



SOWEC supply chain and procurement
Advertising portal workstream

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- Our highly experienced team has an average of over 10 years' experience in renewable energy.
- Most of our work is advising private clients investing in manufacturing, technology and renewable energy projects.
- We've also published many landmark reports on the future of the industry, cost of energy and supply chain.

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1. Executive summary

The Scottish Offshore Wind Energy Council (SOWEC) commissioned BVG Associates (BVGA) to investigate the barriers for Scottish suppliers who wish to get involved in the offshore wind supply chain. This report summarises the findings from the Advertising Portal workstream. This workstream was tasked with identifying how to increase awareness and participation of the Scottish supply chain in Scottish offshore wind projects.

There is a definite appetite from both buyers and suppliers to increase awareness of opportunities in offshore wind, to increase participation and help achieve the sector deal targets for local content.

Current advertising portals are perceived to add little value to the supply chain. Although used by most suppliers, few could attribute any business success to opportunities advertised on portals. Even so, many spent considerable time and energy trying to manage the large number of portals that are available.

Buyers are open to an industry wide advertising portal, but this must be seen to add value to their operations by helping identify relevant local suppliers, make their own supply chain mapping easier and so helping them achieve local content targets.

Summary Recommendations

- Use of an advertising portal has to be compulsory.
- Supplier information requirements should be minimal and only be that required for buyers to carry out initial triage.
- Any portal must have demonstrable benefits for both suppliers and buyers.
- A UK-wide portal is strongly preferred to a Scottish-only portal.
- Portal should add value to users by providing collaboration, learning, advertising and a forward-looking view of opportunities.
- The portal should be free to use for suppliers

2. Introduction

Established in 2019, SOWEC is a partnership between the Scottish public sector and the offshore wind industry to coordinate a Scotland-wide response to the UK Offshore Wind Sector Deal. The partnership aims to lead and support the industry, boost the local content of projects and increase jobs in line with the Sector Deal.

The council has five goals which are to:

- Deliver at least 8GW of offshore wind in Scottish waters by 2030.

- Develop a plan for offshore wind's contribution to achieving Scotland's climate change ambition of net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2045.
- Create a competitive, commercially attractive offshore wind sector in Scotland which can deliver both domestically and in the global offshore wind market, with a focus on project development, deeper water capability and innovative technology solutions.
- Work to increase local content in line with the ambitions set out in the UK Sector Deal, developing a sustainable, world-class supply chain in Scotland.
- Boost the number of offshore wind jobs in Scotland to more than 6,000; an increase of 75% on 2019 figures

2.1. Supply chain work packages

SOWEC have commissioned BVG Associates to deliver a package of five workstreams related to the SOWEC goal of increasing local content and developing a world-class supply chain. This report is one of five interdependent SOWEC supply chain and procurement workstreams.

This Advertising Portal workstream report shows how to increase Scottish companies' awareness of, and subsequent participation in, offshore wind tenders. BVGA has analysed options for a centralised procurement advertising portal for the offshore wind industry in Scotland. The findings are based on in-depth interviews with stakeholders which examined their requirements for improved visibility and awareness of procurement opportunities for supply-chain businesses.

Research was carried out using in-depth insight sessions over video call.

3. Systemic issues

Awareness of opportunities is a necessary condition for Scottish businesses to achieve greater involvement in the offshore wind supply chain. The following issues were identified as systemic issues with the offshore wind sector that would prevent greater involvement, regardless of awareness.

3.1. Incumbent bias

Deciding to use new supplier is always perceived as a risk by buyers. Buyers know what current suppliers deliver and that they will do at least a 'good enough' job. If they did not, they would not be retained as a supplier. Finding and qualifying a new supplier requires potentially significant cost and resources. There are also well-established psychological reasons for preferring an incumbent, such as

loss aversion and the sunk cost fallacy¹. A new supplier will not be able to deliver such surety of performance. This issue is not unique to offshore wind. To win new business, a new supplier must have very strong and obvious advantages over an incumbent. Some supplier stakeholders believed that many opportunities were effectively already allocated to incumbents, even if they are advertised.

