

Agenda item 9b)

Appendix B

HotSW LEP Local Growth Fund Capital – Outline Proposal

Petroc – January 2024

Overview

The following provides an overview of our outline proposal for capital investment in digital infrastructure across the FE college estate of Somerset, Devon, Plymouth & Torbay, designed to enhance the learning experience of thousands of learners through improved teaching and access to state-of-the-art resources. Through a programme of refreshing, upgrading and innovating, the colleges will ensure the region has access to digital and other priority skills to support economic growth and productivity.

Partnership

In order to deliver this proposal, Petroc is leading a partnership of the following colleges, all based within the HotSW LEP area, who are working collaboratively across a range of initiatives to share best practice and improve the quality of teaching and learning across the HotSW LEP area:

Bridgwater & Taunton College;
Bicton College (part of the Cornwall College Group);
City College Plymouth;
Exeter College;
Petroc;
South Devon College;
Strode College; and
Yeovil College.

Project Description

This is a collaborative project, with the partners working together to share learning and best practice, but with each partner taking a particular focus to reflect local circumstances, existing infrastructure and previous investments, with the common theme of digital infrastructure and innovative learning technologies to improve accessibility, particularly for disadvantaged learners facing digital poverty. Furthermore, as several partners are members of the South West Institute of Technology (SWIoT), those being Bridgwater & Taunton College, City College Plymouth, Exeter College and Petroc, a substantial element of the investment will support the ongoing development and relicensing of the SWIoT.

The specific project activities are proposed as follows:

Bridgwater & Taunton College and City College Plymouth, who are both members of the SWIoT, propose to work together, alongside their industry partners, EDF Energy and Babcock, to tackle the issue of access to specialist knowledge, specialist resources and specialist equipment for skills development in Energy Future (nuclear and on/offshore renewables). They will explore, develop and implement immersive learning environments, connecting learners, trainers and resources

digitally, reducing the need for excessive travel, reducing replicated investment, capitalising on employer engagement and accessing subject matter experts.

Bicton College (part of the Cornwall College Group), will invest in new infrastructure to provide fast and reliable network connectivity to their residential accommodation, upon which essential services can be secured and new services delivered in the future. This investment will improve safeguarding, as well as improving the residential experience for learners.

Exeter College will invest in new advanced digital delivery infrastructure, which will be more energy efficient, more secure, will incorporate new innovative technologies and increase speeds. It will also support the development of the skills required to drive the region forwards.

Petroc's classroom mobility project will fundamentally shift some of the college's lesson provision from static delivery to mobile delivery, allowing educators to move away from the teaching wall and become more immersed in the classroom, utilising technologies such as high spec 2in1 touchscreen laptop devices and wireless casting at both the Barnstaple and Tiverton campuses.

South Devon College will invest in its open access fleet of digital devices. These devices are particularly important, as a large proportion of the college's students who are in digital poverty. The investment will address the impact on their learning experience of the current limited availability and capacity/performance of the college's current open access fleet.

Strode College has previously used funding from the Office of Students and the DfE's Strategic Development Fund for the first phase of developing the 'Strode College Immersive Learning Labs' (SCILL), which involved renovating and developing new learning facilities. The new funding will be used to purchase additional kit to further enhance the space; this may include VR headsets, laptops and associated equipment (trolleys, screens etc).

Yeovil College will invest in digital devices to ensure it is able to deliver innovative and connective provision within the priority areas of Engineering, Advanced Manufacturing and Digital.

Project Outputs and Outcomes

Collectively, this investment will enable us to achieve a range of outputs and outcomes, which would not otherwise be possible, and which will help deliver the ambition to position the HotSW as a digital and technological pioneer. These include, but are not restricted to:

- Enhanced local access to skills training, particularly for those facing digital poverty;
- Improved access to skills for employers in key sectors locally, regionally and nationally to enhance the ability to innovate, grow and expand;
- Improved quality of learning through better facilities and sharing of best practice;
- Increased awareness of career opportunities amongst learners;
- Improved reliability of digital infrastructure;
- Reduced/removed need for learners to travel, thereby reducing environmental impacts;
- Improved engagement between learners across the area to support peer mentoring and networking;
- Improved engagement with employers, leading to enhanced relevance of training provision;
- Improved retention of staff, including industry specialists within FE teaching and support
- Improved efficiency and sustainability; and
- Improved staff wellbeing.

New learning opportunities;
Increased learner numbers;
Increased employer engagement;
Increased availability of industry specialists within FE;
Increased staff retention;
New/enhanced learning areas and skills infrastructure;
Exemplar for other local organizations/businesses for improving connectivity between premises and people; and
Reduced energy consumption.

Funding Package

In order to support the above proposal, a grant of **£300,000** is being requested, which will be split roughly 65/35 across Devon and Somerset.

This grant request is anticipated to leverage a further investment of approximately £470,000 from a range of sources to support the proposed developments, generating a combined investment of approximately £770,000 in digital infrastructure and innovative learning technologies.