

REGIONAL SKILLS PARTNERSHIP BOARD

Terms of reference

1 Purpose of the RSP

1.1 The West Midlands Regional Skills Partnership (RSP) leads the overall direction of skills development in the West Midlands. It is committed to raising skills at all levels to support the delivery of sustained economic growth. Its work will contribute directly to prosperity for all, employment for individuals, improved performance for employers and sustained social and economic development.

1.2 The RSP supports the vision of the National Skills Alliance which is for:

‘...employers, unions, employees and education and training providers to rise to the challenge of raising the skill levels of everyone to enable businesses to succeed and people to develop. We will work together to raise significantly the awareness of the value of skills development amongst employers and employees, backed by education and training providers offering a more responsive, proactive and flexible capability’.

1.3 To achieve this, the West Midlands RSP will:

- Provide an employer-led framework for future skills development;
- Inform and influence the plans and budgets of training providers;
- Strive in all its activities to make a real difference in the region;
- Demonstrate its effectiveness and accountability through reporting annually on its performance against its published action plan.

2 The RSP in practice – the role

2.1 The most crucial way in which the RSP will influence regional skills development is through partners agreeing to align their priorities, activities, targets and funding with the RSP’s agreed regional skills vision, strategic priorities and annual action plan.

2.2 The RSP’s regional skills priorities will be employer-led and based on clear evidence, developed through the Data Strategy. They will be set in the context of national, regional and local skills priorities.

2.3 The RSP will operate in an open and inclusive way. The employer-focused decision-making Board will be supported by wider consultation and two-way communication to ensure openness and transparency are maintained.

2.4 All RSP partners bring resources and influence to the RSP and in turn are influenced by it. Some examples of how this operates are set out in Appendix 1.

3 Powers of the RSP

- 3.1 The RSP's main powers lie in the joint action of its members working in partnership. Aligning priorities, funding and targets to achieve shared objectives represents a regional force of considerable power.
- 3.2 The RSP has a significant leadership role in skills development in support of the Regional Economic Strategy, and in exercising influence nationally.
- 3.3 The RSP does not do the work of its partners but adds value to their work by providing an overarching regional framework within which all can work more effectively in partnership and towards common goals. This will take the form of a shared vision, strategic objectives and agreed action plan.
- 3.4 The recognition of the RSP by other key regional institutions, such as the Regional Assembly and the regional Government Office, is also critical in endorsing the power and influence of the RSP.
- 3.5 The RSP has no statutory powers.

4 Accountability and key relationships

- 4.1 The RSP Board is accountable to the wider Regional Skills Partnership – ie:
 - Employers and learners in the region (the main beneficiaries of its work)
 - Other organisations, intermediaries and providers, involved in skills development (also affected by its activities)
 - Individual Board members (the main funders of its work).
- 4.2 Financial accountability is through individual partner bodies' own accountability mechanisms as the RSP has no direct funds of its own.
- 4.3 The RSP works through a series of partner networks to reach the wider skills community across the region.
- 4.4 The Annual Skills Summit is a key element in the RSP's accountability. It reports annually on the skills baseline in the region and sets out clear priorities for action. It reports progress against the agreed action plan and explains variations from targets. This is a two-way communication process.

5 Working arrangements

The RSP has agreed certain key working arrangements which are set out below.

Board Membership

The Board of West Midlands Regional Skills Partnership [RSP] comprises a mix of people from the private, public and voluntary sectors, nominated where appropriate from regional bodies, or proposed, following discussions, by the Chair. All members have to be accepted by a resolution of the Board. The RSP will incorporate the highest level of quality, and commitment to regional skills development.

The membership of the Board will include

- An independent private sector chairman
- A number of sector employers from the private sector or private sector networks; and one from a health authority/hospital trust [as a key public sector employer]

And representatives from:

- West Midlands Forum of the Skills for Business Network (Sector Skills Councils)
- West Midlands Business Council
- The Regional Development Agency (Advantage West Midlands)
- Regional Learning and Skills Council
- Regional Job Centre Plus
- Government Office for the West Midlands
- West Midlands Local Government Association
- Association of Colleges
- West Midlands Higher Education Association
- Trades Unions
- Regional Action West Midlands
- A learner organisation

By invitation to be in attendance at Board meetings will be:

- Advantage West Midlands' Corporate Director responsible for the Agency's skills work
- The Director of the Regional Skills Partnership, representing the Secretariat of the Regional Skills Partnership
- The Chief Executive of the West Midlands Regional Assembly
- The Regional Skills Director, Learning and Skills Council

Outside advisor participation may be invited to meetings of the RSP on a project or initiative basis. Members of the RSP Progress Group may, for example, be invited to attend to discuss workplan progress.

