



rise

The Calderdale Confidence Index

Supporting businesses across Calderdale to
navigate change and build a more resilient tomorrow

A practical guide to building business resilience

Foreword



**Opening comments by
Ebrahim Dockrat MBE.
Director of Commercial
Services and Partnerships
at Calderdale College.**



Calderdale is a centre for enterprise and boasts an above national average of sole traders. It is our belief that enterprises across the region hold the key to district's future growth. However, uncertain economic circumstances, not least as a result of Brexit and COVID-19, mean that businesses of all sizes are under more pressure than ever.

Uncertainty has become a constant for organisations across the UK, and unfortunately Calderdale is no exception. Yet, despite these challenging circumstances, the region's network of businesses continues to demonstrate a stoic resilience.

Calderdale businesses have a long history of resilience and collaboration, as demonstrated by the way we pull together to rebuild following the recent floods. It is this resilience that we at Rise believe is vital for business growth and economic survival post COVID-19 and as we enter the transition phase of Brexit. This sentiment is shared by 75% of local businesses. However, despite good confidence levels across the regions, our research also shows that currently small businesses are not taking advantage of the financial support available to them to upskill their workforce. Financial support that is available right now.

In this benchmarking study, we explore how businesses in Calderdale are missing out on opportunities, the importance of plugging into local support services and wider hurdles impacting companies across our region. It is our hope, that this study will help local businesses become more resilient, signpost employers to support services and raise awareness of the crucial role skills development plays in making businesses more adaptable during changing times.

The support services around today, may not be available tomorrow, so it is crucial that small businesses act now to build their business resilience.

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Report findings and advice at a glance

How to make your business more resilient:

Businesses are cautious about economic growth in the region, but there is an appetite for growth. In this section we use research and expert insight to explore the importance of confidence and how businesses can build resilience.

Should I wait to invest in my business?

There is a clear correlation between those companies that invest in skills and business confidence. In this section we discuss how capitalising on training and skills opportunities can help support business growth.

How to overcome a reduction in growth:

The most common business challenges are reduced sales, a slowdown in new business leads and expansion/growth plans being put on hold. In this section we identify the key hurdles facing businesses, and how they can overcome them.

How to upskill your workforce to drive growth:

A quarter of businesses need new skills to enhance their team in order to navigate the new economic climate. Here we demonstrate the important links between upskilling and business growth.



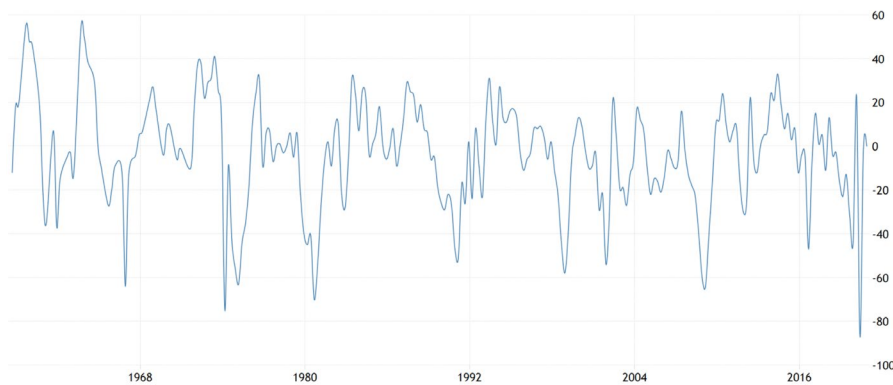
74%

**of small businesses are
confident about growth**

How to make your business more resilient

The importance of business confidence

At the start of 2020, national confidence dropped to its lowest level amongst UK businesses in 25 years to -87 as a result of COVID-19. At the end of 2020 these levels shot back up to just -1¹.



This growth is record breaking. In fact, such a sharp bounce back in confidence has never been documented before and it is reflected in output. It is no surprise then, that leading psychologist, Jim Taylor Ph.D. believes “confidence is the most important psychological contributor to performance in the business world”.

Fortunately, our research shows the impact of such national optimism can also be felt across Calderdale.

Confidence levels across Calderdale

Overall, 44% of businesses in Calderdale are confident about the growth of their own operations in the current economic climate.

