

SCHEME : All Age Advice Centre Pilot

1. Lead Organisation

West of England Combined Authority

2. Partner organisations

--

3. Scheme contact details

Name:	Dr. Naomi Logan	
Email:	Naomi.logan@westofengland-ca.gov.uk	
Telephone:	07920 829 928	

4. Scheme Type – mark with an X

Transport	
Non-Transport Housing Enabling	
Business Support	
Skills	X
Other (please specify)	

5. Is this investment linked to any others within the early investment or wider Investment Fund programme? If so please set out the relationship and linkages.

<p>Details:</p> <p><u>Employment & Skills Portal:</u></p> <p>CEIAG Research - A major piece of research commissioned by WECA in April 2020 into the current state of careers advice and guidance in the West of England region found that CEIAG (careers education, information, advice and guidance) was far too fragmented across our region.</p>
--

Feasibility and Development Funding Application Form

The report made several recommendations (which are now in train, led by our Careers Hub and involving a wide range of regional partners) but the key recommendation that ran throughout the report, was that the Combined Authority should establish an 'all age careers hub'. This would bring together information on all training, employability support and other skills provision available across the region, helping to knit together a fragmented system, simplify the information available by presenting it in one easy to navigate 'all age centre' and ensure that all residents were able to access the support relevant to their needs.

As well as developing a digital repository of information, the report also included recommendations relevant to the training, coordination and dissemination of information to careers professionals so that they are better able to support, signpost and advise residents on opportunities and support available.

This research report was delivered just prior to the outbreak of the pandemic and since then a myriad of new support and skills provision has been put in place, including various local authority-based employment and support services, mostly funded by DWP. These new initiatives support the DWP client base, i.e. the unemployed with short to medium term funding and have been extremely welcome in supporting many residents both during and post the pandemic, however, these services do not address all needs, nor do they singularly address the ever-changing needs of individuals. In order to help individuals to find local, regional and national support, it is proposed that individuals (and businesses) are signposted to the latest provision which best meets their needs and circumstances.

The first step to establish the 'all age hub' was completed in Nov 2020, with the establishment of the Employment and Skills Portal (ESP). This was initially a set of static sheets recording the majority of employment and skills related support available to residents and businesses across the region. This painstaking mapping work took months and was a huge first step in establishing what support is available, which geographies are covered, eligibility and who to contact to access it. These information sheets were published on the Combined Authority's website and therefore were publicly available to individuals and businesses. However, in reality, due to the fact significant elements of the Combined Authority's skills work involves commissioning and working closely with delivery partners, the portal has been mostly used to date by other organisations and stakeholders who have the resource and knowledge to interact with the information to signpost their clients on to provision. See this link: <https://www.westofengland-ca.gov.uk/skills/employment-skills-portal>.

This was a major step forward, and the information was immediately welcomed and used by many regional partners, with many more contacting us for inclusion in the ESP.

To make sure the information in the portal truly transforms and simplifies access, it must also be just as accessible to individuals. It had to be made interactive and searchable by type of provision, eligibility and location. This next stage of development was reached at the end of September 21 as part of the WECA website relaunch. The ESP then became an interactive tool, which enables searches for specific types of support (training, advice, mentoring, wellbeing), by age (to help sift for eligibility), and by local authority area. The new website also includes a 'search function' which compliments the portal and again helps individuals to find suitable provision.

Feasibility and Development Funding Application Form

However, to fully achieve the aims of both the region and the CEAIG research, the information must be kept up-to-date, relevant, and, in order to extend its impact and improve its usefulness in line with the CEAIG recommendations, coupled with human resource.

For clarity and to set out our ambition upfront, we anticipate the stages of development to transform the current ESP into a real and accessible All Age Advice Centre (or other name, to be decided later) as follows:

Phase 1:

- Mapping and creation of static information sheets
- Updated monthly
- Launched: Nov 20 & ongoing

Phase 2a:

- Information pages become interactive and searchable via WECA website
- Information accessible to individuals as well as to stakeholder partners
- Launched: Sept 21

Phase 2b: (the subject of this paper)

- Staff are recruited to support and continue to develop the interactive site – staff will ensure a ‘helpline’ for enquiries and will directly signpost individuals to the best provision for them. This will be local authority, other providers’ or WECA’s existing provision.
- Staffing capacity will also help to develop the pilot and will work across all UA areas and with all key partners to propose solutions to regional needs and gaps to support recovery.
- The ‘centre’ is created, with information, provision, signposting and advice all brought in one place and servicing the provision across the region. The centre will build strong links to regional provision (including National Careers Service and our Careers Hub) but will focus on adults.
- Funding for Union Learning reps to support reach into and referrals from employers on a pilot basis.
- Outputs will include: increased referrals to all provision; an emphasis on ‘quality’ and partnership; improved coordination across the region, minimising duplication.
- Launch: Feb 22