The methods of recruitment of members of the Board are set out in Appendix 4

RSP members are not delegates and are to act in the interests of regional skills development as a whole. Personal, pecuniary or other conflicts of interest in relation to the business of the RSP are to be declared at the start of each meeting of RSP and recorded in the minutes of that meeting.

The RSP will be quorate with seven members in attendance including the Chairperson or his /her nominee from the Board.

Administration

The Board will be supported by a Secretariat team provided by Advantage West Midlands. The team includes:

- Director of the Regional Skills Partnership
- Advantage West Midlands' Corporate Director responsible for the Agency's skills work
- Administrative support

They will be responsible for providing secretariat functions including taking minutes of meetings, preparing and circulating Board papers and keeping the Board informed of key issues affecting the work of the RSP.

Meeting arrangements

The Board meets between four and six times a year (normally four).

In addition to this, there will be an annual “Skills Summit” to:

- Report annually on the skills baseline in the region and improvements year on year
- Report on progress against the agreed action plan and explanations of any key variations in targets
- Set out future priorities, actions and targets
- Take account of comments about any of the above made by the wider partnership.

Board members may not send a substitute if they are unable to attend a meeting. Notice of meetings will be given in advance and at least six weeks before a meeting and papers will normally be sent out four working days before a meeting. Minutes will be circulated within two weeks of a meeting.

6 Board Support Structures

From time to time, the RSP Board may set up other groups to support its work in key areas. As at April 2005, these are:

The Data Group

The overall aim of the RSP Data Group is to *“provide the RSP with a comprehensive, robust and up to date evidence base to inform its strategy development and action planning”*

Detailed terms of reference of the Data Group are attached at Appendix 2. It meets monthly and has its own action plan and resourcing plan agreed by the Board. It is an inclusive group and comprises data practitioners as well as more senior members of key RSP partners.

The Progress Group

The Progress Group terms of reference are attached at Appendix 3. It meets approximately six-weekly and is primarily responsible for overseeing the implementation of the RSP Action Plan. It reports to every Board meeting on progress in this respect.

APPENDIX 1: RSP – powers and influence conferred by partners

Partner	What they bring to the RSP	How the RSP influences them
Skills for Business Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intelligence about key sectoral issues and priorities, especially skills • Advice on good practice employer engagement models • An understanding of what employers need to satisfy their skills needs – especially large and medium-sized employers and their supply chains and advice about how they would most like their needs met • Advice on sector priority planning • Dialogue between national and regional employer networks to widen employer engagement in skills issues • Proposals on how SSAs should be implemented 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The RSP message and priorities can be promoted through their extensive networks of contacts. • The work of the RSP can bring greater regional consistency in delivering plans and business support, so improving efficiency and effectiveness • The choice of surveys priority sectors or research methodology can be influenced • Advice on priority for regional initiatives
WM Business Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A full and considered view on every aspect of the skills agenda from every business sector, including input from the lifelong learning sector • A private sector view from both employer and training provider perspective • Views of business representative organisations, able to give a wider, more considered view than individual employers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The WMBC will work with other partners in public and private sector to ensure stronger linkages between skills and enterprise and technology/innovation • The WMBC will promote engagement with RSP priorities within its membership (businesses of all sizes, including owner-managers) • The WMBC will communicate information to assist employers with training opportunities to businesses
Advantage West Midlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joined up view on labour markets, productivity, business support and skills training within the regional economic context • Delivery of a demand-led agenda • Key regional delivery vehicles – regeneration zones, high technology corridors and business clusters, to make things happen in the region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RSP priorities will inform and influence AWM's corporate plan and funding allocations • Encouragement of projects and programmes that build on best practice and successful pilots • Alignment of regional delivery vehicles behind RSP priorities
Job Centre Plus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data on people available to employers and employer vacancies to inform skills priorities • Understanding of the needs of deprived communities and the socially excluded and their skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RSP priorities will influence local ways in which JC+ works with partners where appropriate • RSP priorities may be added to nationally set JC+ priorities where possible and applicable