Opinions on the chance of economic growth across the region as a whole, however, remains cautious amongst businesses, with 46% admitting they are currently concerned for the future local economy. The long-term view is slightly more optimistic, with 48% stating they aren't concerned about economic output for the region over the next 12 months.

It's an interesting story, and one that is echoed across all sectors. The majority of businesses are currently anticipating growth or expect to sustain their current output, but fear for their peers and the region as a whole.

¹<https://tradingeconomics.com/united-kingdom/business-confidence>

Practical advice for businesses

So, we know that business confidence remains high, or at least balanced, across the region. However, there are some clear learnings we can draw from our research data to help support and bolster greater growth in the short, medium and long term.

The biggest lesson of all is the importance of flexibility.

Flexibility and change

Perhaps the most interesting statistic revealed in the Confidence Index, is the higher resilience levels of smaller companies. On analysis, it appears that the companies that have been able to react and respond most quickly to the changing needs of the market are faring far better than those that did not.

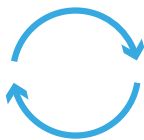
Building a more responsive business structure is crucial to driving resilience in uncertain times. Here's our practical advice for professionals looking to implement change:



Stress test your business

Business as we once knew it will never be the same again. The world is now more digitised than ever before. This is impacting almost every employer in some shape or form, and for many, has transformed the way business is conducted.

It's important that businesses recognise this shift, and plan for it. Old ways of working may no longer be practical or fit for purpose. Taking time to stress test a business model and review all aspects, from how to generate leads to a company's online presence, is vital.



Build a change culture

At times change isn't well received within a company. It may seem threatening and add to a sense of uncertainty. Despite this, it's clear from our data that being open to change is often the smartest way to overcome hurdles.

Building a change responsive culture is key to creating a more flexible business. As part of this process, clear communication is crucial. By ensuring teams, employers and even clients are informed and understand the need to change, businesses can build an increased internal and external customer satisfaction.



Motivate workers

Workers are the linchpin to ensuring a smooth change transition for your business, and so it's important that employers have the skills and knowledge to enable the management of change effectively within their organisation.

By motivating co-workers throughout the change process, employers can develop a happier and more effective workforce, which in turn increases output and positively impacts clients.



My advice

Nicola Lawton,
Office Manager,
Mezzo Studios

**Skills are key to
business innovation
and development**

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A changing market place left us with a need to upskill our team. We accessed support through Rise at Calderdale College, which provided us with guidance into what skills development would be most effective for our business.

