

## Peer to Peer RFQ Q&As

Last updated: 14<sup>th</sup> August 2020

**1. The specification refers to profiles for the Peer Network Facilitator and Peer Network One-to-One Support Provider, can these be shared?**

Yes, the two ideal profiles, as developed by BEIS, are attached at Annex 1 to this Q&A document. They are intended as guides for respondents.

**2. How will you ensure that competing bids have their costs compared in a fair and equitable manner given the lack of definition in the RFQ?**

The RFQ provides sufficient definition to design and cost a response to the specification. Although we had left the number of cohorts open to potential suppliers to offer a number which they believed was realistic, the question has appeared several times and is answered below. Cost comparison will be on the basis of the price stated Section C Pricing Schedule. This should represent the total cost of delivering the service as set out in your answer, including the maximum number of cohorts that you are offering to support within that price. These single total prices will then be scored as outlined on pages 8-9 of the RFQ.

**3. Can we assume that to assist recruitment to the programme, OxLEP and Oxfordshire county and district councils will support a communications plan, with signposts on their websites and by sending email to the businesses that they have on their existing contact databases?**

Yes.

**4. Are there any administrative staff in OxLEP and/or Oxfordshire county and district councils who might be attached to the programme on a permanent full-time or part-time basis?**

OxLEP does not have any spare staff capacity which could be attached to support the selected supplier. OxLEP expects suppliers to have sufficient resources in place to deliver the service which they are offering in response to the specification.

**5. Should one-to-one coaching be designed and costed as a separate activity given that it is unclear from the RFQ whether the programme will provide it directly?**

Provision of one-to-one support as described on pages 20-1 of the RFQ is a requirement of the service and the selected supplier will provide both Peer to Peer Networking and One-to-one Support to participants.

**6. What do you mean by guarantee in section A 4.3? What exactly needs to be guaranteed?**

A Bank Guarantee is a bank's commitment to honour payment to a beneficiary if the opposing party does not fulfill their contractual obligations. This is only required in exceptional circumstances and a "no" answer to this question will not eliminate a respondent from consideration.

**7. How many eligible business entities/organizations do you believe there to be who are entitled to apply for their owner and/or director(s) and/or senior manager(s) to participate?**

There are over 33,000 VAT registered businesses within Oxfordshire, the majority of which are SMEs. OxLEP will work with selected supplier to develop the pipeline.

**8. Is there a cap or guidance on the number of participants from any entity? (e.g. 1 for a six person SME and 3 for a one-hundred-person business)**

BEIS (the funders) have not given any specific guidance on this element of the cohort recruitment, however more than one participant from any specific business is expected to be the exception rather than the rule. If respondents believe this is likely, they should explain how this will be managed to ensure that cohorts are not overwhelmed by participants from the same business.

**9. What is the maximum number of individual participants that you expect this programme to cater for, above which terms may be renegotiated?**

There is no additional funding available for this activity, therefore we will not be able to increase the value of the contract to meet additional demand. The target cohort size is 8-11 participants to each cohort.

**10. Is there a minimum number of SMEs and/or cohorts that should be supported by this programme?**

There is no minimum number of SMEs, however we expect between 11 and 15 cohorts to be supported.

**11. We cannot open the generic OxLEP terms and conditions as they are locked inside the PDF version of the RFQ.**

A Word version of the PQQ has been added to the OxLEP website. The standard terms and conditions are an embedded document within that.

**12. The RFQ refers to KPIs. Are the KPIs the same as the deliverables listed on page 20 of the RFQ?**

Yes.

**13. The RFQ states "Commitment to undertake monthly reporting, including using a programme microsite for network KPI capture" Is the contractor responsible for providing a programme microsite or will OxLEP provide this?**

OxLEP has developed a microsite for the Growth Hub and the selected supplier will work with us to update the site for Peer to Peer Networking.

