

# Specification Document

## The Brief

'Better Placed' is a strategic employment and skills partnership between the London Boroughs of Lambeth, Lewisham & Southwark. Reference to 'Better Placed' indicates all three of the organisations in a single term, and responses to this brief should reflect a single, equal approach to service delivery across these three boroughs.

## Introduction

Skillbot is a partnership project between Better Placed and London South Bank University (LSBU). It is a 'proof of concept' pilot project that utilises Artificial Intelligence to help residents navigate the employment, skills and careers advice landscape. It will work as a chatbot that residents can interact with when seeking information and navigation to different sources of support. We are seeking external support to develop the knowledge base that will sit within Skillbot.

Research in 2019 demonstrated that many residents experience challenges that are not caused by a lack of provision but the ability to navigate and understand the complex network of public services available. In addition, Covid-19 has highlighted challenges for residents trying to navigate public services to find the information and resources that would benefit them most. It also highlights the additional challenge for residents, for example those recently made unemployed, to navigate a web of public services that they are not familiar with.

Due to the need to establish this support service rapidly, Lambeth Council are using Public Contract Regulations (2015) to call for competition using a standard procedure with accelerated timescales.

We expect Invitations to Quote to outline how the scope of services will be delivered:

- A single quote for the delivery against the scope of services. Addressing the questions outlined on page 7.
- Indication on when you will be able to commence delivery. We aim for delivery of the requirement in this scope to start immediately upon appointment.
- A quote based on the full scope of services outlined.
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Quotes should be returned to Spike van der Vliet-Firth ([spike.vandervliet-firth@lewisham.gov.uk](mailto:spike.vandervliet-firth@lewisham.gov.uk)) by Monday 28 June 2021 at 9:00 am.

## Background

The aspiration for Skillbot is that it provides a single front door for sources of advice and support for residents, akin to an interactive directory. There is a lot of public service interest in improving the way residents navigate the sometimes-complex web of public services. This project is at the forefront of how this can be delivered in a self-service way for residents.

Skillbot aims to resolve navigation challenges for residents through a simple online interface that essentially 'triages' users by understanding the information they are looking for and their reason for asking it. The information is categorised to understand the user's 'intent' behind the question they ask, and then provides the relevant best source of information based on its understanding of the question and why the user is asking it.

When Skillbot is complete it will be able to sit within the council websites that best suit residents seeking employment and skills support. It is aimed at adults, although the intention is that it can be used by any age group and any qualification level.

Better Placed and LSBU have entered a commitment to deliver a working pilot of the platform before expanding its functionality. This piece of work focusses on the initial build of Skillbot, to design a working proof of concept with a functioning database of information, known as the 'Requirement'.

In order for Skillbot to be effective, it requires a knowledge database that is sufficient enough to provide relevant advice to residents. This specification is seeking external support to develop the knowledge base that will sit within Skillbot.

The information that is provided to Skillbot needs to be set out in a logical way for the programmers at LSBU to use. This has already been defined under 5 categories, known as intents:

- Careers Advice
- Employability
- Job Searching
- Education and Skills
- Personal Support

Within these there are a series of sub-intents that have partially been defined but need refinement, for example education and skills contains sub-intents like:

- Sources of Education
- Sources of training
- Understanding your skills

Within 'Sources of Education', for example, there are several different sources of information that a user may be looking for such as College, Community Learning, Online learning etc. Skillbot will aim to understand what the user is looking for and make a recommendation on where the best source of information can be found, or in some cases provide the answer directly to the user without the need to navigate them towards an external link.

Being a navigation tool, in many instances Skillbot will aim to provide a relevant link for the resident. For example, if the user's intent was "where can I find information on jobs in the Army" then a link to the Army Recruitment website would be the most appropriate link. The successful bidder will be required to collect relevant URLs to websites where residents would find relevant information and support.

Developing the knowledge base for Skillbot requires:

- expertise in employment and skills
- a good understanding of the support available to residents in the boroughs of Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark
- a good understanding of the career aspirations of residents in the boroughs of Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark.

The output from this specification will be a series of questions residents could ask regarding their education, employment or skills and appropriate responses the chatbot should provide. It will also provide the different ways in which a question could be asked leading to the same result.

While the questions and answers will be simple to provide in many cases, there will need to be a large quantity of questions and answers recorded to make the programme functionable, which is challenging to quantify. We are looking for a provider to support a short-term deep-dive into the questions and responses to help us build a sufficient knowledge base to pilot Skillbot with users.