Phase 3: (the subject of a future business case)

- Learning from phase 2, to develop further the All Age Advice Centre by examining solutions to:
- Improve functionality of the site to include career profiles, linkage to Talent Retention Platform (access to jobs), LMI data and the identification of growth sectors, job roles etc, links to external provision, personal skills audits and profiles (linked to job opportunities) or other functionality and/or -
- Increasing advisor capacity to cope with enquiry numbers, possibly enabling follow up aligning with Future Bright regional service, support alongside the simpler signposting service already in place via phase 2b and/or -

Feasibility and Development Funding Application Form

- Establishment of Centre as a central simplifying platform for information on and access to all regional advice, skills and training provision including customer feedback from phase 2
- Other solutions may be determined based on analysis of the pilot phase and regional evidence of need.
- Launch: Spring – Summer 24

A regional approach will complement and add value to existing local arrangements by:

- Simplifying the landscape: this information centre will contain details of all provision, anywhere. It is a shop window, not a delivery mechanism. It complements existing local services in a way that adds value and increases referrals to all. The advice, if sought, will showcase existing support and point the individual in the direction of the right support for them. Many enquiries received by WECA are complex and often require signposting to a multitude of provision/services. The information centre will facilitate this by directing enquiries to multiple relevant services.
- Being boundary agnostic: much provision is restricted in some way, either by where you live, or according to your personal circumstances. Our information will contain everything and will therefore enable us (and any user, in any setting) to find alternative provision.
- To coordinate with all stakeholders: drawing together information through our extensive, regional networks, including through our close working relationships with our LAs, enabling us to showcase and signpost to the widest possible range of support.
- Running the ESP and Advice Centre at regional level also enables swift updates to be made, which are clear and standardised across the entire area. For instance, we are currently developing our reach into green skills and training – at regional level we can easily add markers to information to show which training directly contributes to our shared low carbon ambitions.

Feasibility and Development Funding Application Form

6. Total Funding required for this phase of works

A. Spending Profile (£)

	21/22	22/23	23/24	Total
Investment Fund	£43,562	£185,500	£106,938,500	£336,000
Match Funding - please state source(s)	0	0	0	

B. Cost Breakdown (£)

	Investment Fund (£)	Match Funding (£)
In house staff costs (2 yrs)	£226,000	
Third Party Support (1 yr)	£65,000	
Marketing/minor platform changes	£40,000	
Trade Union Expenses	£5,000	
Total	£336,000	

7. Please describe the scheme to be developed (including its objectives and expected impacts) **and** the proposed activity to be undertaken through this investment.

Feasibility and Development Funding Application Form

A. Details of the scheme to be delivered:

What We Propose:

We propose to develop the regional information described above further and make it more immediately accessible by employing an officer to integrate alongside the interactive ESP. Staff resourcing would enable –

- regular updates and refreshes to the material, liaising with many hundreds of providers whose support is logged within it
- greater linkage of skills support to the Growth Hub, to ensure that businesses can reach the workforce development services available (and included already on the portal)
- greater linkage of skills provision and services to strategic stakeholders and facilitating a streamlined referral process into their own provision
- examine potential alignment in due course of the ESP to the Talent Retention Platform - a source of information on the jobs available in the region – to provide the information to individuals on how to upskill or train to access these good jobs
- alignment of the portal in due course to LMI data and information, helping businesses and individuals to identify areas for growth, job creation and and/or jobs postings – linked to the Talent Retention Platform
- a route for providers (including those commissioned by the Combined Authority) to promote their provision as well as signpost individuals to other forms of training and support
- provide human interaction and advice for those seeking their next steps, and assessing regional demand.

With support and advice, individuals are far more likely to make the right connections, to pursue the support, training/learning or other opportunities open to them, thus progressing into meaningful activity and progression.

Alongside supporting residents directly through the portal and advice line, WECA ultimately needs to address the gap in coordination, training and support for careers professionals in the region and harness their capacity to deliver quality IAG to residents. The need for high quality IAG cuts across many of our programmes from school age to adult provision. Establishing the all-age advice centre would also, in due course, help us to address some of the other recommendations from the CEIAG research:

- Build knowledge of all practitioners of career guidance and specialist providers to ensure effective and appropriate signposting and referral through the ESP. Systems need to be in place to ensure knowledge remains current ie networking events and annual conferences.
- Provide CPD and training for careers and/or other advisory practitioners to use current LMI data and sources of data.
- To increase the digital literacy skills of area career guidance practitioners and ensure greater access to career guidance activities.
- Encourage stakeholders to consider the new Career Development Professional Apprenticeship as a way to build capacity within their teams to deliver high quality IAG.
- Undertake an annual review across the local authority areas to identify gaps in career guidance provision. This would provide evidence to support funding bids.