**14. The RFQ states, “Bidders should note that elements of this service may be used as match funding against the Growth Hub’s two European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) projects”. Can you clarify what, if anything, is expected of the contractor in the event that this contract is used as ERDF match funding?**

In the event this contract is used as match against OxLEP’s two ERDF projects, the selected supplier will be required to meet ERDF publicity requirements, in terms of use of logos, etc., which will be supported by the OxLEP team. The OxLEP team will be responsible for managing the ERDF related paperwork relating to the activity.

**15. Could you clarify the providers responsibilities in terms of recruitment? How much will the provider be required to do in terms of finding potential participant?**

We would expect the selected supplier to work with OxLEP to develop a recruitment strategy which would be jointly implemented. We would expect the successful supplier to bring expertise in SME recruitment and use their own networks in Oxfordshire to support this.

**16. The pricing schedule mentions breaking down the price into the cost incurred by each aspect. Could you clarify what is meant by an “aspect” – per cohort or a cost for recruitment, delivery (1-2-1 and peer), etc.?**

Respondents have the opportunity to break the costs down in whatever way they feel best sets them out. However, we would expect as a minimum, costs for the peer to peer networking and the one-to-one support. Further breaking costs down into a cost per cohort or for different elements of activity would be useful.

**17. Can a quality assurance statement be added as an appendix, so it does not count towards the 10,000-word count in the method statement?**

If you do not hold an accreditation, then you should provide a brief description of your quality assurance capabilities *within* the 10,000-word limit, but any supporting evidence, such as your internal policies, etc., do not form part of the 10,000-word limit.

**18. Is a business disadvantaged or disqualified if there are no ticks in the boxes in the table at A1.1 relating to being a VCSE, SME, Sheltered workshop or public service mutual?**

No.

**19. Is the daily rate for delivery to include the cost of marketing and recruitment or to be priced separately as component parts?**

The structure of pricing is up to the suppliers; however, it would be useful to separate elements out as far as possible. Cost comparison will be on the basis of the price stated Section C Pricing Schedule. This should represent the total cost of delivering the service as set out in your answer, including the maximum number of cohorts that you are offering to support within that price. These single total prices will be scored as outlined on pages 8-9 of the RFQ.

**20. Whilst not explicitly excluded in the criteria, for transparency, please can you clarify if members of existing networking groups utilise this funding to support their involvement in this programme during this turbulent period?**

Yes, members of existing networking groups can be involved. However, if an existing peer to peer network aimed to be funded as a cohort the added value of this would need to be clearly demonstrated.

**21. There appear to be no sustainability criteria in the bid assessment. Please clarify if there is any requirement to demonstrate sustainability of the networks beyond 31st March 2021?**

There is no requirement for the networks to be sustainable beyond 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 and we do not have any funding to support this. Nevertheless, if a supplier has a strategy for making the networks sustainable beyond that date, then that would be considered added value.

**22. Whilst we understand the desire to standardise the programme, is the OxLEP open to flex the programme to align with existing and proven peer to peer support models?**

Yes. The specification is based on BEIS guidance, but we are open to alternative models.

**23. Are there existing suppliers who are delivering similar services to the OxLEP?**

OxLEP has a small peer to peer element operating as part of the eScalate programme provided by a sub-contractor. We also have suppliers delivering one to one and one to many support to SMEs under our other Growth Hub programmes.

**24. Is the intention to award to a single supplier or multiple suppliers?**

OxLEP intends to award a single contract for this service to a single supplier or consortium of suppliers, however if we receive a range of smaller responses then we will consider awarding more than one.

**25. Please clarify if all bids should be within the range of the lower and upper limit expectations or are smaller or larger bids welcome?**

The upper limit is the maximum contract value available. Bids below the lower limit will be considered.

**26. Given this is a national programme and most businesses do not necessarily align perfectly to LEP geographic areas, is there a willingness for these funds to be used for business in a wider geography than the OxLEP region?**

The funds are allocated to the OxLEP region and must be targeted at the LEP area. However, we understand that businesses do not follow these geographic distinctions and therefore some businesses outside of the area but active within it or vice versa will be acceptable, but these should be the exception rather than the rule.

