



REPORT BACK ON CONFERENCE/SEMINAR

REPORT TO:	Scrutiny Co-ordination	19th July, 2006
REPORT OF:	Phil McGrahan, International Assistant	
TITLE:	West Midlands in Europe Skills Interface	
DATE:	25th – 26th April 2006	
VENUE:	Brussels, Belgium	

1 Recommendation

Scrutiny Co-ordination is recommended to note the report on Phil McGrahan, International Assistant's attendance at a Skills Interchange conference in Brussels and the outcomes of the visit.

2 Background

West Midlands in Europe (WMIE) is the regional representation for the West Midlands region in Europe. The Brussels office provides a visible and high profile first point of contact for the region.

At the same time, the office provides a gateway into the region for Brussels-based institutions and organisations who wish to find out more about what the West Midlands has to offer.

The office operates through its extensive network of contacts with key decision-makers in the EU institutions, including the European Parliament, European Commission, UK Government representatives and the wide range of regional, national and international organisations represented in Brussels. This is reinforced by the many regional, national and international networks in which West Midlands in Europe partner members operate

The Skills Interchange conference offered the opportunity to equip participants with the necessary knowledge, expertise of working successfully within the EU environment, so that its region can play its full part in shaping policy and process.

The programme included detailed presentations from EU officials on their specific Directorate General as well as seminars on accessing EU funding. The conference also provided a good opportunity to network with other participants.

Other organisations represented at the event were: Association of Romanian Regional Development Agencies; Warwickshire County Council; West Midlands Regional Assembly.

3 Cost of attending

The costs for attending were as follows:

Conference attendance:	€90 =	£ 61.52
Return flights Birmingham to Brussels:		£256.97
Accommodation:		£248.50
City Council's Travel Insurance:		£ 15.59
Parking at Airport:		£ 18.60
Expenses:	€61.85 =	£ 42.25

Total £643.43

All costs were covered by the International Team budget.

4 Benefits

Local authority international links and partnerships provide a number of benefits including improved service delivery and problem solving through learning from the best practice of others. Sharing information and experiences with counterparts overseas and staff exchanges can be an effective way of delivering technical assistance and can be more sustainable than one off projects. Local authorities can compare approaches and let members and officers learn from each other over time. Overseas partnerships and twinning links increase awareness of European and international issues and can improve local authorities' understanding of our counterparts in the rest of the world.

In terms of EU funding, twinning links provide a good source of reliable partners for trans-national funding projects and short visits are often the quickest and most effective way of keeping up to date with developments in each other's cities and maintaining an active link.

The below benefits of attendance at the Skills Interchange conference are all linked to the new EU funding programmes (2007-2013) and how these can benefit Coventry:

- Phil McGrahan met the West Midlands in Europe Brussels office (WMIE) staff and through discussion gained a full understanding of the services that the office provides and how this can be of benefit to Coventry;
- The visit provided the opportunity to discuss Coventry's current areas of interest and how these relate to the new EU funding programmes 2007-2013 with the WMIE staff and what plans they are making in response to the new programmes;
- Phil McGrahan had the opportunity to meet and network with representatives of other regions attending the conference who could act as trans-national partners on future projects;

- Phil McGrahan gained a better inside working of certain European Commission Directorates General through talks with their representatives at the conference and tours around the institutions.

List of background papers

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Other contributors:
Papers open to public inspection

Description of paper:	Location
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