Feasibility and Development Funding Application Form

- Deliver training that can be rolled out to all relevant organisations to train individuals to triage users and use the ESP effectively.

As part of the All Age Advice Centre WECA are proposing to fund a Union Learning Coordinator. This postholder could be appointed by the TUC with input from the Combined Authority and would report in to both the TUC and WECA's People & Skills Team on a matrix management approach.

From the Unions' perspective, this would allow greater coordination of the network reinvigorating the push for engagement with learning and progression (to the benefit of both individuals and employers). From the Combined Authority's perspective, the ULC would engage and work closely with the officers operating the advice centre set out above, to bring greater understanding of all regional support to the workers, and increasing the signposting rate on to existing services, thereby increasing uptake with no additional investment. This would help us meet our targets for support and ensure that vulnerable workers have the support of their Learning Rep behind them when engaging with further training or learning.

There is national evidence that for every 1 Learning Rep, 10 learners engage with learning who otherwise would not have done¹.

Why We Propose This:

The alternative proposal would be to build and migrate to a stand alone platform. However this is not our preferred option because these demand very high levels of funding and commitment to keep them up to date and are only useful if constantly maintained. Furthermore, they don't facilitate knowledge and expertise to be retained within the organisation. Even if this requirement is met, individuals seeking training and support are much more likely to need a conversation in order to work out the right route for them, therefore for this purpose, employing a professional to respond to queries, provide navigation and advice and interact on a one to one level will be far more effective and impactful than a website or AI solution alone. This will also facilitate closer monitoring of impact and longer-term benefits.

Finally, this pilot approach will build in capacity to enable the Combined Authority and its Unitary Authority partners to examine the changed regional landscape, demand for and shortage of skills, and to build viable, long term, flexible solutions to address these, as referenced above. The knowledge and intelligence gathered through this pilot will inform the design of future provision which best meets need.

In addition, this route was the clear recommendation from the CEIAG (careers advice and guidance) research carried out by the Careers Hub for the service in April 2020 (see above).

The Union learning Co-ordinator will help co-ordinate the network of Union Learning Reps who are able to support less confident learners, and to persuade those with few or no qualifications to take up the training opportunities open to them, as highlighted by the following findings:

¹ (<https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/every-ps1-spent-union-led-training-economy-gets-nearly-ps13-back-new-report-reveals>)

Feasibility and Development Funding Application Form

- More than two thirds of learners with no previous qualifications that engaged with the Union Learning Fund (ULF) gained a qualification through this route
- 70% of all learners (and 79% of those with no qualifications) said they would not have engaged in the learning or training on offer without the support of their union
- 9 out of 10 participants gained at least one new skill, nearly two thirds gained a qualification, and 1 in 4 gained promotion or greater responsibility in their job.

Benefits of this Approach:

- The proposal directly responds to the CEIAG research report and enables WECA to progress against many of the key recommendations.
- The information would be updated on a monthly basis, with the staff able to input and update information directly into the ESP. This would ensure it was always up to date.
- Individual 'light touch' support would be available to individuals by phone, enabling them to understand what they need to make their next step and find the information or be directed on to any existing support or training, thereby bringing a 'system approach' to the range of existing services.
- Those who need more in-depth support and mentoring could be signposted on to the Future Bright service for their area, thereby raising the profile and referral numbers of this service, or to the National Careers Service or local authority support depending on eligibility. For businesses interacting with the service as part of workforce development, they could be signposted onto Workforce for the Future (and its delivery partners), Digital Skills Investment Programme and other such provision, thus helping to drive referral numbers across programmes aimed to support existing and future business needs.
- The officers would liaise closely with all delivery stakeholders on an operational basis to maintain close links and 'hide the wiring' (this includes hundreds of organisational contacts, websites and stakeholders across the region).
- It would meet the gap for regional support, wherever the enquiry originated from and regardless of authority boundaries, and ensure a constant source of advice, guidance and information to all residents and businesses – a source of support, advice and simplicity.