**27. Is there any quality assurance from the OxLEP that bidders should factor into the management and compliance overheads and costs of operating the programme?**

OxLEP expects applicants to describe their own quality assurance processes for this service. We do not anticipate that OxLEP will require additional cost and activity in relation to quality assurance under this contract.

**28. With reference to the target SMEs profile (desirable criteria) what emphasis (% split perhaps) is put on targeting (i) scale-up and; (ii) exporters/potential exporters?**

No specific emphasis has been set by OxLEP, this should be driven by market demand.

**29. Please can you explain how the LEP envisage this programme linking (rather than duplicating) existing programmes?**

OxLEP has a small peer to peer element operating as part of the eScalate programme provided by a sub-contractor. They do offer one to one support, but the support delivered under this service will be linked to the peer to peer activity. We envisage an active cross-referral process into and out of the service which ensures that businesses have their needs met effectively and that there is a no wrong door approach to accessing the Growth Hub services.

**30. Is targeting of any specific sectors (e.g. technology, life sciences, etc.) required?**

We would expect different cohorts to target different sectors and would look to agree these with the selected supplier.

**31. Is this programme open to foreign owned companies?**

Any business that meets the eligibility criteria can participate.

**32. The bid document mentions that the content for the action learning sessions should be determined by the participants. Is there a preferred**

**method for this? How should we present our ideas for content without knowing what the participants will decide on?**

We do not have a preferred method for this and would expect the supplier to set out how they propose to do this. We would expect the supplier to provide their ideas and suggestions for the type of content participants may be looking for.

**33. When will the playbook be available, before submission or only on success?**

We are still waiting for this. It is now unlikely to be received before the submission date, so we will share it with the selected supplier.

**34. Regarding question A4.1 we are a start-up business, what financial information do you require?**

A start-up business can only select answer c in section A4.1 and will therefore need to provide a statement of the cash flow forecast for the current year and a bank letter outlining the current cash and credit position.

**35. Regarding question A4.2, what are the solvency requirements for a start-up, which has yet to start trading? Is there a minimum share capital requirement?**

No minimum level of economic and financial standing and/or a minimum financial threshold have been stated within the evaluation criteria for this RFQ. There is no solvency or share capital requirement in this situation. The answer for A4.2 is "Not requested for this RFQ".

**36. What are OxLEP's payment terms? How quickly after the completion of stages of delivery would payment be received?**

OxLEP's payment terms are 30 days. A payment profile and milestone schedule will be agreed as part of the contracting process.

**37. Does the programme have to start on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2020?**

No, we anticipate that the activity will commence by the end of September 2020 at the latest.

**38. Do we have to have a two-week gap between modules / sessions?**

No, this should be based on what is beneficial for the participants.

**39. What happens if the cohorts don't fill up as proposed in terms of funding?**

Provided the number in each cohort is within the range expected by BEIS, there will be no implications in terms of funding. Cohorts cannot exceed 11 participants. OxLEP considers that it is reasonable that, provided reasonable recruitment efforts

have been made, the average number of participants across all the cohorts can be taken into account when identifying any underachievement.

**40. Are the cohorts expected to receive an overview of support covering all areas you outline rather than a number of hours on one area only? For example, would Tom Smith sign up to 18 hours of support including sales, marketing, accounting and HR or would he sign up for 18 hours of HR support.**

Cohorts should agree the areas that they want to cover during the networking. The RFQ states that “the content of the sessions is driven by the participants from a list of key themes (e.g. business development, marketing, people management, technology adoption, response to COVID-19, EU transition) and can be tailored to focus on their specific needs, including wider issues that may be affecting their sector, locality or business model.”

**41. Please clarify section A4.2.**

No minimum level of economic and financial standing and/or a minimum financial threshold have been stated within the evaluation criteria for this RFQ. The answer for A4.2 is “Not requested for this RFQ”.

**42. In terms of qualifying criteria, at what point must any businesses applying for the programme been in business for more than one year?**

At the point of application to join a cohort.

