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London's Future: The Skills and Employment Strategy for London 2008-2013

Introduction

1. This paper analyses *London's Future*¹, the skills and employment strategy of the London Skills and Employment Board (LSEB) for 2008 to 2013, which was published in July 2008. The Skills and Employment Strategy for London is especially important because the London Board is the first skills and employment board in the country with a statutory basis. Thus, the strategy may be indicative of the strategies developed by similar bodies in the future.
2. This analysis is structured under the following headings:
 - The LSEB – Background
 - The 2007 draft skills strategy for London
 - *The London Approach*
 - *London's Future*
 - Aim 1: Engaging and Working with Employers
 - Aim 2: Engaging and Supporting London's People
 - Aim 3: Customer-focused Skills and Employment System
 - The implementation plans accompanying *London's Future*
 - Conclusions

The LSEB - Background

3. The London Skills and Employment Board was established by the Department for Education and Skills in December 2006, when it also met for the first time. The LSEB was formally established in statute by the Further Education and Training Act, which became law in October 2007.

¹ <http://www.london.gov.uk/lseb/docs/london-futuresreport.pdf>

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4. The Board's purpose was set out in instructions set by the Secretary of State for Education. In a letter to the Mayor of London, then-Education Secretary Alan Johnson defined the Board's remit: *'The role of the Board will be to champion skills in London, to set priorities and determine the strategy for adult (post 19) skills training in London. The strategy should focus on the needs of adults in the labour market or seeking to enter it (including those on benefits), making a strong link between skills, those on benefits), making a strong link between skills, employment and worklessness. The Board's work and its strategy must be driven by the needs of the employers, giving employers in London a new opportunity to exercise powerful leverage to ensure that training equips adults with the skills and qualifications they need to raise productivity.'*²
5. Once in place, the strategy *'will determine the priorities of the LSC in this area and it will be required to allocate its budget in compliance with the strategy'*³.
6. The LSEB is chaired by the Mayor of London (since May 2008, this has been Boris Johnson). Including the Mayor, it currently comprises 23 members. The Mayor appoints most of the membership: three members sit on the board *ex officio*.⁴ The LSEB is *'employer-led'*, meaning most of its membership is derived from established leaders in the business community.
7. Since the LSEB has strategic control over adult skills in Greater London, it can determine *'the strategic direction of the Learning and Skills Council's adult skills budget'*, which totals £560 million (LSS, p. 10).
8. In form and purpose, the LSEB shares some similarities with the Employment and Skills Boards (ESBs). Similar bodies have been established in many localities,⁵ though under different names, and these are also *'employer-led'* bodies with local government participation.
9. However, The Government did not accord ESBs a formal role in *World Class Skills*,⁶ the implementation paper for the Leitch Review, leaving it up to local governments and sub-national agencies to determine whether and how to create such partnerships. Thus, the LSEB is unique in possessing formal legal authority; the other ESBs serve in an advisory capacity only.

The 2007 proposal for a London skills strategy

10. In October 2007, the LSEB published a proposal for a London skills strategy⁷.

² This excerpt comes from the LSEB's own Website; see <http://www.london.gov.uk/lseb/about/how.jsp>

³ From the LSEB website: <http://www.london.gov.uk/lseb/faqs.jsp>

⁴ Jobcentre Plus' Director for London; the London Regional Director of the Learning and Skills Council; and a representative of the London Development Agency (currently, a member of its board).

⁵ The Leitch Review of Skills, p. 23, paragraph 76. See: http://www.hm.treasury.gov.uk/media/6/4/leitch_finalreport051206.pdf

⁶ <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/skillsstrategy/uploads/documents/World%20Class%20Skills%20FINAL.pdf>