Partner	What they bring to the RSP	How the RSP influences them
	<p>needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of provision to meet basic skills needs, both within and outside employment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RSP will facilitate collaborative ways of working across the region because partners will share common objectives
Regional LSC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of skills and employment issues at a local level across the region • Strong relationships with and understanding of both employers and delivery networks • Wide-ranging data collection and analysis to inform the skills debate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RSP priorities will directly influence the regional (and therefore local) priorities of the LSC • RSP priorities will directly influence the LSC's engagement with the provider network, including funding allocations • RSP priorities will therefore influence the mix, balance and type of public sector provision
Higher Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A trained graduate workforce which can to some extent be tailored to the needs of the region • Enhancing the skill levels of the workforce through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creating a demand for skilled labour as knowledge-based organisations - New job creation and enhancing the demand for skills in the workforce through knowledge transfer (eg, in regeneration, applied research, technology transfer, science parks and the interaction with the wider economy) • Upskilling and retraining (short-term) programmes for those both within and outside employment, contributing to the skills escalator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RSP priorities will influence course planning, provision and curriculum development • RSP will provide a forum through which education can be more joined up from 14-19 and beyond – particularly schools, FE and HE • RSP will influence the way in which HE develops its accessibility to learners and its use of resources
NIACE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy for adult learners and an understanding of barriers and good practice in relation to adult learners, potential learners and the development of learning communities • Influence at national level through membership of the National Skills Alliance (with ministers and senior officials), LSC adult learning and equality & diversity committees and other national policy and strategy development arenas • Information and research results to inform the development of regional skills priorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RSP priorities can be communicated through NIACE's wide network of contacts throughout the region • RSP priorities can influence the NIACE research agenda and content of campaigns • NIACE can feed RSP regional messages and priorities into national government and the national policy agenda

Partner	What they bring to the RSP	How the RSP influences them
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to a network of partners across the region • Campaigning, promotion and dissemination capacity (e.g. through Adult Learners' Week) 	
Voluntary sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to third sector employer networks, both regionally and nationally • Links to the Change Up strategy which focuses on building the skills of the third sector • Access to good practice examples on widening participation • Access to good practice on helping people back onto the employment ladder • Important perspective on challenges small employers face in engaging with the skills agenda 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RSP priorities will be communicated to the sector through RAWMs networks and full members • RSP priorities will help influence current and future thinking around influencing strategy & policy regionally from a third sector perspective • Access to understanding the skills needs of voluntary & community sector employers in the West Midlands
Government Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The voice of government in the region, including strong connections into ten government departments, and the interpretation of national government policy at regional level • GOWM is DfES in the region, the RSP's sponsoring department • A broad overview of regional issues and priorities that gives perspective to the regional skills issues and puts them in context, both within and beyond the region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RSP priorities will influence the advice that GOWM gives to the variety of delivery programmes that it manages across the region • GOWM can take the key RSP messages to and within the wide variety of networks and contacts that it has across the region • GOWM can take the RSP's regional messages and priorities into the heart of national government
Regional Assembly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A strategic view of the regional perspective – speaking up for the region • Coordination with other regional strategies • Commitment from across the region and (eventually) political support for the RSP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The RA will build RSP priorities into other strategic plans that it manages, where appropriate • The RSP will advise the RA on skills matters – it will be the regional voice on skills for the RA • The RA will draw on individual RSP members for advice on specific skills issues when developing policy, responding to consultation etc

Appendix 2: Data Group terms of reference

1. Overall Objective

The overall aim of the RSP Data Group is to “*provide the RSP with a comprehensive, robust and up to date evidence base to inform its strategy development and action planning*”

The priorities for action of the RSP Data Group will be guided by the need to focus on a number of key skills related questions to be determined by the RSP Board and Management Group.

The RSP Data Group has been established as a practical working group, with all members of the group responsible for specific practical tasks to be agreed through the RSP Data Group. It is envisaged that RSP Data Group members will benefit directly from the resulting outputs from this work in terms of increased access to enhanced intelligence.

2. Specific Objectives

The RSP Data Group has two key objectives:

Objective 1: Prepare on behalf of the RSP a Data Strategy describing how the evidence base required by the RSP will be developed, used and maintained to support the RSP agenda

Objective 2: Deliver the Data Strategy through the practical implementation of the RSP Data Action Plan to develop and iteratively update the regional skills evidence base.

Objective 2 can be subdivided into a number of specific objectives as follows:

- Survey and catalogue existing data and intelligence sources to determine those that are relevant for implementation of the RSP Data Action Plan. The RSP Data Group will need to determine the scope and methodological approach for this exercise
- Establish necessary protocols for sharing of data and ensure agreed protocols are implemented in practice. Such protocols will need to define the scope of each data set to be shared, data formats, frequency of data exchange and any changes in operational data collection procedures
- Assess the quality of data and intelligence available through agreed Quality Assurance (QA) procedures - This will need to be based on the concept of peer review to ensure that the quality assessments are robust, transparent and collectively agreed
- Identify critical data gaps and needed data enhancements
- Identify appropriate actions to fill critical data and intelligence gaps and to implement needed data enhancements. Harmonise data collection protocols and standards as necessary. Oversee the implementation of these actions

- Undertake data analysis, modelling and interpretation in relation to agreed key questions sought by the RSP
- Co-ordinate the evaluation and dissemination of output/outcome measures. Dissemination vehicles will include the annual Skills Summit and RSP annual reports process. Other approaches may include the Internet, seminars, workshops and use of partner newsletters
- Ensure appropriate steps are taken in order that procedures for implementing Objectives 2 are updated over time

3. Administration of the RSP Data Group and Reporting mechanisms

The RSP Data Group will be chaired by the West Midlands Regional Observatory (WMRO), who will also provide administrative and organisational support.