**43. Applying businesses must have at least 5 employees – must these be full time?**

No, this has not been specified.

**44. Could you please confirm how the new Peer Networks will work with what looks like a very similar programme between OxLEP and Oxford Brookes - <https://www.brookes.ac.uk/business/employers/scale-up/>**

The Oxford Brookes programme is specifically focused scale-up leadership and management capacity. This service will cover a much wider range of topics and potential participants.

**45. You have stated that you will reply to questions on 19<sup>th</sup> August, although the deadline is midday on 19<sup>th</sup> August and some of the Questions & Answers may impact bid content. Is it possible to either have your Answers on 18<sup>th</sup> August or move the bid deadline in order to be able to reflect your answers in the submitted bid?**

The final updated questions and answers (this document) will be published on 17<sup>th</sup> August and will not be updated further.

**46. What is the intended role of the Growth Hub in this programme?**

This programme will be managed through the OxLEP Growth Hub, which will also be a source of referrals into and out of the peer to peer networking.

**47. What is the status of this 'Playbook' and is the winner of this bid expected to contribute?**

We are still waiting for this. It is now unlikely to be received before the submission date, so we will share it with the selected supplier. We do not know whether the selected supplier will be asked to contribute.

**48. What does "elements of this service may be used as match against the Growth Hub's two European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) projects" mean? Can you specifically explain "used as match" please?**

This means that funding and activity may form part of the ERDF projects and be reported accordingly. The key difference for the selected supplier would be the need to use ERDF logos, etc., on materials.

**49. There's a mention of "two lots" - what does this refer to?**

This is an error. 4.5.3 should read "choose not to award any contract as a result of the current procurement process, or to award the contract in part".

**50. If face to face sessions are allowed, can we assume that as long as they are not already booked, suitable meeting rooms will be provided for cohort action learning sessions in OxLEP or other local government and public sector buildings at no cost?**

OxLEP has very limited space for meetings, but, if available, our meeting room can be used. We cannot guarantee access to any other venues.

## Annex 1: Peer Network Facilitator Profile & One-to-One Support Provider Profile

This Annex provides an ideal profile for a Peer Network Facilitator and a Peer Network One-to-One Support Provider. They are intended as guides for respondents.

### Peer Network Facilitator

The Peer Networks programme will see the creation of series of peer networks in each LEP area, which will be delivered by Growth Hubs across England working in partnership with BEIS. Each will harness action learning to gain powerful results for the participants helping them to explore new thinking or opportunities, or find ways to overcome difficulties, or address other challenges.

The role of the facilitator is critical to the successful management and optimisation of an individual peer network – supporting the rapid building of trust and collaborative relationships between participants within the peer group (the cohort), providing strong leadership and direction, and driving the in-session action learning process to deliver tangible actions and solutions for each member of the group.

The facilitator has three main strands of responsibility:

- Management and direction of their individual peer network(s) and its successful facilitation using the principles of action learning
- Individual one-to-one communication with each participant to support reflection and provide signposting to the most appropriate local support
- The capture of Information, data, and insight to help inform contract manager and programme about frequent hot topics for delegates

### The role

The main duties of the facilitator are to enable participants to get the most benefit from their cohort experience this should include encouraging participants to:

- Express and discuss their ideas, concerns and understanding of the business situation facing them
- Reflect on and learn from things that did not turn out as expected
- Take responsibility for their own decisions, plans and actions
- Work together to agree both group and personal objectives
- Undertake constructive exploratory discussions within the cohort and avoid conflict.
- Maximise opportunities within their existing business
- Review their progress and identify realistic and practical options to realise their goals
- Connect with other sources of information, advice or further support when appropriate

Working to action learning principles the group facilitator will have the ability to:

- Respect the needs of participants
- Listen and respond effectively and check understanding
- Keep their promises
- Empathise with a range of different feelings and experiences
- Build and maintain an effective relationship with their participants
- Manage group dynamics and deal with conflict
- Generate creative energy within the cohort
- Develop a resourceful state in others
- Handle and respond effectively to change
- Encourage the group to focus on the output
- Shift group and individual perspective
- Evaluate people and processes
- Ensure the people involved retain ownership of the solutions arrived at
- Challenge people to think