⁷ See: <http://www.london.gov.uk/lseb/docs/proposalboardstrategy.pdf>

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11. The LSEB identified five 'challenges' that it intended to address. These were:
 - *'A fundamental change to the employment and skills support available in London, making it easier for individuals to access the help they need to move into work, and to help existing employees progress and/or develop new skills'*
 - *'An ambitious new Employer Programme for all London employers'*
 - *'A new level of responsiveness from London's learning and skills providers to ensure that skills provision is focused on meeting genuine needs.'*
 - *'An integrated skills and employment infrastructure.'*
 - *'Public funding for skills and employment in London aligned to the challenges and priorities identified in the draft Strategy.'* (Draft Strategy, p. 5-7)
12. The Board also set three targets for skills attainment and an employment target. The skills targets were:
 - *'Reduce the proportion of Londoners with no qualifications to 11 percent by 2013, focusing particularly on improving functional literacy and numeracy'*
 - *'Increase the proportion of the employed workforce engaged in training to 15 percent by 2013'*
 - *'A target to cover progression to higher skills'*
13. The draft strategy called for 72 percent of working-age Londoners to be employed by 2013, and 75 percent in 2021. The Board also committed to raising employment among minorities, women and disabled people (LSS, p. 15).
14. The draft strategy also proposed a 'London Employer Programme,' which involves developing and brokering training programmes for London business. This included an 'employer contribution,' encompassing:
 - *'Employer led and designed work placement/trial schemes for young people and adults'*
 - Public commitment to investing in skills and training and fairer recruitment practices (some form of 'London skills and jobs pledge') including commitments to train their workforce. (LSS, p. 27)
15. The draft strategy called for 'a unified employment and skills system focused on providing long-term employment for all Londoners' (Draft Strategy 38) which 'covers skills, jobs and careers advice in an integrated way' (Ibid. 20). The draft strategy expected that the LSC, Jobcentre Plus, the London Development Agency, the London boroughs and service providers in the private and third sectors to work together to deliver skills and employment services, and that many of these partners would work together to create a common investment strategy (Draft Strategy 38).

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The London Approach

16. The LSEB held a public consultation on the draft strategy, which closed in January 2008⁸. In March, the LSEB published *'The London Approach'*, which *'describes the key points raised in the consultation and outlines how the Board will work over the next few months with key stakeholders to ensure that the Board's ambition is translated into workable solutions'* (London Approach, p. 1).
17. *The London Approach* identified four key principles that would underpin the delivery of a skills strategy, principles that were later incorporated into the Board's final strategy:
 - Being *'customer-focused'*;
 - Encouraging *'equality of opportunity'*;
 - *'Maximising impact'* of skills and employment spending and delivery;
 - *'Better integration'* of all parts of the employment and skills system (London Approach, p. 4).
18. *The London Approach* also included a timeline for the implementation of some of the measures discussed in the draft strategy. It called for proposals for a joint investment system between the LSC and the London Development Agency (LDA) to be developed by the summer of 2008. It also called for a London Adult Advancement and Careers Service to be operational by 2010, and a delivery programme for the London Employer Programme to be prepared by May 2009. An integrated skills brokerage would come into operation by May 2009 (London Approach, p. 6-8).

London's Future: Overview of resources, aims and targets

19. In July 2008, the LSEB published *London's Future*, a five-year skills and employment strategy for the capital. The document contains a foreword by Johnson, who notes that *'the key priority for my administration is tackling gun and knife crime'*, and that *'engaging in training opportunities and gaining new skills can provide a vital second chance'* for youth who might otherwise turn to violent crime. He also stressed the importance of working in partnership with the central government (London's Future, p. 2-3).
20. The paper then goes on to note that London suffers from *'the persistence of deep inequalities and a poverty of aspiration'*. The report states that London has a worklessness rate of almost 30 percent, and that 600,000 adult Londoners *'have no qualifications at all'*. More than half of Londoners lack the numeracy skills expected of a person who has completed primary school. (London's Future, p. 6).