## Objectives

Scope of Services
<p>The final product delivery would be as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A series of questions and responses covering a broad range of careers, employability and skills topics</li> <li>• We would expect around 1800 question and answers, or 60 per day for the 30 working-day/ 6 week contract, to be reasonable given the simple nature of many questions in the data. This can be reviewed downwards or upwards depending on the providers experience of undertaking this exercise. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ An interpretation of each question in different ways it could be asked. This would likely average around 5 responses, covering the different and simple ways a user may ask the same question.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Questions and answers will be organised into their main category areas and ‘sub intents’. A sub-intent refers to the intent behind a question being asked by the user <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The format for organising these questions and responses has already been defined for the project</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Where relevant, URLs to relevant resources/information should also be provided</li> </ul> <p>What should the final product look like</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This can be flexible depending on the preferred working practice of the successful provider, and will be agreed in advance with Better Placed and LSBU.</li> </ul> <p>Understanding the local service offer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The provider will need to undertake mapping to understand the best sources of information to resolve questions presented by the user, based on their understanding of the information that residents seek for support in their employment and skills.</li> <li>• This will not be required as a separate output but should feed into the questions and answers for the Requirement.</li> <li>• Better Placed can provide a map of the employment support organisations in the borough from 2019. Developments of careers and employment support since then will need to be inputted into the project, and the project team can support with some of this scoping</li> <li>• This will enable the navigation tool to reflect the up-to-date support and resources available to residents.</li> </ul> <p>Understanding the potential users</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The questions and their responses will need to be written in simple, accessible English. Plain language will improve the accessibility of Skillbot.</li> <li>• Skillbot is intended to act as a universal tool, so it will need to cover a range of lower &amp; higher skills suggestions, and a range of employments.</li> </ul> <p>Engagement and workshops</p>

- The provider would need to engage with key agencies within Lambeth, Lewisham & Southwark, such as employment support organisations, to secure relevant local intelligence
- This will be used to inform the ideal response to questions presented by the user
- This will not be required comprehensively, but it will add to the quality of the information and the pace of product delivery

Liaison with developer

- Intelligence will need to be fed to the development team at LSBU on a regular basis, to allow the data to be reviewed and queries as it is being developed
- Weekly meetings will be required with the developer to feed in data developed.

Outputs	Timescale/Due Date
Agreed format for recording questions and answers with LSBU and Better Placed.	Week 1
A minimum of 300 questions per week and answers coupled with URLs and different interpretations for each question, 1800 in total for the project, submitted to the developer on a weekly basis	Each week in the project
6 weekly liaison meetings last around one hour with the developer	Week 6
At least 6 hours of interaction with at least 6 local providers.	Week 3

**Fees and Costs**

An Invitation to Quote is adjoined to this specification. The maximum award value for this contract is £5,000 +VAT for 6 weeks of delivery.

Selection Criteria & Award Criteria	Weighting (%)
Significant experience of working in the adult employment support, education and skills space	20
Demonstrable understanding of the adult education, careers and employment support landscape in Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark	20
Understanding of potential Skillbot users	20
Ability to deliver the scope of work within the required timeframe	20
Cost	10

**Questions for response**

- 1) What is your recent and relevant experience of working in the adult employment support, education and skills space (**20% - 200 words maximum**)

- 2) What is your understanding and experience of the adult education, careers and employment support landscape in Lambeth, Lewisham & Southwark? **(20% - 200 words maximum)**
- 3) Which residents are more likely to seek Careers IAG and what are the potential employment and skills challenges they face, and how will your outputs ensure accessibility? **(20% - 200 words maximum)**
- 4) Describe how you can deliver the scope of work in the required timeframe, and how will this be organised and key milestones to ensure delivery? **(20% - 200 words maximum)**
- 5) A quote of the cost to deliver and a simple breakdown of cost **(10% - 100 words maximum)**

### **Key Performance Indicators**

1. Completion of the minimum output in each week of the six-week project.
2. Quality and relevance of the information provided.

### **Payment model**

The suggested payment model is:

1. 20% upfront payment
2. 30% at the end of week 3, subject to output being maintained to a reasonable quality.
3. 50% final payment at the end of week 6

## **Timetable for responses**

All responses must be received by 09:00 Monday 28th June and sent to [spike.vandervliet-firth@lewisham.gov.uk](mailto:spike.vandervliet-firth@lewisham.gov.uk). These will then be assessed by a panel comprising of officers from Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark Councils.

### **1. Responsible Procurement Policy**

Lambeth Council is a London Living Wage employer and expects all individuals employed as a result of entering a contractual relationship with Lambeth Council to be paid at least the London Living Wage. In this context, this requirement will apply to any employment coaches, advisers or trainers who are delivering the support outlined in this specification. It does not include the young people who are on a Kickstart placement.