

**WMCA Skills Procurement (Adult Education Budget, Free Courses for Jobs & Multiply)  
Market Engagement Event: Monday 13<sup>th</sup> June 2022 (am & pm sessions) / online event Friday 1<sup>st</sup>  
July**

**Event Notes and FAQ's**

**1. Welcome and Introduction to WMCA Skills – Clare Hatton/Iris Both**

Additional notes to presentation: -

- The last 3 years have been challenging particularly due to Covid, however WMCA are proud of what has been achieved. Adult Education is in better shape. Regional inequalities exist and overall, the West Midlands lags behind on Level 3/4 to meet predicted jobs at that level.
- There is still a disparity with residents not meeting requirements for higher skilled jobs. How do we ensure Skills and AEB funding will work more; targeting and make a real difference in region?
- Looking for more innovation, move more people into work and closer to the labour market.
- Multiply – more information to follow shortly.

**2. Approach to Market – Lesley Edwards**

Additional points to presentation:

This engagement event is taking place as potentially there is over £170million available.

Zero carbon will be important longer term. The 'dynamic' nature of this procurement needs to be interpreted correctly.

**3. Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) – Josie Medforth**

Additional notes to presentation: -

- This is public money so needs to be a fair, open and transparent process.
- The DPS means it can be more inclusive e.g., for SMEs, as well as generally less reactionary. DPS is similar to a framework but is more flexible and has a 10 year timespan.
- Don't want to limit market therefore supply base could be continually refreshed.
- Credit checks – we are still working through the process and which (agency) we will use. Please note that we also reserve the right to undertake further financial assessment at a later date.

**4. Tender Process & Timelines – Josie Medforth**

Additional notes to presentation: -

- All tenders will go through Bravo Solutions; therefore, all providers will need to register as a supplier on the Bravo Solutions portal if they haven't already.
- If you (Provider) are not successful in first instance i.e., the pass or fail test, once DPS goes live you will be able to reapply.

## Questions and Answers

	Question	Response
1	How similar is the DPS to the DWP procurement system in the Black Country?	The WMCA Skills Procurement DPS will not be similar apart from the selection questionnaire. Every time we wish to procure it will be through the DPS (except bootcamp which needs to be spent by March 2023 – see answer below)
2	If a provider has been successful previously through an open tender, do they need to apply to the DPS?	Yes, this is an entirely new procurement
3	Are call offs going to be for delivery in excess of 12 months and if so, how will the effects of inflation be mitigated?	Durations for delivery from call offs will vary. Some will be based on short term need while others will be longer term. Delivery will be flexible. Inflation is a standard clause in contracts and will be addressed that way
4	What are the timelines for processing call offs?	There is not a confirmed timeline for each package yet, however the whole process will be streamlined.
5	Is there a minimum or maximum funding amount to apply for?	This will depend on providers financial strategy and risk
6	How will changes in strategy be reflected in the DPS over a 10-year period?	The DPS will be flexible i.e. dependent on need at the time. However, some aspects are likely to stay throughout e.g. Level 2. Others may need to be more flexible e.g. emerging technologies.
7	Will providers have the opportunity to answer questions in a way that doesn't just reflect back the specification? e.g., track record	The skills procurement is looking for something differentiated and targeted. It is the process being streamlined not the call off questions. There will be a dedicated team working on the DPS.
8	Please consider that a 2-week turnaround period is a narrow window to return information in.	Noted
9	What is the WMCA view in reducing sub level 3 delivery in relation to government policy?	WMCA cannot give a political view however we fund many things outside of national criteria as flexibilities. While there are some things that are conditions e.g., resident eligibility, we continue to fund flexibilities that means there is not necessarily reduced investment.
10	Where there are key challenges to AEB e.g., 19-23-year-olds excluded from a full level 2 how will this be addressed?	WMCA can and do use flexibilities to counteract these challenges where possible.
11	How will contract awards be communicated through a DPS to ensure transparency?	The day-to-day management of the DPS will be through Bravo and is designed to be as quick as possible. Letters will be sent out where not successful at selection questionnaire stage
12	How will it be ensured that Community providers are fairly considered in the process?	The procurement process will be a DPS so that it is easier for all organisations to be considered from the outset. We are looking for the best provision from the best providers. The

