

South Bristol Workforce for the Future – Briefing

1. About the West of England Workforce for the Future Programme

WECA has launched an **£8 million programme** entitled ‘Workforce for the Future’ (WfF) with a core aim of supporting small and medium size enterprises in the West of England area (all 4 local authorities that make up the former Avon area). This £8m is made up of £4m ESF and £4m WECA investment funding. This funding will be available for programmes for **3 years 2020 – 2023**.

Part of ESF priority 2.2, **the aim of this programme is simply to support SMEs** – it is not primarily about activities for unemployed or employed individuals – it is about improving the support and systems for SME employers. However, through putting a new system in place, this may result in an SME employer accessing apprenticeships, providing more ‘decent jobs’, accessing training for their workforce. Whereas this programme won’t pay for training for individuals, it will improve employer understanding of the training and skills system so they can access resources and help with their workforce development planning. New systems can support employers to access a skilled workforce – now and in the future, therefore projects can help build stronger links with schools and education settings, involving inspirational careers activities in school; they can also help employers to market their opportunities for individuals – whether that is graduate retention; placements for young and older workers.

The aim of this programme is that a total of **470 SMEs will have been engaged, of which 350 will have completed a meaningful project**. Over the lifetime of the project, a number of core SMEs will become mentors and provide case studies to support other SMEs to benefit from key learning and investment.

WECA is acting as a lead commissioner and they have issued a call for projects – some may be focused on one area, some will be West of England wide. **Integrated consortia are forming around industries and localities**. These consortia are involving partners that can help manage the whole customer journey – including partners who are in a strong position to reach interested SMEs, and those partners who have a ‘route to market’ for example those organisation that can provide or broker apprenticeships, those organisations that can source potential apprentices.

2. A South Bristol proposal

Bristol City Council teams (Employment, Skills & Learning and Economic Development) have been working together with a range of partners on a Workforce for the Future Project for South Bristol.

Our simple idea is to support SMEs in South Bristol, with targeted activities in the most deprived wards, so that small local businesses can get easy access to HR and workforce development information, advice and resources to grow their workforce and develop their employee skills in order to meet future productivity challenges, contribute to industrial estate improvements as well as help build a thriving local economy.

We have identified a number of priority outcomes we’d like to achieve through our project:

- As a result of an initial in-depth **workforce and skills audit**, each SME that we work with will have a **customised action plan** with supported opportunities to enhance their workforce development, in particular through diverse recruitment and workforce skills development.

- Each SME will have an opportunity to create at least one new entry role which is developed as a **funded work trial**, enabling them to ‘try out’ a potential new employee who is **matched into the role from the local community**. Paid work trials will build on previously successful schemes managed by Bristol City Council (Future Jobs Fund and HYPE West). Young people and older residents facing the greatest challenges will have opportunities to obtain work experience and improve their confidence, skills, and work readiness.
- Each SME engaged in our project will also learn about **new apprenticeship digital accounts** and receive advice and support so that they can take on an apprentice, potentially as a direct progression from the work trial.
- Each SME will also be supported to access information, advice and about **workforce development opportunities** – including potential workforce and business development programmes (e.g. Future Bright; adult skills accredited training and qualifications).
- As a result of our project, SMEs in a specific locality would **develop stronger links with local community based providers and services** – including schools, colleges, community organisations, local authority services, DWP Job Centre Plus and other local employment support and advice services. They will also be plugged in to business support networks and services in Bristol and the wider West of England area.
- SMEs will also be supported to pledge support and **provide meaningful experience of work** opportunities for young people attending local primary and secondary schools. Through these activities, young people will discover more about the world of work, about local employers and career opportunities and pathways, making contact with positive role models in different work places in their community.

3. Project Legacy

By the end of the three year programme, we will have strengthened local SME networks in Bristol – with improved links to West of England services - to enable greater collaboration to spread good workplace practices, as well as strengthening links between SMEs and their local communities, schools, colleges, universities, employment and business support services resulting in improved talent pipelines and more responsive skills curriculum and offer.

We will have supported SMEs to access new and existing resources and services to support their recruitment and workforce development needs. We will have supported SMEs to provide experience of work, work trails, supported internships and apprenticeships to inspire young people and adults to connect with great career opportunities in their local area. SME employers will be more motivated to train and retrain their staff and support progression at all levels.

4. Next Steps

WECA have delayed the application process allowing time to consider the focus of the programme in light of Covid 19. Once they have reviewed expressions of interest from potential applicants, and we have a green light to proceed, we will finalise our project plan and application, contacting each delivery partner to define their contributions in a written service level agreement. The final bid will be signed off by our Section 151 Officer and submitted by the deadline of 2nd June.

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