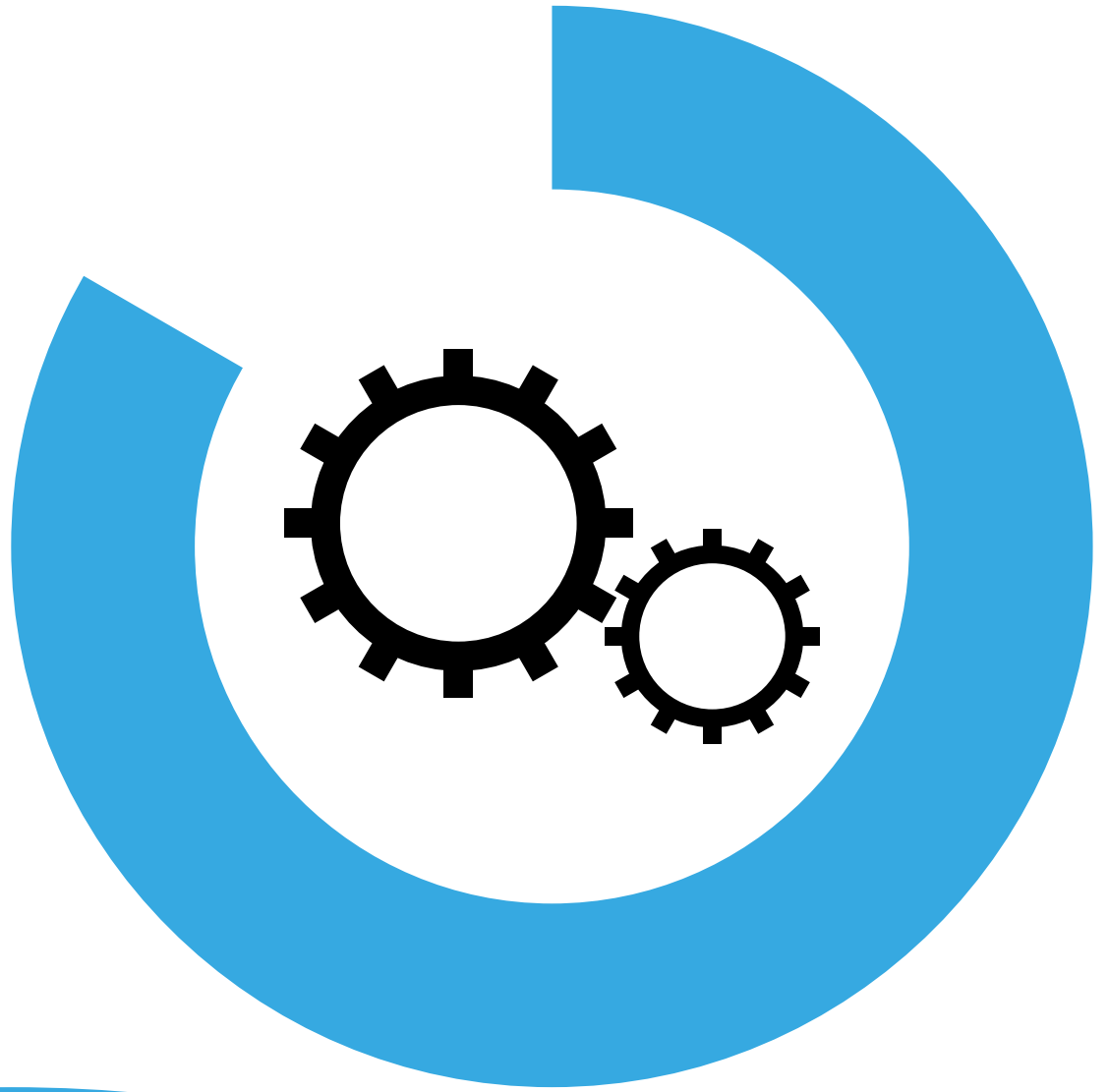
We enrolled our team on a bespoke business management course and were also able to take advantage of a generous 40% funding towards the cost of the training. The training has brought more innovation and confidence to our staff within their role by upskilling knowledge further within management areas, enhancing communication and streamlining to create greater efficiency within the team.

The impact on our businesses has been highly valuable and has provided us with an unwavering enthusiasm, despite such challenging economic times.

Rise can help you access support from Calderdale's business community, as well as offering a Change Management training programme. The course is designed to help provide employers with the skills and knowledge to enable the management of change and make potentially difficult situations more manageable.

For more information visit:

www.calderdale.ac.uk/employers/employer-training-catalogue/



84%

**of businesses think
resilience is the key
to success**

Should I wait to invest in my business?

There is a clear correlation between those companies that invest in workforce skills and those that state they have business confidence. Our research also shows that there is a growing demand amongst local employers for skills development and access to new skills as a whole.

Almost a quarter (23%) of businesses have seen a change in the demand for skills in their business in 2020, with one-in-five (22%) revealing that accessing talent has become a challenge.

But despite this clear need, skills funding is proving a major hurdle for Calderdale business, with 38% stating that investment concerns are holding them back from addressing required skills gaps across their company. This trend is further exasperated, as employers expressed time constraints are stopping them from upskilling employees within their business.

These perceived hurdles to accessing skills support is resulting in just 26% of businesses actively upskilling team members, and only 13% of employers accessing the skills funding available in Calderdale to fully-fund or part-fund their required training.



Practical advice for businesses

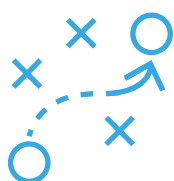
It's clear that Calderdale businesses aren't accessing the support available to them. Whilst businesses looking to address skills needs within their organisation must invest in some capacity, there is financial support currently available to part or fully-funded courses.

Alongside the support that is available via Rise, here is our advice to businesses that want to strengthen the skills of their workforce, but need guidance and support to reach their goals:



Set clear objectives

Consider exactly what support your business needs and the results you want to achieve. By doing this you can begin to plan the appropriate next steps and importantly, assess what support is available.



Create a plan of action

Once you've established your objectives, you need to create a plan to meet those goals. Across Calderdale there is a rich business community offering support. Touch base with the team at Rise who can point you in the right direction and help you to put a workable plan in place for your business.



