

# SUPPORTING THE REGION THROUGH ECONOMIC RECOVERY

West of England Mayor Tim Bowles and the West of England Combined Authority are bringing the region together, alongside the Local Enterprise Partnership, business, universities and the region's councils to drive economic recovery and renewal, following the impact of Covid-19.

We're taking action to help people and businesses immediately affected and taking action to ensure our residents and businesses across the region are getting the support they need.

For individuals in need of support, they should be directed to Future Bright, who can help signpost them in the right direction.

- **Bristol:**  
Email [futurebright@bristol.gov.uk](mailto:futurebright@bristol.gov.uk) or call 0117 9222250
- **Bath & North East Somerset:**  
Email [futurebright@bathnes.gov.uk](mailto:futurebright@bathnes.gov.uk) or call 01225 395555
- **South Gloucestershire:**  
Email [futurebright@southglos.gov.uk](mailto:futurebright@southglos.gov.uk) or call 01454 866008

For businesses, including those who may be considering making redundancies, direct them to our West of England Growth Hub

**E:** [wearegrowth@westofengland-ca.gov.uk](mailto:wearegrowth@westofengland-ca.gov.uk)  
**T:** 0117 4566955

## Skills

- **Expanding Future Bright:** The eligibility criteria for the West of England **Future Bright** initiative has been changed and can now provide dedicated 1:1 coaching support for people who have:
  - Been made redundant or laid off
  - Are at risk of redundancy
  - Have had their hours significantly reduced, and therefore have a reduced income
  - Are self-employed and whose income or ability to earn has been severely impacted
  - Are furloughed employees, if their reduced income means they are eligible for Universal Credit

The Combined Authority provided **£3.6m** so that the scheme can continue for an additional 3 years from January 2021. Sign-ups under the Covid 19 criteria are over 25% of the current referrals into the Future Bright. The Future Bright offer forms part of the rapid redundancy response for business and can be contacted via the teams embedded in our councils.

- **Giving certainty for Adult Education providers:** WECA has devolved responsibility for the **Adult Education Budget (AEB)** amounting to £15m per annum to help adults over the age of 19 to develop the skills and qualifications needed for life, work, apprenticeships and further learning. AEB will continue to provide the underpinning foundational skills needed by residents to access regional opportunities, particularly considering increased need, as unemployment rates rise.

With our support, AEB providers have already undertaken extraordinary work to ensure that delivery was able to continue as fully as possible during the lockdown and are now working on plans to enable a full return to learning in September. We have begun to secure some additional resource from Government – funding for high value qualifications and Sector Based Work Academies – and will deploy this accordingly as part of the overall recovery effort.

- **Supporting apprentices and other learners:** by talking to our colleges and training organisations about how we can best support those currently in apprenticeships to learn and gain skills as well as minimising disruption. We have lobbied government hard, on behalf of our major employees, for flexibilities on the Apprenticeship Levy.
- **Revising and relaunching Workforce for the Future (WfF):** This is an £8m fund aimed at helping SMEs plan for future skills needs. This has been relaunched, with a clear, revised prospectus against which a core support service will be delivered to provide immediate engagement with SMEs on skills/training brokerage and skills planning. The refined shape of the service has been developed with partner input and the service will be finalised by **early September**. It will run until December 2023, with a further funding round to fund sector or geographically focused projects to support SMEs hit hardest by Covid-19 to follow.

