

The Excellent Gateway

Six provider-led projects to improve the quality of the Excellence Gateway

Invitation to tender

1. Introduction

1.1 LSIS is pleased to invite bids from learning and skills providers in England for six provider-led projects to improve the quality of access to the content and services of the Excellence Gateway site as part of the LSIS drive to help the sector improve.

1.2 The projects cover three areas of work:

- A.** review and improvement of a nominated area of content, including retagging of items (3 projects);
- B.** creation of resources to support users of the Excellence Gateway, including user guides (1 project); and
- C.** sustainable development of key National Learning Network NLN materials, which are currently hosted by LSIS (2 projects).

1.3 The Excellence Gateway has recently moved to a new open source content management system and repository. This root-and-branch redevelopment constituted a significant and substantial programme of work. The new site consists of :

- a core of current, topical and essential content, significantly reduced in size after a review with content owners;
- an associated archive which contains the remainder of the useful content from the original web site. Archived content will continue to be available to users and searchable from the main site; and
- a number of so-called 'federated' sites and tools: developed elsewhere and subsequently migrated into the site.

1.4 The original Excellence Gateway consisted of around 130 separate sub-sites and 100,000 pages. This content forms an invaluable resource for the FE and skills sector. A persistent difficulty has been in ensuring that users can find their way easily and effectively through such a vast resource to the content that they need.

1.5 The technical shift has been supported by improvements to the navigation and search, which have included a revised information architecture, a unified single taxonomy and a new search engine, Solr. The projects in this ITT form an important element in this part of the development programme.

1.6 Bids should be submitted by **12:00 midday on Monday 7 November 2011**.

2. Eligibility for participation

2.1 This ITT is restricted to organisations in England whose primary function is as a provider of further education and training. Eligible providers must be SFA funded organisations (excluding schools) subject to inspection by Ofsted. Provider representative bodies, consultancies or other bodies involved in supporting learning and skills providers are not eligible to bid for this funding, but they may be part of a consortium bid submitted by a provider organisation.

3. The projects

A. Review and improvement of a nominated area of content (3 projects)

- 3.A.1 The Excellence Gateway provides the national hub for finding and accessing resources to support improvement in the FE and skills sector. Since its launch in 2007, a large number of external websites have been migrated into the site and thousands of resources have been added, making it both an important repository of knowledge and complex to search and navigate.
- 3.A.2 We are looking for topic and subject experts to ensure that resources that are valuable to the sector can easily be found and promoted. We are also keen to encourage others to share and add content that they find valuable by providing examples of how to do this. The tasks required to achieve this are as follows:
- develop quality assured listings of records which describe and link to valuable resources found across Excellence Gateway websites and beyond (where appropriate);
 - identify and apply appropriate tags/categories to organise the records; and
 - support the LSIS Web Services team in publishing the records on the Excellence Gateway website to form 'curated collections' that users can easily search and browse.
- 3.A.3 The LSIS Web Services team will provide support and training for adding records to the Excellence Gateway and for applying tags. Social bookmarking sites, such as scoop.it and delicious.com could also be used to support the initial collation of links.
- 3.A.4 The exact topics areas to be addressed will be agreed with the three successful bidders at the point of award of contract. Bids should make clear your capacity and capability to carry out work of this kind and identify preferred areas of content. The work will require both information management skills and subject/ theme specific expertise.
- 3.A.5 Total funding of up to £75,000 (inc VAT) is available for this strand of work, which will consist of three projects, each funded up to a maximum of £25,000 (inc VAT).

