

SELEP CV19 Recovery Funds Update

Executive Summary

1. Overview

- 1.1. In 2020, Strategic Board (the Board) approved the use of £4.4 million Growing Places Fund to establish two Covid-19 (CV19) Recovery Funds, one to develop skills across the region and one to provide business support to small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs).
- 1.2. Service providers were contracted in June 2021 to deliver six projects over a period of 12 months, with an additional 12-month impact evaluation period. Three are supporting skills development and three are supporting SME recovery.
- 1.3. In October 2021, following procurement and contracting of the providers, the Board endorsed the removal of £440,728 of uncommitted funds from the Recovery Funds programme, to provide additional support to SELEP in delivering its future responsibilities.

2. Summary of update

- 2.1. Further to the previous update report for the March 2022 Board meeting, this report provides key information on progress to date, and a high-level update on each programme.
- 2.2. The Business Support CV19 Recovery Fund projects and providers are:
 - 2.2.1. Starting and Succeeding in Business (£565,000) – WSX Enterprise Ltd.
 - 2.2.2. Adapting with Digital (£750,000) – WSX Enterprise Ltd.
 - 2.2.3. Supporting the Visitor Economy (£1.05m) – Visit Kent and consortium partners
- 2.3. The Skills CV19 Recovery Fund projects and providers are:
 - 2.3.1. COVID Recovery Academy (£100,450) – Shaw Trust
 - 2.3.2. Digital Skills Programme (£279,960) – Tech Talent Academy
 - 2.3.3. The Digital Bridge (£300,000) – We are Digital

3. Rationale for update

- 3.1. Since the programmes were launched in Quarter 1 of 2021/22, it was agreed that the Board would receive regular updates relating to the delivery of the funds.
- 3.2. The programmes are nearing the end of their 12-month delivery phase and the dashboard has been updated to show progress and key activities. This is provided in Appendix A.

Further Information

4. Update 1: General update

- 4.1. The suite of CV19 Recovery Funds support programmes was [launched in May 2021](#) and five providers were formally contracted on 8 June 2021. There are six individual support programmes, each with a 12-month delivery period, with up to a further 12 months for impact evaluation.
- 4.2. All six programmes are due to complete their training and business support activities in June



2022. In addition to this, the Supporting the Visitor Economy programme will be running place reboot campaigns through Quarter 2 and Quarter 3 of 2022/23 to reinvigorate the visitor economy by increasing consumer confidence, footfall and spend.

- 4.3. For programmes running a grant scheme through to the end of June 2022 (WSX) and July (Visit Kent), there will be a financial administration closure period through to the end of September 2022 to allow for the defrayal of grants.
- 4.4. All providers will complete an impact evaluation of their programme(s) by a date agreed between SELEP and individual project providers and by 7th June 2023 at the latest. Evaluation will be undertaken at key points throughout the delivery phase and beyond, to track the progress of programme beneficiaries and the benefits of each programme. The skills programmes are due to submit evaluation reports in Quarter 2 of 2022/23, and the business support programmes by Quarter 1 of 2023/24.
- 4.5. The following timeline shows the different stages of the suite of programmes:

	2021/22				2022/23				2023/ 24
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1
Project design	→								
Provider contracting	→								
Support activity phase		→	→	→	→				
Grants and grant administration phase		→	→	→	→	→			
Visitor economy reboot campaigns					→	→	→		
Evaluation phase			→	→	→	→	→	→	→

- 4.6. One of the significant benefits of the CV19 Recovery Funding has been the flexibility it provides compared to national and European funding streams for this type of activity. This has given SELEP the ability to work with providers to adapt certain elements of the programmes quickly, where necessary, to respond to the impacts of the pandemic and events in Europe. Flexibility means that the support can continue to be targeted to those who need it most, when they need it most.
 - 4.6.1. The business support programmes have extended their grant application and award windows into Q1 2022/23, to accommodate the inertia caused by the Omicron wave. The promotion of these schemes has also adapted rapidly to a societal shift towards the use of social media and on-demand material versus live events. The appetite to start a new business has declined, whilst the need to safeguard existing businesses and adapt digitally remains strong.
 - 4.6.2. The training programmes have adapted to support under-employed individuals such as those on zero hours contracts and national minimum wage, and to provide more in-depth digital training for more vulnerable individuals. Skills development programmes have been impacted by the launch of similar national schemes and lower than predicted unemployment rises. Despite significant outreach and marketing, it is expected that overall take-up may be lower than originally forecast for some activities, which is reflected in the RAG ratings for the projects.
- 4.7. All projects are contractually required to ensure a fair spread of delivery across the SELEP geography. The skills programmes are promoted broadly in line with local population percentages, and the business support programmes are achieving equitable geographical coverage broadly in line with previous Growth Hub core funding allocations.



- 4.8. Following the LEP review and changes to the SELEP Secretariat, management of the individual contracts currently remains with the SELEP Skills Lead and the Business Development Manager, assisted by additional resource from within the existing SELEP Secretariat.