## The requirements

### Facilitation of the peer network

- Facilitate and host a series of sessions (using video conference) that are inspirational and engaging
- Use the principles of action learning to successfully facilitate each session
- Work with participants to develop a collaborative and open culture and supporting behaviours within the peer network cohort
- React and respond to the specific issues presented by participants within the sessions
- Focus the session topics on specific issues as directed by the cohort participants (possible themes and topics provided by BEIS)
- Champion the programme, its benefits and its impact on productivity
- Gather and capture learnings and good/best practice and feedback back insight, share best practice, and identify opportunities for improvements and new initiatives
- Work collaboratively with programme colleagues and other facilitators to ensure high quality service provision

During the course of the programme identify opportunities where participants could benefit from deeper support by referral into the Growth Hub and at the end of the action learning series the facilitator will hold a one-to-one review with each individual participant to help consolidate their experience into potential next steps.

- Undertake a structured one-to-one 'review and next steps' discussion (using video conference) to understand the challenges and opportunities they need to address, and develop a short action plan for follow-on support
- Identify opportunities for further business support and ensure effective signposting, referrals, and connections

- Link clients into further one-to-one support if not already connected (offered by the Peer Networks programme) and/or onto appropriate Growth Hub support, and liaise effectively to support relevant account management activities
- Undertake any necessary handover requirements

### Supporting the programme more broadly

- Support relevant stakeholders to promote, engage, and sell the programme and its activities
- Be flexible and responsive to the needs of participants and the programme managers
- Participate in programme-specific training and orientation
- Maintain participant activity records and documents
- Conform with any other relevant contractual requirements, targets, outputs and reporting
- Comply with all aspects of the programme's Quality Assurance Framework
- Support in-programme and post-programme review and evaluation activities

### Key skills and qualifications

Facilitators should have a range of competencies, enabling them to demonstrate their individual credibility to businesses in the network. All will have the following attributes:

- Strong facilitation capabilities and toolset – including the use of action learning principles
- Proven facilitation track record built through work performed with small-businesses, entrepreneurs, ambitious business owners and leaders
- Technical skills to run and manage groups virtually using video conference/collaboration tools
- Excellent understanding of the range of business issues associated with growth, productivity, innovation, strategy, people and skills, driving change, resilience, technology adoption
- Good understanding of the specific needs, characteristics and issues faced by SMEs with the local region
- Appreciation of the business/organisational/economic challenges posed by COVID-19

### Key characteristics:

#### Essential

- Optimistic, enthusiastic and self-motivated, with an empathetic approach
- Engaging personal style, energetic personality
- Understanding and appreciation of smaller business – from micros to large SMEs
- Passionate about getting the best out of people, with a genuine interest in supporting others to excel
- Integrity, independence and patience

- Knowledge and application of facilitation methodologies and toolsets – including action learning styles
- Proven track record in high-impact facilitation in the SME space
- Strong interpersonal skills, with a robust but respectful and constructive approach to facilitation
- Able to offer constructive challenge
- Credibility, a strong business acumen, commercial mindset and excellent project management skills
- Able to interact comfortably at owner/MD/CEO/Board level, with great communication, collaboration and storytelling skills
- Flexible approach to solving business problems and the ability to articulate solutions
- High degree of personal ethics, able to understand and reflect LEP/GH/BESI strategy and values
- Ability to rapidly evaluate the needs of participants and suggest appropriate support based on their capacity, ability and motivation
- Practical understanding of the current landscape of publicly funded business support (local and national)
- Strong IT/technical skills, including an understanding of video conference platforms (e.g. Teams/ Zoom/Hangouts), computerised management information systems, diary management, and CRM databases
- Excellent stakeholder management and relationship management abilities

### Desirable

- Experience of developing and leading peer-to-peer groups, peer boards, or peer networks
- Experience of operating in senior leadership positions within an SME
- Experience setting up, running, and growing an SME business
- Professional experience of managing and delivering business assessment, advice and development
- Ability to structure, analyse and present complex ideas and data, as well as resolve complex problems
- Relevant qualifications and accreditations

### **Peer Network One-to-One Support Provider – for the provision of one-to-one support**

The Peer Network Programme provides additional one-to-one support for each participant. This begins once the formal peer network set is complete and can utilise highly competent business coaches or mentors, the regional advisor network, or existing local business support programmes.

