

# West Yorkshire Consortium of Colleges

## A New Skills Service Bringing Better Collaboration and Alignment With Employers

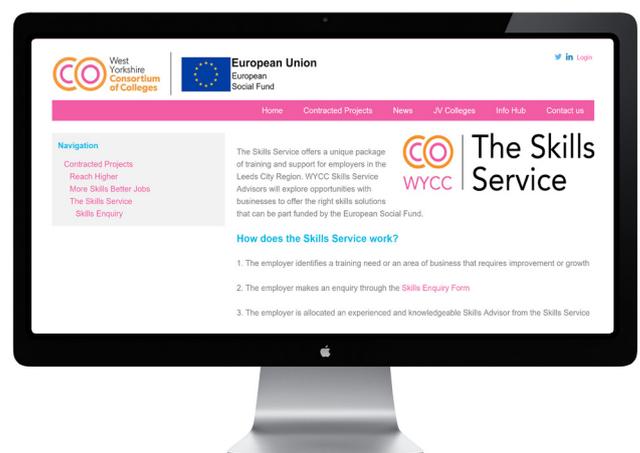
### The Skills Service

West Yorkshire Consortium of Colleges (WYCC), which operates on behalf of seven **Joint Venture Colleges** in West Yorkshire, recently launched a new Skills Service, which provides a model for the colleges to drive the kind of better alignment and collaboration that employers are calling for to increase workforce skills and influence the skills agenda. Launched at the 2018 Leeds City Region Skills Network Conference, the service, which is funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) and managed by WYCC, offers a unique package of training and support for employers in the Leeds City Region, ensuring a cohesive offer is in place to support businesses to access the right skills solutions, drive business performance and support good growth across the region.

WYCC Skills Service Advisors will work sectorally, offering a free, no obligation, Skills Plan session with businesses to gain an understanding of their current situation, their aims, objectives and growth aspirations, and the skills which may be needed to achieve these, which may result in:

- **Skills solutions bespoke to the needs of employers**
- **Commissioned leadership and management programmes**
- **Investment to support skills and training aligned to significant Leeds City Region initiatives, such as major infrastructure developments or priorities such as Inclusive Growth and Social Mobility**

In practical terms, the service begins with an employer identifying a training need or an area of business that requires improvement or growth. They then make an enquiry through a **Skills Enquiry Form**, which is located on the **Skills Service** webpage, and once this has been submitted they are allocated a Skills Advisor who contacts them to discuss their business and employee needs. The Skills Advisor then identifies what they believe is the right solution, and presents the employer with a series of options from the Skills Service offer, which the employer can choose from, depending on which is best suited to their business. Finally, the Skills Advisor sets up the training or project with the approved training partner.



As Rachel Mather, WYCC's Research & Development Project Manager, commented:



*Through the Skills Service, businesses will be offered more than one-off, existing training courses. WYCC values employer and industry expertise and insight to help drive and shape our skills offer to businesses. This means we can get a much better understanding of the needs of employers in our region and so provide training that is far better aligned with their needs. For employers, it means they get the opportunity to influence the skills agenda. And of course for learners, they end up benefiting from being trained in skills that are actually needed by employers in the real world.*



## The Skills Catalogue

A major part of the Skills Service is the **Skills Catalogue**, an online catalogue available on the WYCC website offering over 350 courses to businesses available through the Joint Venture Colleges. The catalogue is being developed on a phased approach, starting with the Consortium's wider named partners in their ESIF projects adding their skills offer to the catalogue to broaden and enhance the availability of high quality, in-demand skills. The skills offer will continue to grow in response to employer demand and labour market insight, with the first refresh due in Autumn 2018.



Key intelligence from Emsi's online data tool, Analyst, which offers both structural, trend-based Labour Market Insight (LMI) and more current insight through Job Posting Analytics (JPA), will be cross referenced against employer demand for skills to ensure WYCC's offer remains responsive, relevant and reflects the skills needs of the Leeds City Region. Other mechanisms for identifying the need for new skills training will include:

- **Aggregated employer demand, identified through Sector Forums, analysis of enquiries, take up of skills and employer engagement**
- **Forecast demand, for example where is it anticipated there may be a forthcoming business impact (i.e. the implementation of GDPR)**
- **Skills insight, through engagement with industry, stakeholders and intermediaries, complemented by the use of regional LMI and JPA.**

## Better Collaboration and Alignment Through Insight

Each Skills Advisor has been allocated a particular sector to lead on, which will enable them to develop specialist knowledge of that sector, and so be well placed to support businesses within that industry. Together with the establishment of Sector Forums, this will mean regular, dedicated engagement with employers, through which they can discuss and influence the skills offer in their sector.

Data plays a big part in the Sector Forums, with Emsi's LMI and JPA forming a focal point in terms of sparking discussion around the needs of the employers in the room, and whether the skills and competencies shown in the data are reflective of their business. What this does it to provoke a number of discussion points: Is the language in the postings reflective of what they themselves would use? What do these skills mean to them and their business? How can WYCC help shape and create an offer for them that helps to build these skills?

The insight that can be brought into the discussion by LMI and JPA data is therefore crucial to WYCC's vision of facilitating better collaboration between the colleges and local employers, as well as shaping more informed and ultimately better aligned skills provision. According to Rachel Mather:

“

*Emsi data will help to put some context around our discussions with employers. These forums will be vital for WYCC to gain a clear understanding about the skills gaps and challenges facing regional businesses. This will in turn support the development of new skills and enhancements to the skills catalogue and wider skills solutions we provide employers to fully meet sector needs.*

”

To find out more about the West Yorkshire Consortium of Colleges and the Skills Service visit their website at [www.westyorkshirecolleges.co.uk](http://www.westyorkshirecolleges.co.uk)