B. Creation of resources to support users of the Excellence Gateway, including user guides (1 project)

- 3.B.1 The new Excellence Gateway will go live on 12 December 2011. It benefits from a number of different ways to find any given theme or particular piece of content. There is a need to produce online guides which explain how to get the best from the website, including search, using key sections of the site and finding resources across other sub-sites covered by the Excellence Gateway service. We require the creation of resources covering:
- user guides for the site which explain to users in specific roles/sectors how they can use the Excellence Gateway to support them; and
 - sample journeys which take a user through the alternative methods of finding information and resources.
- 3.B.2 These assets should then be built into a resource to support a one hour input into a provider CPD programme and shorter 'bite size' chunks that visitors to the Excellence Gateway website can quickly view/use. The Excellence Gateway team receive many requests to attend staff development events to present the site and help provider staff to make best use of it and need to increase their capacity to cover such requests.
- 3.B.3 The resource should be a suitably structured online package which could be used by:
- an individual as a freestanding learning experience (please note, packaged learning objects for VLEs may be considered, but versions which can be used independently of a VLE must also be provided); or
 - a trainer as part of a delivered learning experience with a group of staff.

- 3.B.4 The resource should aim to be more than a dry guide to the Excellence Gateway, but seek to engage, enthuse and inspire staff to build its use into everyday professional practice. Resources must also take account of users' access needs (for example, by supporting assistive technologies) and address equality and diversity requirements.
- 3.B.5 Bidders for this project should be enthusiasts for the Excellence Gateway who are able to demonstrate existing knowledge, understanding and relevant resources on which to build. LSIS will particularly welcome consortium bids which bring together the input of a number of providers and other bodies.
- 3.B.6 Funding of up to £25,000 (inc VAT) is available for this project.

C. Updating, refreshing and re-use of the NLN materials (2 projects)

- 3.C.1 LSIS took responsibility for the NLN materials and the associated website from July 2011, when funding for them ceased, in order to extend the period during which they will remain available to the sector. There is no identified funding stream or budget to continue this beyond an initial two year period. Consultations with the sector prior to the transfer revealed an enthusiasm for continued access to the materials and service despite:
- technical issues which prevent some from working currently, or threaten their continued viability in the long run; and
 - curriculum, topicality, fashion and currency issues which make some learning objects redundant or dated.
- 3.C.2 An expert committee of sector representatives has been convened to consider the future of the materials. This group met on 5 October 2011 and recommended two small pilot projects which are detailed in **Appendix A** of this document.
- 3.C.3 Total funding of up to £20,000 (inc VAT) is available for this strand of work, which will consist of two projects, each funded up to a maximum of £10,000 (inc VAT).
- 3.C.4 LSIS will particularly welcome consortium bids which bring together the input of a number of providers and other bodies.

4. Project delivery, deadline and resources

- 4.1 The deadline for completion of each of the projects listed here is 31 March 2012. Bidders should be able to demonstrate appropriate levels of suitably skilled and experienced staff with the capacity to deliver the project.
- 4.2 50% of the funding will be paid on achievement of agreed interim project outcomes. The remaining 50% will be payable on satisfactory completion of agreed project outcomes. All projects must be completed by 31 March 2012.
- 4.3 It is expected that the successful bidders will work closely with the Excellence Gateway team to ensure that agreed project outcomes are delivered on time and are fit for purpose. Reporting and monitoring arrangements will support this (see below).

5. Project outcomes, review and reporting arrangements

- 5.1 The outcomes of project areas A and B will be the updating of content and/ or metadata, rather than reports or suggestions of changes. The principal purpose of the projects is to identify, agree with LSIS, administer and deliver such changes.
- 5.2 A regime of weekly reporting on project outcomes to date will be put in place, with a named lead contact in the Excellence Gateway team.

5.3 A brief formal report of outcomes, giving evidence that the agreed outcomes have been delivered in full, should accompany the final invoice.

6. Applications

6.1 Bidders should complete all the boxes on the application form clearly and concisely, including a breakdown of the total cost of the project, and the anticipated project start and end dates. You may attach additional documents in support of your bid but in no circumstances should the total document set exceed 4 sides of A4 in a legible typeface and size.

6.2 This should be e-mailed to chris.kelland@isis.org.uk under the title 'The Excellent Gateway Projects' by **12:00 midday on Monday 7 November 2011**, or earlier if possible.

