

[2.7.1] Community Engagement

Please describe the community engagement that you have undertaken to inform the design of this provision.

Your response should:

- Identify the characteristics of the local community, any other local factors and the impact of these on the local labour market
- Provide evidence of proactive engagement with a range of organisations from a variety of sectors, detailing the specific organisations that you have consulted to gain an understanding of the local community
- Explain how you have used the above engagement and understanding when designing the provision content to ensure that it aligns to local needs and those of the specified priority groups
- Explain how your provision adds value compared to any existing delivery that is already available in the area

Insert your response in the pre-set, shaded space on the following pages.

Your response MUST be limited to 2 sides of A4.

PLEASE NOTE THE SCORE ATTAINED IN THIS SECTION MAY ALSO BE USED IN A TIE-BREAK SITUATION WHERE APPROPRIATE.

Through our current delivery of both the REDACTED and REDACTED, together with our Supply Chain Partners (SCPs) The Learning Partnership and Disability Resource Centre (DRC) and their close links with local communities and employers in the South East Midlands LEP (SEMLEP), we have developed a clear understanding of the **characteristics of the local community and their impact on the labour market**. This area is made up of Unitary Authorities of Bedford, Central Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes and 2nd tier Councils of Aylesbury Vale and Cherwell, comprising large urban areas (Milton Keynes, Luton, Bedford) rural areas of farmland (Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire) that are punctuated by towns such as Buckingham, Bicester and Leighton Buzzard and a range of tourist attractions (e.g. REDACTED, nature reserves and country parks). With an unemployment rate of just 3.7% (below the national average 5.1%), the region has experienced significant economic growth in the last few years. For example Milton Keynes is the fastest growing city in the UK and jobs growth at 3.5% per annum is above the national average. The region has secured two Local Growth Deals in 2015, worth £126m, which will contribute to further developing key economic growth in industries such as advanced technology, manufacturing, creative industries, the green economy, construction, engineering, logistics and tourism.

To **develop our understanding of the local community** we set out to engage a wide variety of representatives, stakeholders and organisations including *Public*: Employment and Regeneration Managers from all Local Authorities, ESF Lead SEMLEP, REDACTED; *Voluntary / Charitable*: SEMLEP's Voluntary / Community Sector (VCS) Lead, DRC, REDACTED, Citizens Advice, REDACTED; *Education and skills*: REDACTED; adult skills providers and local Colleges such as REDACTED. Despite significant growth, our discussions with stakeholders have identified that **key challenges persist in the region**. We have used our engagement and understanding **to design provision to ensure that it aligns to local needs and those of the specified priority groups**. Key challenges and our proposed response to align to local needs include:

Key Challenges	Our response
Council Economic Development Teams told us that <i>Pockets of urban deprivation</i> exist characterised by low skills, social / economic exclusion, and history of worklessness.	We will engage referrals through place based initiatives, in wards such as Luton Dallow and Woughton in Milton Keynes, working with partners such as REDACTED to access estates, and engaging with local community providers to deliver provision.
Increase in the number of ESA Claimants, an influx of migrant workers lacking language/employability skills and Older Workers, contributing to a more challenging labour market	We have engaged expert local SCPs DRC and REDACTED with extensive experience of delivering successful local programmes to these priority groups, with proven links into communities, employers and skills provision available locally.
Bedfordshire Rural Communities Council's Chief Executive told us that 27.5% of the SEMLEP population live in rural areas, presenting more limited employment options and less frequent public transport links and therefore a reliance on personal	We will conduct outreach in larger rural settlements to engage participants, engage rural employers (such as those within tourism and hospitality) to generate local jobs and augment our support to participants through a digital platform , enabling on-line jobsearch advice, provide real time access to trained advisors through REDACTED, enabling easier

transport.	access to job vacancies.
SEMLEPs ESF Lead told us female unemployment is volatile and above recession levels due to lack of affordable childcare and inflexible working practices.	We will deliver tailored support for women returning to the labour market, including advice accessing childcare services. Our Employer Engagement Manager will source employers to provide more flexible job opportunities as part of our <i>Employer Journey</i> .
Local Councils and our SCPs identified the potential for conflicting and confusing delivery through various strands of ESF local Council initiatives (e.g.: MK Neighbourhood Employment Programme) targeting similar referral groups.	We will create an integrated delivery strategy by establishing an REDACTED of key stakeholders from JCP, all Local Councils, SEMLEP, employers and skills providers to co-ordinate our delivery, lend strategic input to our provision, avoid duplication of service and identify opportunities to collaborate resources such as employer engagement.
SEMLEP told us that higher level skills shortages and skills gaps mean businesses experience issues recruiting into skilled roles and cite a lack of interest in jobs in elementary, administration and service occupations.	We will encourage employers to utilise our 'working interview' initiatives and access apprenticeships to develop skills, work with the REDACTED of REDACTED Further Education colleges adult skills provision to develop sector routeways with employers; utilise DRC's REDACTED to create jobs and raise enthusiasm for under represented jobs markets through REDACTED.

How our provision adds value compared to any existing delivery that is already available in the area. We have listened to the needs of local stakeholders by designing a programme that is integrated with and adds value to existing provision. For example, we met REDACTED who informed us of REDACTED vision for integrated information, advice and guidance with services including Citizens Advice, REDACTED, REDACTED, Immigration, Housing, Debt, REDACTED, Health and Social Care services working together as part of 'REDACTED'. If successful with our tender, we will co-locate our delivery team within the integrated REDACTED hub site, being the first employment specialist provider to do so. MAXIMUS and our selected SCPs have close links with SEMLEP, JCP, VCS, Colleges, Skills providers and employers with extensive experience of engaging and supporting the priority groups into work, e.g. DRC work closely with ESA claimants and older workers and have a REDACTED engaged employers as part of their acclaimed REDACTED initiative sourcing and securing jobs for those furthest from the labour market; and The Learning Partnership have developed links with over REDACTED partner organisations including the REDACTED with whom they have supported Migrant Workers into work. We will co-locate with providers offering access to complementary provision to support participants into work, for example locating with REDACTED and REDACTED; and through our *ESF Steering Group*, we will collaborate with key stakeholders to ensure service alignment with other ESF funding strands (Big Lottery, Skills Funding Agency, Access to Employment). This will avoid duplication and help to identify opportunities to share engagement strategies, best practice, co-ordinate engagement activities and agree simpler cross referral methods to avoid confusion for local people.