⁸ The consultation summary document can be found here: <http://www.london.gov.uk/lseb/docs/consultation-summary.pdf>

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21. The board also defines the resources and powers that underpin the strategy. *'The Board's primary responsibility,'* the paper notes, *'is for the strategic direction of the Learning and Skills Council's (LSC)⁹ adult skills budget in London (over £600 million per annum)'*. The board also directs £300 million in skills and employment funding from the London Development Agency (London's Future, p. 11)
22. *'Furthermore, through the Strategy the Board will influence other public and private funding for skills and employment, including funding provided by Jobcentre Plus and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)'*, and the mayor of London has *'strategic responsibility'* for a further €476 million¹⁰ from the European Social Fund, *'matched by funds from four co-financing organisations (the LSC, DWP, LDA and London Councils¹¹)'* (London's Future, p. 11)
23. The paper sets out the board's three strategic aims:
 - Strategic Aim 1: *'Working with employers to better support them in providing more job and skills opportunities to Londoners, to the benefit of their business and to keep London's economy competitive'*
 - Strategic Aim 2: *'Supporting Londoners to improve their skills, job and advancement prospects through integrated employment support and training opportunities';*
 - Strategic Aim 3: *'To create a fully integrated, customer-focused skills and employment system'*. (London's Future, p. 7-8).
24. The Board also adopts one of the targets from the draft strategy, calling for the employment rate in London to be raised to 72 percent by 2013, from 70.5 percent now. This *'will require over 75,000 extra people to move into sustainable employment, many of whom face complex barriers'*. The battle against worklessness *'will include increases in the employment rate for people of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) origin, women, people aged between 50 and retirement, disabled people, parents and lone parents, and people with no qualifications'*. (London's Future, p. 12)
25. The LSEB commits to reducing the percentage of London's working-age population without any qualifications to 10 percent by 2013, from 13 percent now. To meet this target, 94,900 people will need to gain a Level 1 or above literacy qualification, and 62,000 will need to obtain a Level 3 or above numeracy qualification (London's Future, p. 13).

⁹ Current Government policy calls for the abolition of the LSC in 2010 and its replacement by two funding agencies, the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) for pre-19 funding and the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) for post-19 funding. The strategy notes this change, saying that the SFA will become responsible for the adult skills funding involved in implementing *London's Future*, and that the Board will *'work with the Government to ensure that the emerging new commissioning and funding structures support the priorities identified in this Strategy'* (London's Future, p. 50)

¹⁰ Roughly £374.6 million, by the exchange rate in force on July 31st, 2008.

¹¹ An umbrella organisation which represents London's 32 boroughs. See www.londoncouncils.gov.uk.

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Aim 1: Engaging and Working with Employers

26. *'Part of our challenge'*, the LSEB writes, *'is to persuade employers of the business case for doing more to promote local recruitment and training, and to make it easier for them to do so. ... We can do so much more to make it easier for employers to recruit more local people and train their workforces'* (London's Future, p. 22). The Board noted that there are a *'wide range of often related commitments'* for employers to join which commit them to improving their workforces' skill levels, but that *'this array of pledges is ... confusing and complicated'* and often work in isolation from one another (Ibid., p. 22).
27. The LSEB believes *'there is a core business case which – if clearly presented and backed up by simplified, easy to access support – will lead to more employers opening up opportunities to Londoners, and increasing their workforce'* (London's Future, p. 23). To this end, the board proposes several measures.
28. Firstly, *London's Future* provides for the creation of a London *'employer to employer'* sales force, involving public, private and third-sector employers in a campaign, the *'London Employer Awareness Campaign'*, that will *'encourage best practice in skills and employment by employers through procurement arrangements and contract management of supply chains'*. The campaign will also involve chambers of commerce, the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), Sector Skills Councils and London Councils (London's Future, p. 24).
29. Secondly, the LSEB wants to make it easier for employers *'to work with public and other agencies to improve job and skills opportunities'*, so that more workless people can be recruited and trained into sustainable employment. The public sector should set up *'one stop shop arrangements'* that will allow employers to provide work placements, open up spaces on employer training programmes to local people (including taking more apprentices and part-time employees) and *'undertaking more development of their workforces at all levels from basic skills to higher-level skills'* (London's Future, p. 24). The various skills programmes and pledges will be integrated into a *'simplified pledge to provide jobs and training for Londoners'* – this single pledge will be called the *'London Employer Accord'* (Ibid., p. 24).
30. *'The key way of delivering employer-focused training to meet these commitments is Train to Gain'*, which has a National Plan for Growth including:
- An expanded offering of training, including leadership and management training, Level 3 qualifications and, in London, pilot ESOL for Work and Skills for Life programmes;
 - Improved communications about the service, including a *'targeted sector marketing campaign'*;
 - Ensuring contractors on the 2012 Olympics have the opportunity to use Train to Gain services.
- (London's Future, p. 25).
31. The LSEB is committed to increasing employer input and control over skills provision in London, through the Sector Skills Councils (SSCs). The LSEB expects the SSCs to *'ensure that their work has a regional focus'*, by