Weigh up the options

If you have a clear plan in place, you will understand that there is a range of different opportunities available to employers looking to upskill their team. Be it hiring fresh talent, or looking to take on an apprentice, investing in upskilling existing team members or simply improving management skills to increase company output, the options are endless. Be sure to explore what's available before you settle on a final decision.



Make it measurable

It's important that any investment in training, team development and recruiting is as measurable as possible. Once you've settled on an appropriate route to improving your team, consider how you can measure the success of your activity against your initial objectives. It may be that you are hoping to improve client satisfaction, or perhaps the focus is on increased output. No matter the results, make sure you can track success and use these learnings to further improve your outcomes.



My advice

Councillor Jane Scullion,
Calderdale Council's
Cabinet Member for
Regeneration and Strategy

Reach out and access support

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Calderdale is alive with talented business people who contribute to a thriving and resilient local economy. There are a wealth of support schemes available to businesses of all types across the district, but research shows that despite these schemes being in place, they aren't being accessed by many small businesses. We encourage all employers to reach out, especially during these difficult times, to access the support available.

As a Council we work in partnership with local organisations, such as Rise at Calderdale College, to help with the development and support of schemes that directly benefit local businesses. We are confident that as businesses start using these schemes business confidence will grow and flourish.

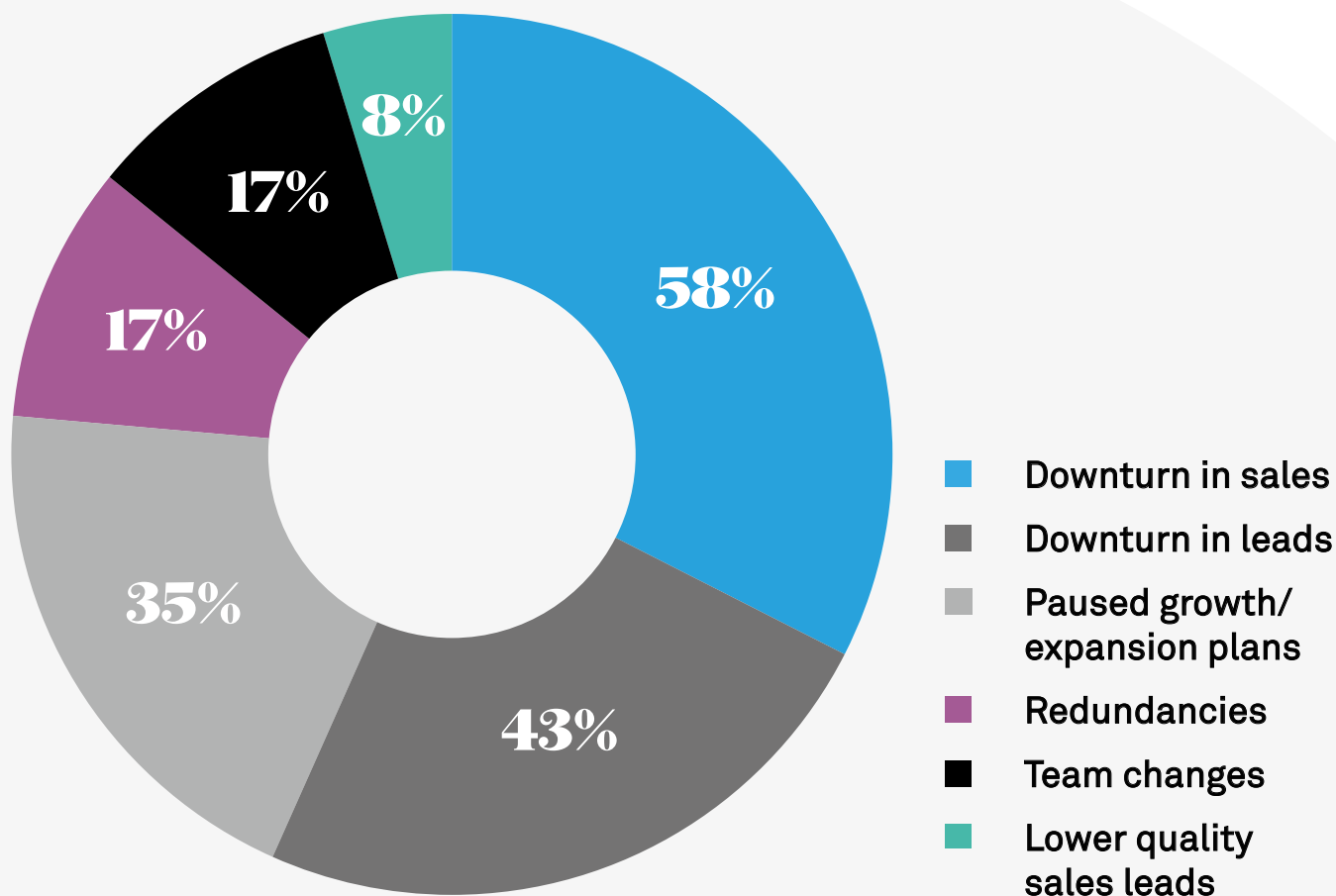
The team at Rise has access to a wide range of training, skills and business development opportunities. Whether supporting with your skills provision, or sign posting you in the right direction to access business consultancy. Our team of experts are on hand to help support businesses thrive in Calderdale. For more information on how Rise can support your business, visit: www.calderdale.ac.uk/employers/

