consider the risks before implementing this. Phil reassured me that it was the right decision when we analysed the new markets it would open up and jobs it would create in the business.

"We achieved BRC accreditation in April 2017. Since then we have started supplying five large food and drink manufacturers and taken on three more employees to help us meet demand."

By handing over some of the day-to-day aspects of running the business my time has been freed up to focus on what I'm passionate about – flavour development and winning new business.

"The Manufacturing Growth Fund has enabled us to make a huge leap forward; it is the best thing we could have done for the business. I'm due to start recruiting for a new flavourist to increase our range, which will only see us grow further."

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