When provided within the programme the role requires the provision of one-to-one follow-on business-focused coaching/mentoring/support to individual participants through a mixture of consultations and signposting.

## The role

The main duties of the One-to-One Support Provider include:

- Analysing the specific difficulties posed to the business by the impact of COVID-19 and what actions should be taken by the SME participant to tackle those issues, in conjunction with their learning from the peer networks
- Agreeing with the SME participant ways to maximise opportunities within their existing business
- Encouraging the SME participant to express and discuss their ideas, concerns and understanding of the business situation facing them
- Supporting the SME participant in creating both business and personal objectives and goals
- Helping the SME participant to review their progress and set realistic and practical options to realise their goals
- Helping the SME participant to reflect on and learn from things that did not turn out as expected
- Signposting the SME participant to other sources of information, advice or further support when appropriate
- Encouraging the SME participant to take responsibility for their own decisions, plans and actions.

## The requirements

One-to-one follow-on coaching/mentoring/support [depending on local circumstances]

- Work with the participant to understand their strategy, the challenges and opportunities they face, and agree a plan for follow-on advice which will address specific barriers to productivity and growth
- Deliver a series of structured one-to-one sessions (using video conference) to help address the identified challenges and opportunities
- Provide wide-ranging coaching, mentoring, support and direction tailored to individual participants
- Understand the local business support landscape to ensure effective signposting, referrals, and connections
- Refer clients back into (or onto) appropriate LEP/Growth Hub support and liaise effectively to support their account management activities

## Supporting the programme more broadly

- Support relevant stakeholders to promote, engage, and sell the programme and its activities
- Be flexible and responsive to the needs of participants and the programme managers
- Participate in programme-specific training and orientation
- Maintain participant activity records and documents
- Conform with any other relevant contractual requirements, targets, outputs and reporting

- Comply with all aspects of the programme's Quality Assurance Framework
- Support in-programme and post-programme review and evaluation activities

## Key characteristics:

### Essential

- Optimistic, enthusiastic and self-motivated, with an empathetic approach
- Engaging personal style, energetic personality
- Understanding and appreciation of smaller business – from micros to large SMEs
- Passionate about getting the best out of people, with a genuine interest in supporting others to excel
- Integrity, independence and patience
- Knowledge and application of coaching/mentoring/consulting methodologies and toolsets
- Proven track record in high-impact coaching/mentoring/consulting, and SME business advice
- Strong interpersonal skills, able to offer constructive challenge
- Strong influencer, significant experience of coaching/mentoring/advising/supporting others through change
- Credibility, a strong business acumen, commercial mindset and excellent project management skills
- Able to interact comfortably at owner/MD/CEO/Board level, with great communication, collaboration and storytelling skills
- Flexible approach to solving business problems and the ability to articulate solutions
- High degree of personal ethics, able to understand and reflect LEP/GH/BESI strategy and values
- Ability to rapidly evaluate the needs of participants and suggest appropriate support based on their capacity, ability and motivation
- Practical understanding of the current landscape of publicly funded business support (local and national)
- Strong IT/technical skills, including an understanding of video conference platforms (e.g. Teams/ Zoom/ Hangouts), computerised management information systems, diary management, and CRM databases
- Excellent stakeholder management and relationship management abilities

### Desirable

- Experience of operating in senior leadership positions within an SME
- Experience setting up, running, and growing an SME business
- Professional experience of managing and delivering business assessment, advice and development
- Ability to structure, analyse and present complex ideas and data, as well as resolve complex problems
- Relevant qualifications and accreditations