How to overcome a reduction in growth

The high confidence levels of businesses across the region is encouraging, however the businesses we spoke to remained cautious about the challenges that lay ahead.

A downturn in sales is currently the biggest challenge facing employers across Calderdale, with 57% revealing that reduced sales is having a negative impact on their company. Little surprise then, that 43% of businesses also reported a reduction in new business leads during this same period.

The impact of this is a slowdown when it comes to expansion rates across the region, with 35% of companies revealing investments for growth had been placed on hold.



Practical advice for businesses

When analysing businesses confidence across Calderdale, key trends emerge that can help us build a blueprint for a successful development plan. Out of the businesses that demonstrated highest confidence levels, 68% were accessing skills, funding, investment or upskilling team members, showing the importance of skills development.

Skills and workforce development

By investing in training workforces and developing skills within a business, we can raise productivity, boost business growth and increase profitability. More important than ever at uncertain economic times like this.

Across Calderdale there is a wealth of support available to employers looking to address skills and training gaps. This includes the support Rise is able to offer to develop employees through a comprehensive range of professional courses, such as professional qualifications, industry specific training and help with access to funding.

Here's our advice to accessing support with skills and workforce development:



Access expert advice

Training needs for a company can be complex, and according to the size or sector of a business can vary dramatically. Before committing to investing time or budget into skills development, we recommend speaking to a team of expert advisors who can work with you to identify the skills needs within your business and recommend appropriate solutions.



Explore funding availability

While training and skills development requires a time commitment from employers, it doesn't necessarily have to involve funding. Employers that want to develop workforce skills and expertise can work with Rise to identify potential funding opportunities available. This may mean discounted training fees, access to free courses or support in opting for the most cost-effective training solution for a company's team.



Consider alternative requirements

Businesses looking to grow their teams or diversify skill sets can take advantage of proven schemes that are supported with funding and financial incentives. Opportunities such as work experience programmes, where employers can benefit from the exceptional talent of students, to apprenticeships, which are a cost-effective way for employers to expand their workforce, are ideal for businesses looking to develop talent for the future.



My advice



**Sherrie Gill,
Employer Engagement
Officer for Rise**

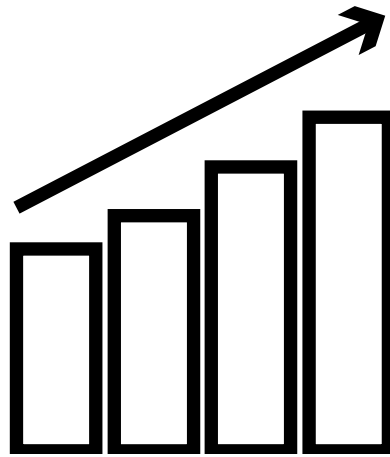
Take advantage of Calderdale's support eco-system



Calderdale has long been recognised as an outstanding place to do business. The majority of businesses in the local area agree that the region offers a rich, diverse and innovative platform to build resilient organisation. One of the key reasons for this is the support eco-system that surrounds businesses in the Valley. From funding support offered through the LEP and Calderdale Council, to the range of bespoke training and skills opportunities local companies can access through Rise, this supportive community plays a crucial role in the development of thriving local businesses.