6.3 All organisations submitting bids will be notified of the outcomes by **Friday 25 November 2011**. LSIS reserves the right to approach bidders for further information or clarification, without obligation or commitment.

6.4 Successful bidders for project area A will be invited to a project initiation workshop in Coventry in the following week.

7. Further information about this fund

7.1 If you have any questions or require additional information, please contact Chris Kelland (chris.kelland@isis.org.uk). All questions of substance and the response to them will be posted in an FAQs document, which will be updated on the LSIS website weekly where possible. Interested parties should consult this before submitting their bid document.

Appendix A

Updating, refreshing and re-use of the NLN materials

1. Introduction

1.1 LSIS wishes to explore and trial two possible approaches for maintaining the value of the NLN materials collection to the sector, which without intervention will gently decay in the face of technical redundancy and ageing content. These approaches are:

- **Updating:** Updating of materials by communities of practice within the sector.
- **Creating an Asset Bank:** Disaggregation of the existing learning objects to create a bank of digital assets (resources) which can be built into new learning objects to be made openly available. This would involve:
 - Identifying and removing useful components (e.g. the colour wheel);
 - Building them into new learning objects using appropriate software (e.g Xerte, eXe etc); and
 - Storing and further developing them through a community resource (to be constructed) on the Excellence Gateway.

2. The projects

We are looking to fund two small pilot projects as follows:

2.1 Renewing the NLN materials

2.1.1 There is no budget for ongoing updating of the existing NLN materials, nor any likelihood of significant funding becoming available. Updating of technical redundancies and maintaining the continuing relevance of content will depend upon individual endeavour and communities of practice within the sector.

2.1.2 This pilot project should take a discrete section or area of the NLN materials and seek to update a number of learning objects:

- to fully functional technical status; and
- to current curriculum relevance.

2.1.3 The main purpose of the project is to identify and document the challenges and possibilities of this process. The principal outputs will be:

- a guidance document for those who might wish to do this for themselves and for the community at large, detailing the process, problems and potential for significant updating; and
- a small number of updated materials to illustrate and exemplify.

2.1.4 We would be particularly pleased to receive proposals from consortia or communities of practice.

2.1.5 Funding of up to £10,000 (inc VAT) is available for this project.

2.2 Repurposing the NLN materials

2.2.1 The learning objects that make up the NLN collection contain digital assets which might usefully be separated out from the original object and used to create new ones. Like the updating work described above, the repurposing of content will depend upon individual endeavour and communities of practice within the sector. The full benefit will be derived from making both the assets and any newly created objects available to the whole community. LSIS will explore separately how it might create an asset bank on the Excellence Gateway or work with partner organisations to utilise a central repository elsewhere.

2.2.2 This pilot project should take a discrete section or area of the NLN materials and seek to repurpose a small number of learning objects. This will involve:

- disaggregating a number of learning objects into their constituent digital assets; and
- building these digital assets into new learning objects.

2.2.3 The main purpose of the project is to identify and document the challenges and possibilities of this process. The principal outputs will be:

- a guidance document for those who might wish to do this for themselves and for the community at large, detailing the process, problems and potential for disaggregation and repurposing of learning objects; and
- a small number of disaggregated digital assets and new learning objects built upon them to illustrate and exemplify.

2.2.4 We would be particularly pleased to receive proposals from consortia or communities of practice.

2.2.5 Funding of up to £10,000 (inc VAT) is available for this project.

3. Further activity

3.2 Subject to budget discussions, LSIS intends to support two related activities in late Spring/ early summer next year:

- An event to publicise the outcomes of the projects and to develop and publish an Action Plan that will kick start and steer the process of building communities to take this work forward.
- A national competition to identify the best learning objects built on repurposed digital assets from the NLN materials sets.

3.2 We shall look to agree and announce these initiatives in March 2012.