- **Adapting and Expanding the West of England Careers Hub:** The Careers Hub has been expanded to work with schools to progress against government's career development objectives – the **Gatsby benchmarks**, and has adapted to allow a virtual approach to ensure young people do not miss out on vital advice during this critical period. The region has improved on rankings and a recent Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC) survey of schools reported our satisfaction levels are higher than the national average. CEC funding for next year has been agreed, and alongside the Combined Authority's match funding this allows the team to start planning for the year ahead.
- **Addressing mental health through Thriving at Work West -** Mental health in the workplace support has been highlighted as a challenge by many of our businesses. Through WECA, the region's local authorities, Public Health England and business ambassadors, Thriving at Work West aims to raise awareness, provide information, advice and guidance and to develop online tools to support businesses and individuals affected.
- **Delivering innovative digital skills through iSTART:** A new innovative digital skills programme, that will see the creation of a new facility on Bath College's City Centre Campus. It will be home to the SETsquared University of Bath Innovation Centre; a new, disruptive adult skills offer; and a collaborative University of Bath/ Bath Spa University research presence.
- **Adapting the Growth Hub:** In the short term, the **West of England Growth Hub** managed by WECA prepared resources to help businesses through the initial 'crisis management' phase of Covid-19, and has since developed a range of support packages to respond directly to what businesses are highlighting as critical issues in the context of recovery and renewal. Through the Hub, Enterprise Executives are on hand to provide advice and support, including through new measures including the following:
  - **Trading Better Online** – designed to provide specialist support to help businesses become digitally enabled and improve their resilience and productivity e.g. through enhanced e-commerce, accounting software, CRM...etc. The programme launched on 8th June 2020 and has already seen 32 SME referrals and we have invested more WECA funding to double the number of companies. The project is a partnership approach between WECA and TechSPARK.
  - **Financial Resilience** – support which targets the region's accountancy expertise to help SMEs (5-100 employees) plan for financial resilience. The programme has recently launched and is delivered by a partnership between WECA and the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England & Wales (ICAEW).
  - **Intellectual Property support:** WECA has an in-house specialist adviser from the Intellectual Property Office (IPO) to help businesses understand the basics of IP and how best to protect it. Resource, promoted through the Growth Hub, is free to use and accessible via desktops, tablets and smart phones.
  - **Mentoring for Growth:** The Mentoring for Growth programme has been refocused during the crisis to a Rapid Response Mentoring Programme. Eligibility criteria has since been relaxed after raising it with government, so more of our SMEs are able to access the support.
- Working with the West of England local authorities, additional resource is being put in place to increase local outreach and help local areas respond more flexibly to business needs.

## Business

- Developing and implementing the **Redundancy Response Initiative** including a new group to deliver targeted support initiatives to businesses at risk of, or making, redundancies. The group is coordinated by the Combined Authority and includes the local Councils, DWP, National Careers Service (Adviza), SERCO, WTPN, TUC, FSB and Business West. Higher Education providers will also be included in the group.

It is actively working on several live cases. We are also developing a Talent Retention Platform for the region alongside, to help redeploy people into alternative employment and training and enabling businesses to source talent.



- Our **Creative Scale Up** programme's first cohort is halfway through its programme, and fully engaged on-line with their mentors and peer-to-peer groups. A **further 20 businesses** have been recruited for the second cohort has now been recruited; the application window for a third cohort is open.
- **Low Carbon Challenge Fund:** The West of England Low Carbon Challenge Fund will run over three years with a total of £1.7m in grant funding to help firms:
  - avoid emissions that can harm the environment and contribute to climate change
  - reduce energy bills
  - lower maintenance costs and retain equipment for longer
  - make buildings more comfortable and healthier for staff o access cutting edge low carbon technologies
- West of England Green Business Grants support SMEs to improve their energy efficiency and reduce carbon emissions. We have already invested £200,000 in local businesses and will be investing a further £800,000.
- **A new Business Innovation Fund:** The West of England Combined Authority's Business Innovation Fund provides SMEs with tailored support and funding to bring new products, services and processes to market. This includes:
  - Grants between £20,000 - £50,000 to invest in innovation
  - Support and guidance to move from concept to production
  - Collaborate with our region's leading research institutions
  - Advice on intellectual property, testing and research and development roadmaps

## Further action to support Recovery

- **Bolster Growth Hub capacity.** This will include:
  - a partnership between WECA and Business West to deliver a **small grants programme** for business adaption (with specific support available for the tourism and hospitality sector).
  - a support package for **'peer to peer' networking** and collaboration across multiple sectors to facilitate action based learning and sharing of best practice and knowledge.
  - Skills development support for SMEs through the Workforce for the Future.
  - Decarbonisation advice and signposting.
  - Increasing account management and business engagement activity with indigenous businesses.
  - Focusing effort to attract new business to the region and respond to inward investment enquiries.
- WECA led a consortium of partners in the submission of a speculative fast-start **Made Smarter Expression of Interest into BEIS for £21m**, to deliver a package of interventions across the South West. Made Smarter assesses how UK manufacturing can benefit from the evolution of technology and increasing digitalisation. This has the potential to engage with between 3,000-4,000 manufacturing SMEs.