		DPS will help providers to respond effectively to demand.
13	Can community providers be 'educated' on how to be considered in the process?	We are working with community groups and taskforces e.g., in Birmingham so understand what we need to do as WMCA, and we want to improve this further.
14	How will due diligence be performed as part of the process for providers who work with a lot of partners and will work with more over the lifespan of the DPS?	If WMCA have approved a provider to use subcontractors, then the due diligence will lie with the provider. WMCA look for sub-contractor delivery to add value.
15	What are the interim procurement arrangements from August 2022?	A VEAT notice has been issued regarding this for existing contracts. Bootcamps will be a separate procurement though as this needs to be spent by March 2023
16	When assessing financial criteria for SMEs and charities will the impact of Covid be taken into consideration?	WMCA are very mindful and continue to look at this and want to take a pragmatic approach.
17	Is a provider who isn't an SME likely to be less successful after the selection questionnaire stage, as the MEAT criteria is being used?	Where standard funding rates are used this won't be an issue. Otherwise, where it is innovative delivery, it isn't a fixed model and won't always be about lowest price. Consideration needs to be given to the capability and capacity of the provider.
18	Will Multiply and UK Shared Prosperity Fund be procured through the DPS?	For Multiply – some but not all of this will go through the DPS. For UKSPF the investment is not yet finalised, however there will not be a UKSPF tender in the next 6 months.
19	In terms of qualifying provider numbers, do you foresee the process will be open and closed?	Yes, the DPS will be opened and then closed for the initial evaluation. It will then be reopened and kept open for the duration of the DPS. As an application comes in, they will be evaluated.
20	When call offs are awarded, will the data be published online i.e. similar to how prison contracts are awarded, with successful bidders details are published online?	This could be something we can consider, good idea to look how awards are published. There is a requirement to issue a Contract Award Notice through the e-notification portal notifying all providers who the successful bidder(s) are. Standstill letters will also be issued following contract award. Providers should note that the contract will not officially be entered into until after the standstill period has expired.
21	Stage 2 – do you have a sense of how frequently contracts will come up for tender?	Part of this depends on the contracts from DfES. We would like them to be more frequent and also dependant on how funding flows into us.
22	How welcoming and enabling will the process be for those wishing to collaborate between providers? i.e., for diversity, within the community etc. Some providers may not be able to meet the full requirements but could through collaboration?	We are very keen to understand how we can do this and move away from the old-fashioned prime providers top slicing 20% of funding which could be spent on the resident. Really keen to see more collaboration and understand how we can do better

23	Will the WMCA be able to help the development of smaller organisations?	We are going to look at this internally to see how and what we can do legally. However, we are open to collaboration
24	<p>Barriers to entry – premortem (opposite to post-mortem) as a provider we have previous experience of tendering and getting stuck at the financial phase.</p> <p>How do you view 'Price vs quality' - what is your take?</p>	<p>Premortem - need to seek legal advice.</p> <p>In terms of not meeting certain criteria, the DPS requires you to answer specific questions.</p> <p>Once a tender opportunity is 'live', when selecting providers to deliver we assess both price and quality with quality being the overarching factor. This is another area where we need to look at how we consider and think about the cost vs quality question. Appropriate weightings will be provided for each opportunity at tender stage.</p>
25	<p>When you look at sectors, sometimes the cost of bringing something to market is too much to consider. Say we develop something to work with car batteries and costs £500k with a cost of £5k per learner. The specification is published for £2.5k per learner, therefore not viable for us, how do you stop market failure?</p> <p>It's a mindset and process shift which is huge.</p>	<p>This is something that we would have to work to. Using the example of bootcamps, we only arrived at the standard price after initially paying a wide range of costs for 2 years.</p> <p>We will take back and look at how we package the work and determine the outcomes. We are trying to address how we can procure and deliver the requirements better and are working collectively to achieve.</p>
26	In terms of financial security, if you get to the call off, what would the duration of contracts be?	<p>This would depend on the contract. There will be a variety of lengths not one standard length.</p> <p>A lot depends on funding coming through the pipeline, particularly from DfES who we are pushing for more advance planning. Once the DPS is up and running we will be offering more workshops and asking for feedback as to how to do better.</p>
27	In certain areas, what would you be looking for, will you be using out of area providers for local community programmes?	We are looking for the best provider for the job! Due to procurement rules we cannot restrict to those based in that locality but would require evidence of the providers community connections and evidence of delivery within that community.
28	Stage 2 of the DPS (with regard to call offs for any particular project) for example a large contract, would you be looking for one single provider or more than one if for example you need to be able to deliver £500k but smaller providers cannot undertake that volume?	It would depend on flexibility required at the time. There may be occasions where there could be one provider, or a number of smaller providers contracted.