If your business is struggling, or you feel as if you aren't fully aware of the support services open to you, we'd encourage you to reach out to Rise. As a team we have an abundance of knowledge on support packages and funding options available to local employers, and can help support you on your journey to build business resilience and upskill your company.

To undergo a skills diagnostic and discover the opportunities available to your business when it comes to skills development, visit www.calderdale.ac.uk/employers/skills-and-workforce-development



**Organisations
upskilling teams are**

48%

**more confident
about growth**

How to upskill your workforce to drive growth

Realising improvement in skills development is the key to employers building more resilient business models.

With over a quarter of businesses in Calderdale in need of new skills to enhance their team, and a fifth struggling to access funding to help, it is crucial that employers are provided with the tools and services needed to help their businesses thrive.

Calder Carers is just one example of a local organisation that has built business resilience through access skills support via Rise at Calderdale College. Lydia Woodall, Outreach Team Manager & Specialist Young Adult Carer Worker, at Calderdale Carers, explains:

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As a charity operating across Calderdale to meet the needs of carers, recent events have led to huge changes in how we deliver our services. This has meant that our need to adapt quickly has been unprecedented. We placed a focus on upskilling our team through management training, HR practice and a managing change course. The skills learnt have assisted us to manage our growing demands, care for our staff and most importantly to continue supporting those caring for our most vulnerable members of society.

I am certain that businesses looking to refine their skills, overcome complex and often difficult hurdles, and help prepare for a successful future would benefit from accessing some form of training provision. It has helped us overcome some of the most challenging working conditions in recent history and provide a quality service to our clients.

Calderdale Carer's experience is echoed across hundreds of businesses that have access support through Rise. It highlights how important investing time into skills development is for businesses, not least as our own research shows that those investing in these areas are outperforming those that do not.



Key takeaway points

Through numerous testimonials, research and insight, this report has revealed the important role skills and funding support plays in helping Calderdale businesses build resilient business models.

Here we have summarised our key takeaway points from the report:

- 1** Explore funding options for training and skills development within your company
- 2** Consider accessing free courses
- 3** Get in touch with Rise for a free no-obligations skills consultancy
- 4** Use Rise to access the wealth of business support services on offer across Calderdale



Closing comments



**Closing comments by
Ebrahim Dockrat MBE.
Director of Commercial
Services and Partnerships
at Calderdale College.**



This study has demonstrated a clear – and admirable – resilience amongst the Calderdale business community. As we work together to build a stronger future, it is important that we realise improvement in skills and expertise. Calderdale is a fantastic place to do business and it is our duty as skills experts to ensure local organisations are provided with the necessary skills support and funding they need to realise their potential.

It would be a huge loss for the region for any business to miss out on the opportunities presented by skills development, because of the time, perceived expense or difficulty in accessing the relevant support.

Over recent times, we have seen a renewed need and focus on skills. Whilst hundreds of local businesses were forced to place activity on pause, we, as a community, had the opportunity to assess the real needs of our customers, teams and businesses.

We are proud that Rise has helped to address and identify this need for new skills provision across the region. Through collaborative working with local employers, we have been able to help ensure businesses survive and grow to thrive by delivering tailored training and skills funding advice.

It is this support that drives Rise. We are absolutely committed to helping local employers meet their full potential through accessing skills. As we move forward into a new age of working, we are committed to maintaining this focus and in turn helping businesses across the Calderdale Valley to thrive and flourish both today and in the future.

By working together, we can upskill, re-skill and shape skills to build a secure tomorrow.

Is Rise the perfect fit for your business?

If you are interested in finding out how Rise can support your business, visit www.calderdale.ac.uk/employers/rise-form/ and one of our expert advisors will be in contact.

Alternatively,



call [01422 418 430](tel:01422418430) or



email employers@calderdale.ac.uk

About Rise

What is Rise?

Realising
Improvement in
Skills &
Expertise

Rise helps businesses to grow by offering support, training and funding. Our team of expert advisors will work with you to identify the skills needs within your business and recommend appropriate solutions from our comprehensive training and apprenticeship offer. You could also benefit from the exceptional talent of our students, through mutually-rewarding work experience schemes.

Employers wanting to develop workforce skills and expertise can access support through Rise, exclusively available at Calderdale College.