It will be the responsibility of WMRO to report back to the RSP Board and Management Group on the progress of the RSP Data Group.

The Head of Skills Research (HoSR) at WMRO will be responsible for overall co-ordination of RSP Data Group activities.

4. Membership

Any member of the RSP may be represented on the Data Group.

Data Group members will be active data and intelligence practitioners and will be expected to make a significant contribution to the delivery of the objectives of the group.

It will be the responsibility of the Data Group to review the overall composition of the group and suggest appropriate changes as necessary for agreement by the Management Group.

It will be the responsibility of the Chair of the Data Group to agree changes to Data Group membership.

Appendix 3: Progress Group terms of reference

- 1 The Progress Group (the Group) will monitor performance, particularly the delivery of the annual Action Plan, on behalf of the Regional Skills Partnership (RSP)
- 2 The Group has been set up by and reports to the RSP Board
- 3 Membership of the Group will include representation from:
 - *Employers* – WM Sector Skills Forum, WM Business Council
 - *Key funding partners* – AWM, LSC, JCP
 - *Key supply side partners* – AOC, WMHEA, HEFCE
 - *The West Midlands Regional Observatory (WMRO)*
 - *The RSP Secretariat*
 - *Others* – as invited from time to time by agreement with the Board or the Chairman
- 4 The Group will be responsible for updating progress against the annual action plan by:
 - Reviewing material submitted by partners to ensure that it fits with what is set out in the action plan
 - Ensuring good progress is being made in all areas
 - Where progress is poor, challenging each other constructively and helping to address problems and barriers identified
 - Identifying areas where progress is not being made and, where the Group itself cannot resolve the issues, bring them to the attention of the next Board meeting
 - Reviewing the action plan progress as a whole, not just in individual sections
- 5 The Group will work closely with the Data Group in initially developing and then using appropriate performance measures and targets for individual actions in the Action Plan
- 6 Through the RSP Secretariat, the Group will make publicly available, six weekly updated versions of the Action Plan on the RSP website
- 7 The Group will inform the development of the RSP Action Plan for the following year
- 8 The Group will carry out other performance management and delivery monitoring activities as may from time to time be requested by the RSP Board

Appendix 4 Recruitment to the RSP Board

The Regional Skills Partnership is about everyone in the West Midlands –employers, individual learners, training providers, and funders.

The RSP Board is a mix of people from the private, public and voluntary and community sectors. As such recruitment will be made in a variety of ways set out below.

1. Chair, with background in the private sector and in skills, notably experience and involvement in the national skills scene and an understanding, and if possible experience, of public sector funding regimes. Given the regional significance of the post then recruitment will be by regional or national advertisement based upon a pre-prepared person specification and 'job description'.

2. Invitation to participate to appropriate regional agencies:

- Regional Director and Regional Skills Director, LSC
- Director Government Office for the West Midlands
- Chief Executive, Advantage West Midlands
- Chief Executive, West Midlands Regional Assembly
- Regional Director, Job Centre Plus

3. Nominations from regional bodies having an interest in skills development:

- Representative of the West Midlands Local Government Association [nominated by WMLGA]
- two representatives of Higher Education [nominated by West Midlands Higher Education Association]
- representative from Further Education [nominated by West Midlands Association of Colleges]
- Trades unionist [nominated by TUC]
- representative of the Skills for Business Network [nominated by Sector Skills Council network]
- representative from West Midlands Business Council [nominated by WMBC]

4 i At least three private employers, proposed by the Chair [additional to representatives from the Skills for Business Network and West Midlands Business Council], after open recruitment or individual interview by the Chair. The RSP website [www.wmskillspartnership.co.uk] will include an invitation for interested people to express an interest.

4 ii an individual from a learner organisation, proposed by the Chair, after open recruitment or individual interview by the Chair

Members of the RSP shall be appointed by the RSP itself, following nomination or recommendation from the Chair.

All new members of the RSP will be briefed by the Chair and by the RSP Secretariat as to their roles, duties and responsibilities.