For the Union Learning Co-ordinator the benefits include:

- The Combined Authority ensures greater recognition, understanding of and progression on to its own and regional support mechanisms (as listed in the ESP) by workers via the Learning Reps. We would not have the access or resource to source these individuals ourselves.
- The Combined Authority referrals on to AEB provision, Future Bright, Digital Skills and other projects increases via the Learning Reps

Feasibility and Development Funding Application Form

- The Coordinator acts as part of our fully integrated Advice Centre as set out above, working closely with us to bring together all support, advice and signposting into a single unit. This would strengthen the Combined Authority's 'centre' by aligning unions through the sharing of LMI, information, training materials (developed by the Unions) and contacts
- Workers who most need it most have the support of their Learning Rep (in turn supported and provided with information via us/the Coordinator) to build the confidence to engage with further learning or training
- Learning Reps have a source of support and the network can be extended to those sectors currently under most pressure and most in need of additional support (health and social care; hospitality)

B. Details of the activities to be undertaken through this feasibility or development phase: The activities delivered through this phase are as follows:

- Two-year pilot of the All Age Advice Centre including the provision of a Union Learning coordinator for one year
- Rolling evaluation of the All Age Advice Centre pilot stage to establish viability, impact and optimum delivery/staffing model post the pilot, including building on existing arrangements
- Feedback from 'customers' of the service to ensure we continue to target support in the most effective way, and to inform development of the phase 3 centre. Therefore, full evaluation will be built in and learning embedded into phase 3.

8. Please set out how the activities to be undertaken through this Feasibility and Development Funding Application will be managed and resourced. If use of consultants or other third parties is proposed please describe how these have been, or will be, procured.

Details:

Funding:

All direct funding required for this pilot project will be sourced directly from WECA funds either directly through this application or via existing staffing for management of staff.

Material to be held on the ESP will be generated by the provider base which generates an in-turn match funding element, although this is challenging to quantify and measure.

Staff Resourcing:

The staff required to resource this project will all be mainly employed by WECA although the TUC will take part in the matrix management of the Trade Union Learning Coordinator. The table below indicates the expected staff posts and whether they are new or pre-existing.

Feasibility and Development Funding Application Form

Post:	New/Pre-Existing:
Portal development lead	New post
Trade Union Learning Coordinator	New post
Co-ordinator	New post
Management of the Service	Existing posts (split between WECA and the TUC)

Some of the funds allocated to the marketing of the portal may be used against a marketing officer and/or development of materials, campaigns etc. This contribution will to an existing marketing officer and will not be a new post.

Management:
Overall the service will be managed by a WECA Employment and Skills Programme Manager. The Trade Union Learning Coordinator will be matrix managed between WECA and the TUC.

9. What output will be produced using the funds awarded as part of this Feasibility and Development Fund Application, and when will this be completed?

	Mark with an X	Date (mmm/yy)
Pilot of All Age Advice Service	X	Feb 22 – Feb 23
Evaluation of All Age Advice Service Pilot	X	March 23
Option Assessment Report	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Outline Business Case	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Full Business Case	x	April/June 2022
Second Stage Skills Capital Application	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Other (please state)		April – June 23: next stage development of portal/solutions for regional coordination as set out subject to business case.

10. When do you plan to start and complete your project and what are the main project milestones? Please include the milestones related to the feasibility or development work to

Feasibility and Development Funding Application Form

be undertaken through this application **and** the milestones for the subsequent implementation phase through to completion.

A. Indicative milestones for the activities through this Feasibility and Development Funding*

Milestone	Date (mmm/yy)
Start of Staff Recruitment	Dec 21
Complete Staff Recruitment	Jan 22
Start of Pilot Phase	Feb 22
Complete Pilot Phase	Feb 23
Final Evaluation of Pilot	March 23
Development of full business case for continuation activity	April/June 22
Conclusion of pilot	Feb 24

* Milestones and delivery timetable may change once the service is established in order to expedite some elements of delivery or to build in new elements.

B. Planned milestones for scheme development or delivery beyond this initial phase.

Milestone	Date (mmm/yy)
Roll out of full-service delivery*	March 24

* The full service has yet to be defined – the pilot phase will permit not only delivery of the pilot but development of longer-term solutions to issues identified. These proposals will be submitted as Full Business Cases therefore this date is subject to change depending on the solutions proposed.

11. Application sign off by the promoting organisation:

Senior Responsible Owner	Name:	Stephen Bashford.
	Signature:	
	Date:	

Section 151/Chief Finance Officer *	Name:	
	Signature:	
	Date:	

* Where WECA are the applicant this should be signed by the appropriate Director/Head of Service

Date approved by WECA Committee:	
---	--