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- 'gaining hard-edged employment and skills commitments from London employers as part of their Sector Skills Agreement process';
- 'providing high-quality labour market information on their sector for London for the new adult advancement and careers service and other services; and'
- 'rationalising and unitizing qualifications'. (London's Future, p. 27).

Apprenticeships

32. 'The Board will drive this further and faster in London', adopting a 'no wrong doors approach' so that 'no matter what part of the system employers come into contact with, they are given the whole picture, rather than sold a particular product'. In implementing this, the LSEB expects delivery agencies to take a demand-led approach, 'to focus flexibly on what employers want', and establish an integrated skills brokerage service between Train to Gain and Business Link from April 2009. Delivery agencies will also be expected to share employer contact information more effectively. (London's Future, p. 25).
33. London's Future identifies apprenticeships as 'another key way for employers to build the skills of their workforce'. London has a below-average number of apprenticeships – only 5 percent of English apprentices are in London, though the capital holds 14 percent of England's population. The LSEB believes 'there needs to be an increase of Apprenticeships in London by more than 20 percent over the next three years'.
34. To achieve this, the Board has asked the LSC to run trials that will 'provide better support to employers in order to increase the supply of Apprenticeships'. The LSEB has also asked the LSC to collaborate with Sector Skills Councils, the Trades Union Congress (TUC), the voluntary sector and other partners to mount annual campaigns aimed at increasing the supply of apprenticeships in key sectors, 'including the public sector'. (London's Future, p. 26)
35. The LSEB strategy also calls for measures to raise awareness of apprenticeships among employers ('currently only 40 percent of employers state they are aware of Apprenticeships'). The LSEB strategy also provides that 'progression routes will be developed' for apprenticeships 'to the degree level to improve the perception of Apprenticeships as a good career choice'. This will be done in conjunction with the Lifelong Learning Networks in London (London's Future, p. 26).

Aim 2: Engaging and Supporting London's People

36. London's Future argues that, in addition to improving support for employers and increasing their capacity to train and employ Londoners, the LSEB must also 'raise individual motivations to learn, and ensure that good quality information and support are available so that Londoners can make the skills and employment choices that will lead to sustainable careers' (London's Future, p.29).
37. Part of this strand of work is to make Londoners more aware of training opportunities and to encourage them to aspire to better jobs and skills – 'raising aspirations and awareness'. This will include a 'pan-London engagement campaign' and the establishment of a 'single encompassing brand that would become the trademark for adult skills in London' (London's Future, p. 30).

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38. The strategy also pledges better information for individuals about the labour market and its needs, as a *'coherent picture of how the London labour market is changing should underpin decisions made by individuals and employers'*. The Board will create a *'London Skills and Employment Observatory'* to provide a *'central platform for all labour market and skills information in London'*; it will work closely with the SSCs to gather this information (London's Future, p. 31).
39. The key measure of this part of the skills strategy is the creation of a *'specifically tailored London adult advancement and careers service'*, which will carry the London skills brand and offer *'help and support on everything and individual needs to 'get on' in London'*, including careers, skills, tax, benefits, childcare and financial support. It will operate through a variety of platforms, including online services, phone services and community offices on high streets and within other agencies such as libraries of Jobcentre Plus. It will also undertake *'targeted outreach in partnership with voluntary and community groups as part of a wider advancement network'* (London's Future, p. 31).
40. The LSEB strategy also mandates improved training and employability support, so that the unemployed can obtain sustainable employment and work progression. *'It is not enough for an individual to gain a qualification if this has not helped them develop the skills required for sustainable employment. It is equally important to support progression ... building a 'skills ladder' that suit an individual and helps them to build up their skills portfolio and progress at work'* (London's Future, p. 32). Measures in this area include:
- More focused pre-employment support, linked with vocational training, work experience and work trials and providing *'clear stepping stones from informal learning'*. This support would continue during the first months of employment.
 - Literacy, numeracy and ESOL provision, which *'should be personalised and where appropriate delivered alongside or integrated within vocational programmes'*.
 - *'Clear progression routes with a strong focus on moving people forward in their working lives'*, including *'flexible progression pathways'* in provision up to Level 2 and *'Individual Employment Plans'*.
 - *'Expanding the supply and responsiveness of higher level skills'*, including more input from employers, *'closer working between further education and higher education to create coherent pathways to higher skills'* and more work-based learning, distance learning and professional development courses.
 - Using Skills Accounts to allow individuals more control over their learning and skills provision. (London's Future, p. 32-34)