5. Update 2: Progress of Business Support Projects

5.1. Starting and Succeeding in Business, and Adapting with Digital:

- 5.1.1. To date, 1136 businesses have applied to access the support. 71% of these are 'self-referrals' and 29% are referrals from the Growth Hub. Of those progressing, 216 businesses have attended a live course or event and 546 businesses have accessed a cumulative total of 1357 hours of on-demand support. Alongside this, 1815 hours of 1-2-1 support has been provided across 850 businesses.
- 5.1.2. The 100% grant offer went live in October 2021 and closes on 30 June 2022, open to businesses completing a minimum number of hours of support. To date there have been 282 applications, 258 of which are progressing or have been successful, and 24 rejected. 132 grants have been paid out, totalling £233,154 and representing 51% of the total grant pot.
- 5.1.3. In March 2022, the delivery targets for Starting and Succeeding in Business were increased for start-ups and decreased for pre-starts, to reflect external factors affecting take-up. The overall target KPI to create and safeguard 180 businesses remained unchanged. Programme delivery is on track to achieve the modified targets, as shown in Appendix A.
- 5.1.4. The provider's registration portal and case study of the month can be viewed [here](#).

5.2. Supporting the Visitor Economy:

- 5.2.1. The Revi-VE 100% Grant Scheme for the South East Visitor Economy, which launched in July 2021, received 325 expressions of interest. To date, 139 grants have been paid out, totalling £360,794. This represents 92% of the KPI target and 80% of the total grant pot, with an average grant payment of £2,800. A further 46 applications are still to be processed, with the aim of exhausting the grant pot.
- 5.2.2. Smarter Society – an established business support and grant administration provider aligned to the public sector - has been engaged by Visit Kent to complete the administration of the remaining pipeline of applications and defray the grant pot by the end of July (following the project's contract with Southend Council coming to an end). Smarter Society are implementing a 3-day turnaround time for businesses whose applications remain in the pipeline. Priority will be given to those in areas where geographical quotas have not yet been met, to help ensure a reasonably equitable spread of grants across the SELEP region.
- 5.2.3. Element 2 of the project is progressing well with 114 stakeholders and businesses engaged. Workshops were run from January through March 2022 across greater Essex, Kent and Medway, and East Sussex by Toposophy, an independent place-making and marketing agency, who have now reported on their findings.
- 5.2.4. The workshop reports are being used to develop re-boot campaigns and shared marketing assets for the evolving network for the visitor economy. This work has identified a need to broaden the scope of such campaigns to go beyond 'destination'



and 'tourism' and put 'place' on a bigger scale at the heart of the marketing model. The campaigns will be launched in a timely fashion for each geographical area over the coming weeks and months, with the first being launched by Visit Kent at a network event on 21st June.

- 5.2.5. An Evaluation Framework has also been drawn up, outlining the methodology by which the success of the 'place' campaigns will be measured, and promoting collaboration across members and beneficiaries of the network.

6. Update 3: Progress of Skills Projects

6.1. COVID Recovery Academy:

- 6.1.1. To date 686 people have been engaged in the programme, above the target at this point of 630. with 128 upskilled and 190 having completed training and gaining employment. The pre and post-Easter period was quieter although job fairs were held, attended by employers with vacancies and with presence from the We are Digital CV19 Programme also. The Shaw Trust have held a range of events and are offering additional support to participants to assist with confidence, mental health, the benefits of working and progression. There are some issues recently with those on the DWP Restart programme accessing the support but with discussions with DWP underway to mitigate this. The Shaw Trust are still finding a reluctance to progress from some participants and it is hoped this extra support will assist with this as well as factors such as travel support for those in rural areas.
- 6.1.2. The adaptation of the programme to support under-employed people will offer useful learning in assisting those in work to progress and reskill. Shaw Trust have commenced joint working with large employers such as Stansted Airport, Tesco and Millbrook.
- 6.1.3. Due to being below target, this programme will continue to be offered in quarter two.

6.2. Digital Skills Programme:

- 6.2.1. To date 112 people have commenced or completed training. Tech Talent Academy have established a very good working relationship with Jobcentre Plus locally which has assisted with referrals.
- 6.2.2. There have been some delays with participants commencing the training due to a lack of equipment, which Tech Talent Academy is supporting with. They are already providing examples of people previously working in retail or other sectors and securing employment in digital roles.
- 6.2.3. The final cohort is now nearing completion and with job outcomes to be provided soon.

6.3. The Digital Bridge:

- 6.3.1. To date there have been over 498 referrals and 124 people completing or in training. 104 tablets and 19 SIMs have been allocated.
- 6.3.2. As outlined in the last board paper an adaption of the programme is now in place offering more in-depth support to fewer individuals. This follows requests for more detailed support, particularly from hard to reach individuals.
- 6.3.3. Current numbers for the new version of the programme are provided in the



dashboard. As with the COVID Recovery Academy programme, this will continue to be offered in quarter two.