29	There are concerns that a small provider might not be able to meet the minimum contract values and would have to be a subcontractor where 20% of funding goes to the prime and not spent on the resident or community. How can you prevent this?	We have tried to do this, we have used BCTG as the SWAP Fund holder as it would not have been financially viable for the WMCA to manage the vast number of contracts. Lot 3 was for smaller contracts.
30	Regarding compliance and funding – will we be paid by the ESFA?	No, you still submit your ILR data to the ESFA, but you are paid by the WMCA.
31	How will new providers entering the market get picked compared to existing suppliers? It was felt that existing supplier's that were well known were securing the contracts.  Aside from the financials, because some suppliers are unknown to the authority, what is going to be different this time to ensure that smaller suppliers can apply?	This is not the case; we evaluate providers equally. Need to have a separate conversation if you believe there has been a bias. Recommend take offline with Clare Hatton/Lesley Edwards  The DPS will provide a wider opportunity and help providers to respond effectively to demand.
32	With AEB funding being procured through DPS – will all provision be subject to OFSTED?	All AEB funded programmes will be in scope for OFSTED inspection. Other skills funding that comes through DPS might be subject to OFSTED, but they will be identified in the invitation to tender.
33	What if a provider has not been inspected by OFSTED therefore wouldn't meet criteria i.e. car battery provider?	Will clarify. As an example, the Construction Gateway has an element of flexibility.
34	Multiply funding – can you please provide some information?	Multiply is a national numeracy programme awarded by DfE to sit around AEB not to duplicate. Qualifications can be accredited or non-accredited.  The WMCA have been awarded £16m over 3 years. Quite a large proportion will be looking at delivering to employed learners. Please refer to the WMCA website for updates and further information: - <a href="https://www.wmca.org.uk">UK Shared Prosperity Fund (wmca.org.uk)</a>
35	Will the DPS also be used to tender for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund?	Yes – year 3 when it comes in. There will be one tender (£11.2m) for bootcamps that will be run outside of DPS as it has to be delivered by March 23, details being published soon.
36	When does the 1st tranche of contracts start delivery?	February 2023
37	If applying for bootcamp funding, do we still need to register through the same DBS system?	The bootcamp funding is outside of the DPS system for the forthcoming round. Future rounds will be through the DPS
38	We have previous contract experience but have now rebranded our company. Can we use the same contract track record?	This depends on the status of the company i.e. merger, takeover, separate company etc. If it is a different company, then you will be unable to use the original company's track record.
39	For credit checks, will they affect credit rating? We are conscious we're considering a mortgage at the moment.	The credit checks will be against the company not the individual. If the company is a sole trader, then the company finances can potentially impact the individual.

40	What accreditations will be required. Anything specific e.g., Matrix?	There are no pre-requisite accreditations required, however we would expect the usual safeguarding procedures to be in place. There is a contractual requirement to be working towards the Matrix standard for any successful providers.
41	We currently deliver apprenticeship training at levels 2 -7 - would an example of one our contracts in this area that be adequate, or does it specifically need to be grant finance specifically?	An apprenticeship contract would be a good example of previous delivery. It does not have to be grant funded.
42	You've spoken about Black, Asian, mixed ethnic communities, are you looking for interventions for disabled people including non-visible disabilities?	There is a whole range of different groups including disability groups, the list we have presented is not exhaustive. The specification is likely to ask for proposals to work with groups who are disadvantaged in the labour market and experience would be how you have previously done this.
43	Regarding financial checks. For new companies and SMEs if they do not have 2 years financial accounts. Is a forecasted accounts acceptable?	As outlined in the financial due diligence guidance new companies who cannot provide at least 2 years of financial history will be classed as ungraded. This does not mean they cannot progress and receive funding; it is simply a way of assessing the financial risk.  Should the provider be accepted for funding, monthly financial accounts will be required, to allow WMCA to assess the financial risk prior to the payment of funding.
44	What support is there for new companies to engage?	For new companies we have not specified any length of time a company has to be operating for them to sign up to the DPS system.