Aim 3: Customer-focused Skills and Employment System

41. The LSEB identifies several shortcomings of the London skills and employment system. *'Employers and individuals find the skills system in London hard to find their way around, incoherent and disjointed'*, the Board writes, and *'until recently, welfare-to-work arrangements in London focused primarily on getting people into work as quickly as possible ... and did not systematically address the help people need to stay in work and progress'*. To rectify these problems, it is the LSEB's goal to offer *'a seamless service for London's individuals and employers, from skills to employment and from employment to skills'* (London's Future, p. 36-7).

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42. The strategy demands a '*stronger customer focus*' on skills provision, '*which does not attempt to predict and plan the needs of individuals and employers, but has greater capacity at the point of delivery to respond to their circumstances*'. The strategy expects all providers, at the central and local levels, to gain a greater knowledge of customer wants and needs through independent survey information (London's Future, p. 38-9).
43. The Mayor and the LSEB believe that, for joined-up working to be implemented, there must be '*a single purse*' for London, with pooled resources and aligned commissioning and targets. '*Genuine integration is a precondition for delivering many over the service reforms outlined in this strategy*' (London's Future, p. 37). '*We therefore want all those responsible for investing public money in skills and employment to commit to working together through share targets with joint commissioning of programmes to ensure there is a meaningful and streamlined offer*'. The London Regional LSC, the LDS, Jobcentre Plus and the DWP are identified as the '*key partners*' in this integration, and should develop a joint investment plan. '*All agencies and planning and funding bodies*' are directed '*to take into account the content of the Strategy when developing plans and distributing resources*'. European Social Fund monies would also be included in this integrated approach (London's Future, p. 40).
44. The strategy stresses the need for targets that encourage sustainable employment – rather than simply measuring the number of people who are placed into a job or the number of qualifications earned, targets should measure '*getting people into work and helping them progress in work by improving their skills*'. The LSEB avers it is important that Local Area Agreement (LAA) targets '*reinforce the need for integrating the employment and skills journey*', and worries that the current round of LAAs and the measures chosen within them do not '*provide a sufficient and consistent focus on sustainable employment for Londoners*' (London's Future, p. 41).
45. The LSEB calls for a '*remodelling*' of skills provision in London, with changes in the curriculum, the provision of services and the way stakeholders work together. The strategy calls for '*delivery and funding agencies to work with further and higher education providers (including colleges, universities, private and third sector training providers)*' so London can meet its skills requirements. (London's Future, p. 42).
46. Lastly, *London's Future* calls for '*better collaboration and integration across the capital*', from local, regional and national agencies. Recruiting local authorities to cooperate in delivering the strategy is '*critical*', because Government reforms will shift control over 16-19 education and training to them from 2010. '*We must also ensure that the funding used by local authorities for economic regeneration, enterprise and business support and skills is connected with this Strategy*' (London's Future, p. 43).

Implementation, delivery and future developments

47. *London's Future* contains a section outlining the LSEB and its partners' plans for delivering the strategy. It is also accompanied by a detailed, 26-page implementation document¹².