6.4. Underspend

6.4.1. £45,000 of the Covid-19 skills reserve was set aside as match funding for the Digital Skills Partnership. This may now not be required in full. Discussions are ongoing as to how this could support year four of a Digital Skills Partnership for Catalyst South and therefore at this stage the Board is asked to note that this and any other underspend may be requested to be repurposed to the operational reserve in 2022/23.

7. Next Steps

- 7.1. The SELEP Secretariat CV19 Recovery Funding leads will continue to oversee delivery of the programme contracts. There remains a risk that external and/or other factors will affect the ability of any or all the programmes to fully deliver against agreed KPIs, or fully defray agreed budgets. If such risks do materialise, any consequent changes that are required to agreed KPIs and/or budgets across the programmes, will be brought to the attention of the Board as soon as possible to ensure continuity of delivery and proper use of funds.
- 7.2. General updates on delivery of the programmes will continue throughout the financial year 2022/23. Information on the programmes can be found on the SELEP and South East Business Hub websites.

8. Comments from the Accountable Body

- 8.1 The Accountable Body entered into contracts with each of the selected suppliers, on behalf of SELEP in June 2021, to support delivery of each element of the Programme. A total of £2.191m of Covid-19 reserves was defrayed in 2021/22 to support the delivery of the contracts, with the remaining balance of £1.861m on the Covid-19 other earmarked reserve carried forward to 2022/23 to support the delivery of the remaining contracts and associated monitoring activity.
- 8.2 A total of £440,728 uncommitted Covid-19 Skills and Business Support funding was appropriated to the SELEP Operational Reserve in 2021/22 following endorsement by the Board in October 2021 and Accountability Board approval in November 2021, to help support SELEP to fulfil its future responsibilities.
- 8.3 The Accountable Body will continue to work with the SELEP team to monitor the Covid-19 programmes spend against original allocations and progress to achieving target KPI's.
- 8.4 SELEP will need to carry out appropriate due diligence on all Covid-19 programmes where a contractual change may be required including consideration of the value for money position. The Accountable Body will support in this process.

9. Appendices, Supporting Documents and Previous Decisions

- 9.1. Appendix A – SELEP CV19 Recovery Funds Dashboard June 2022
- 9.2. Strategic Board Agenda pack setting out the Skills COVID-19 Recovery Fund:
https://www.southeastlep.com/app/uploads/2020/08/SELEP-Strategic-Board-Agenda-Pack_Sept-2020.pdf (page 6)
- 9.3. Strategic Board Agenda pack setting out the COVID-19 Business Support Fund:



https://www.southeastlep.com/app/uploads/2019/11/SELEP-Strategic-Board_Oct-20_Agenda-Pack.pdf (page 5)

- 9.4. Accountability Board Agenda pack setting out the award agreement and delegated authorities for the Skills COVID-19 Recovery Fund:
https://www.southeastlep.com/app/uploads/2019/09/Accountability-Board-Agenda-Pack_Sept-20-WITHOUT-confidential-appendix.pdf (page 250)
- 9.5. Accountability Board Agenda pack setting out the setting out the award agreement and delegated authorities for the COVID-19 Business Support Fund:
<https://www.southeastlep.com/app/uploads/2020/07/Agenda-Document-Pack-16.10.20-WITHOUT-CONFIDENTIAL-APPENDICES.pdf> (page 85)
- 9.6. Strategic Board Agenda pack, for information item providing an update on the CV19 Recovery Funds:
https://www.southeastlep.com/app/uploads/2019/11/SELEP-Strategic-Board-Agenda-Pack_Dec-2020.pdf
- 9.7. Strategic Board Agenda pack, for information item providing an update on the CV19 Recovery Funds:
<https://www.southeastlep.com/app/uploads/2020/10/SELEP-Strategic-Board-Information-Items-Pack-June-2021.pdf>
- 9.8. CV19 recovery Funding Decision Report as published for Accountability Board 15 December 2020.
- 9.9. Strategic Board Agenda pack, for information item providing an update on the CV19 Recovery Funds October 2021: <https://www.southeastlep.com/app/uploads/2020/10/For-Information-CV19-Recovery-Funds-Update.pdf>
- 9.10. Strategic Board Agenda pack, for information item providing an update on the CV19 Recovery Funds:
https://www.southeastlep.com/app/uploads/2020/10/SELEP-Strategic-Board_Information-Pack_Dec-21.pdf
- 9.11. Strategic Board Agenda pack, for information item providing an update on the CV19 Recovery Funds:
https://www.southeastlep.com/app/uploads/2020/10/SELEP-Strategic-Board_Agenda-Pack_March-2022.pdf
- 9.12. For further information please contact Jo Simmons, Business Development Manager (jo.simmons@southeastlep.com) or Louise Aitken, Skills Lead (louise.aitken@southeastlep.com).