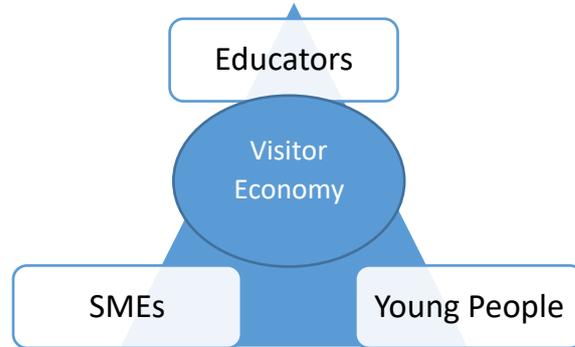


VENI - Visitor Economy ESF Skills Bid

Introduction

VENI is the **Visitor Economy Network Initiative** that will bring educators and SMEs closer together and at the same time create opportunities for young people to develop work-ready skills and participate in, and learn more about, their local visitor economy.



Four key strands provide the framework for project activity. These are: developing the Visitor Economy workforce; supporting young people through a Visitor Economy Youth Pledge; encouraging SMES to get involved through business networks; and creating a package of exciting events across the region, which galvanise local communities; engage local colleges; and promote the region to visitors.

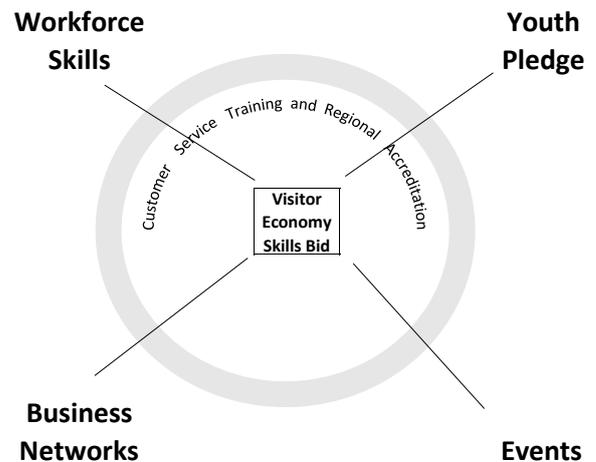
Four strands offer a comprehensive approach to skills development in the Visitor Economy and provide sufficient breadth to positively affect the culture sector and creative industries.

The Youth Pledge is primarily aimed at young people but it is also about influencing the curriculum and the way that educators prepare young people for careers in the sector. So the youth pledge is a starting point for the project - it connects educators, students and local SMEs - and ensures that industry relevance is top of the agenda.

The Workforce Skills strand builds on this - providing a package of skills activity for people working in the sector. This includes skills competitions, masterclasses, workshops and career building courses.

The Business Network strand is an essential part of the overall project in that it ensures businesses are fully engaged and a consistent message is communicated across the sector. Working through business networks across the region is a good way to build industry confidence and expand the number of business that colleges currently engage with. The business network strand will provide a sounding board for industry initiatives and events that can be delivered through this project.

Finally the **Events** strand will encourage colleges to get involved in the planning, marshalling, delivery and participation in fayres, festivals and functions unfolding in their local communities. Events are a powerful way to bring the community together and to provide a multi-skills framework for further education.



Strategic Context

This project has been developed in response to the recent call for proposals from the European Social Fund Managing Authority in England. The project has been developed as part of the New Anglia LEP Visitor Economy Sector Skills Group's core work and is the result of numerous discussions and consultation across the LEP region.

VENI is aligned to strategic priorities of the region, and is also part of the preparatory work for a Tourism Zone in the East, an initiative which itself will transform the way the Visitor Economy delivers skills, jobs and careers in the region. The LEP's ESIF strategy has highlighted the need to "develop pathways either to employment or progression within our growth sectors" and it also refers to "the concerns of employers about the readiness of work of young unemployed people"; both of these issues are taken on board in this project which aims to break down some of the structural barriers that exist between employers, FE colleges and young people. The project is based on the successful ESF delivery framework developed by PLACE 21.

VENI builds on the recent report from The Independent Commission on the College of the Future (October 2020). In this report, the idea that colleges should be "at the heart of their community" is reiterated and collaboration between colleges encouraged. The report's emphasis on lifelong learning opportunities for all; a focus on industry relevance and business responsiveness; and a non-competitive environment within which a highly productive skills system can be developed are all themes supported by, and explored through, this project. The report suggests that "Employers will see the college network as a key source of strategic support – as a place they turn to as they seek to innovate and develop." This aspiration will hopefully become a reality for the Visitor Economy in our region; VENI will provide a framework for exciting collaboration between colleges and businesses from the sector. A key recommendation from the report is that colleges are seen as "anchor institutions within the wider local and regional ecosystem" and this is certainly something VENI seeks to bring about.

Finally, it is not possible to provide strategic context without mentioning COVID-19. The destructive impact that the pandemic has had on the Visitor Economy and related industries cannot be overstated. Not only has the pattern of demand simply vanished but many businesses are struggling to survive in the short term. Whilst this project is unlikely to be able to save businesses, it can provide a solid platform for recovery centred on developing industry relevant skills and high quality customer service.

In summary, VENI will encourage educators in further education to find out more about their local industry and the project will enable them to reach out to local SMEs and develop exciting learning projects. At the same time, VENI will have a significant influence on the curriculum both through SME participation and through educators making their courses more industry relevant and sector friendly. These developments will have a significant impact on young people in further education - giving them the confidence and 'know-how' to pursue careers in the regional visitor economy.