¹² See: <http://www.london.gov.uk/lseb/docs/london-futures-imp-plans.pdf>

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48. Put briefly, the LSEB has established a Joint Delivery Group to implement the skills strategy. This comprises the LSC, the LDA and Jobcentre Plus, and it is empowered *'to manage, coordinate, monitor and review the implementation of the actions in the implementation plans'*. The group will report on its progress to the LSEB, to which the delivery group is responsible (London's Future, p. 46).
49. The LSEB also establishes a performance and accountability framework, including:
- *targets and outcomes measures for employment and skills;*
 - *the implementation plans mentioned above;*
 - *reviews of the major skills funding plans, such as the LSC's Regional Plan;*
 - *surveys of Londoners to determine how customers experience the skills system; and*
 - *'selective local reviews' to improve performance in parts of the capital where skills outcomes are lagging behind* (London's Future, p. 46)
50. The Board will undertake an annual review of the skills strategy, in accordance with the provisions of the Further Education and Training Act 2007, which established the LSEB (London's Future, p. 47).
51. *'In addition, the Board is clear that addressing inequality is a core value that underpins its ambition'*, and the strategy states that *'implementation and delivery plans will identify how the needs of groups who are most disadvantaged in the labour market will be addressed'*. Delivery partners will be required to monitor data on equalities, and equality will be promoted through the supply chain (London's Future, p. 47).
52. *London's Future* ends with a short section on *'future developments'*. Here, the strategy notes that the *'change of administration at City Hall from May 2008 [when Conservative Boris Johnson was elected mayor and succeeded Ken Livingstone of the Labour Party] sets a new context for the work of the Board'*. The mayor of London is the LSEB's chair, and as such, Johnson will *'ensure policy coherence'* with his administration's strategies on subjects including crime and disorder, health, child poverty, housing, transport and sustainability (London's Future, p. 49-50).
53. The LSEB will also work with the Government *'to help shape emerging national policies so they work for London'*, including the newly separated pre-19 and post-19 skills systems, Government policy on innovation, qualifications reforms and welfare reform (London's Future, p. 50-1).

Conclusions and implications

54. *London's Future* reflects a broad spectrum of Government agendas around skills, employment and local partnership working. It also echoes to some extent recent policy documents produced by the Conservative Party, as that party formulates a new policy platform under its current leader, David Cameron.

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55. Of course, the most powerful influence on the LSEB strategy is the Leitch Report, the foundation document for skills and employment policy. Leitch called for the creation of Employment and Skills Boards (ESBs) like the LSEB. The London board is unique in having a basis in statute law, but it does otherwise follow the model of employer-lead ESBs advocated by Leitch, and its strategy may serve as a blueprint, or at least an influence, on other strategies and programmes adopted by ESBs in other parts of England.
56. Leitch called for a unified adult careers service, as does *London's Future*. Both documents advocate using demand-led approaches to skills funding and provision, with strong employer involvement. Both advocate involving employers in skills pledge programmes that commit them to training their workforces, and both propose a key role for the Sector Skills Councils.
57. However, the skills targets in *London's Future* are orientated towards the improvement of the most basic literacy and numeracy skills; although Leitch is concerned with these, its central targets revolve around improving attainment at Levels 2, 3 and 4.
58. The LSEB strategy also touches on themes explored in other Government policy documents. Its call for reorienting the welfare-to-work system to provide more sustainable employment echoes similar proposals in the Freud Report of 2007¹³. *London's Future* also bears the mark of recent local government reforms, which call for closer partnership working between local authorities, public-sector agencies and other stakeholders to jointly tackle employment and skills problems.
59. *London's Future* shares some policy priorities with '*Building Skills, Transforming Lives*'¹⁴, the Conservative manifesto on skills and training published in July 2008. A major plank of this document is a drive to increase the number of apprenticeships and the financial support available for them through demand-led mechanism. The Conservatives also propose an '*all-age careers service*'.

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¹³ See: <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/publications/dwp/2007/welfarereview.pdf>

¹⁴ Which can be downloaded at : <http://www.conservatives.com/tile.do?def=people.opportunity.page>