## Innovation and exports

- ✓ We have relaunched **Digital Engineering Technology and Innovation (DETI)** programme has been reframed and relaunched to maximise its role in the region's recovery from Covid-19. DETI is a research, innovation and skills initiative. It will develop and accelerate digital engineering across multiple industry sectors – to benefit future generations of engineers and engineering products, and to help tackle global challenges. WECA funding of £5m is match funded by the High Value Manufacturing Catapult and industry.
- ✓ Support funding bids e.g. **Future of Flight Bid:** An R+D project to support regional electric flights into Bristol Airport as well as un-piloted passenger drone flights from Bristol city centre and surrounds direct to the airport and **5G Create (Logistics) Bid:** The bid project aims to show how 5G capabilities and capacity can improve logistics management and impact on air quality by reducing traffic congestion.
- ✓ Through **WECA's Productivity Challenge programme**, pilot new approaches to increasing export activity across the West of England economy. With further financial support secured from government and through additional support from WECA's Productivity Challenge programme, there is an opportunity for partners to come together to pilot new approaches to increasing export activity across the West of England economy, particularly for SMEs currently disengaged and in areas of identified strategic opportunity
- ✓ Made the case for a **freeport pilot** in the region to draw investment from around the world and help transform the area by bringing high-value jobs to the areas of the region that have been hit by the decline in manufacturing, building innovative business clusters and levelling up areas left behind areas





## Transport

As the region responds to the impacts of Coronavirus, the Combined Authority's new role as Transport Authority has been particularly important to ensure that those who need to travel to work across the region can travel safely. During the crisis WECA has worked with transport providers to ensure key workers could get to their place of work safely. It has:

- Secured **£1.76m** of Government funding to keep our supported bus network running, while demand is reduced.
- Committed **£10.73m** to continue bus service contract payments, concessionary travel payments and maintain Community Transport operations.
- Worked with businesses to communicate travel advice and encourage walking, cycling and staggered start times where possible
- Underwritten **£3m** for councils to implement temporary measures such as temporary cycle lanes and wider pavements across the region to help people to travel safely while social distancing is in place

The temporary measures will help more people to feel confident walking and cycling and we are building on this by investing a further **£10m** in longer term cycling and walking solutions to improve air quality, physical and mental health and reduce congestion in the region.

In the longer term, WECA is bringing partners together to improve transport across the region, and fix the chronic underinvestment the region has seen in the past. This **£350m** investment programme will provide sustainable, long-term solutions to help people move around the region more easily, reducing congestion and improving the environment we live in.

We've already allocated millions to improving our busiest routes – including rail, road public transport network improvements and walking and cycling routes. This includes:

- Extensions and improvements to the metrobus network, connecting residents to job opportunities, improving connections with the Park and Ride as well as making it easier for people to change from one form of transport to another
- Introducing the MetroWest rail network which will revolutionise our rail services by generating over 1 million new rail journeys and give 80,000 people access to train services.
- Spending millions on walking and cycling improvements over the next five years alongside a new 'Active Travel' promotion campaign to capture the changes in travel that Coronavirus has brought. Our Cycling and Walking Plan proposes investment in cycling and walking routes of **£411m** over the next 16 years, focussing on 30 local high streets as well as improvements along 55 continuous cycle routes
- Developing the evidence base for a new regional mass transit system that will revolutionise the way we move around the area, dramatically improving congestion and air quality while reducing our carbon emissions
- Developing a 'Future Transport Zone' proposal which uses smart transport and technology to better manage our network as well as improving the user experience. A trial of E scooters is one of the first projects that will offer a new way to travel around our region benefitting our residents, our environment and our economy. This is being fast tracked following the coronavirus outbreak.