3.2. Capability

The importance of using local supply was recognised as a 'good' thing to do by all stakeholders. Most did recognise that for significant parts of the supply chain, local supply is not possible due to lack of capability or significant cost disadvantage. For example, the lack of a UK turbine manufacturer makes it impossible for buyers to source complete turbines locally. Similarly, the high labour costs for jacket foundations would make it difficult for Scottish companies to compete with suppliers from lower labour costs markets. The lack of capability necessitates refocus rather than abandonment of driving greater local supply. For example, for foundations, the high automation involved in monopile manufacturer should make it a good candidate for local supply.

3.3. Contracting practices

The responsibility for increasing local content is usually assigned to developers. Developers need to have a clear view on their likely costs and availability of capabilities at a very early stage in project development. This necessitates the appointment of an Engineering, Procurement, Construction and Installation (EPCI) provider or Tier 1 suppliers early in the process. They in turn will be committed to the price and quality quoted to developers. There is no commitment to work packages at this time, so they are highly likely to quote using information from existing suppliers rather than speculate on new suppliers. When project work is being commissioned, developers have limited (enforceable) influence over which suppliers an EPCI or Tier 1 provider uses since agreements on scope and budget have already been made.

4. Stakeholder feedback

Relevant stakeholders were categories as follows:

- Suppliers – Companies based in Scotland that could supply the offshore wind industry. Participant companies were a mix of companies currently active in offshore wind, those who have tried to develop business in offshore wind with no success and companies with capabilities that could service the

offshore wind sector but have no apparent interest. Companies were identified using BVGA's internal contact list and recommendations from SOWEC.

- Buyers – organisations that make commercial decisions for offshore wind projects. These include developers, Tier 1 suppliers and EPCI contractors, and
- Portal owners/enablers – organisations responsible for existing portals that advertise opportunities for the Scottish supply chain across several sectors.

4.1. Suppliers

Views of current advertising portals

Suppliers find it difficult to gain timely visibility of relevant new opportunities in offshore wind.

Generally, portals were viewed as having poor client engagement. Suppliers were sceptical about industry advertising portals, driven by the time taken to register and keep up to date with opportunities, with limited return.

Current portals played a very minor role in their business development activities. Tools such as social media (especially LinkedIn), face to face events, networking and cold calling were much more useful for business development.

Most business is won using existing relationships and direct engagement with buying organisations. Often buyers will contact known suppliers asking to quote for work or highlighting a Request for Proposal (RFP) or Invitation to Tender (ITT) opportunity. Trade associates are seen as good providers of networking opportunities to establish new relationships and uncover opportunities. Occasionally, word of mouth recommendations and referrals from past collaborators would lead to business being won.

Suppliers would like better visibility of relevant opportunities. It is presently difficult to find relevant opportunities since suppliers are unsure where they are advertised. No current advertising portal stands out as an essential source of opportunity information. There was a strong desire for a single database containing all relevant opportunities.

Even free to use portals were not a good use of company resources. Several mentioned that paid-for portals had not delivered a return on investment. Those not currently involved in offshore wind were reluctant to risk spending on a new portal given the perceived difficulties in winning business as a new supplier.

¹ See The Decision Lab <https://thedecisionlab.com/biases/loss-aversion/> and Behavioural Economics

<https://www.behavioraleconomics.com/resources/mini-encyclopedia-of-be/sunk-cost-fallacy/>

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The perceived large number of portals made it difficult to know the best portals to use.

In contrast with buyers interviewed, suppliers thought *Meet the Buyer* events were of limited use, even before current restrictions made them impossible. Other networking events, including trade shows, are seen as having a positive impact on business. This apparently paradoxical situation is likely to be due to expectations. Meet the buyer events have the expectation that opportunities will be unveiled with the expectation of possible business wins but this rarely happens. Suppliers at other networks events will expect to work hard to uncover any opportunities and making new contacts would be judged as a success. The absence of networking events during the Covid pandemic has left some with a gap in their business development plans.

Any opportunities advertised by buyers are perceived by suppliers as polarised into very big spends or very small (such as taxis, PPE and accommodation) with local opportunities being focussed on the latter.

Where buyers did make direct contact, opportunities highlighted were usually either too small or the scope was beyond capabilities.

Some potential suppliers did use several third-party portals (such as TED, Public Sector Scotland, the Cluster websites and O4B) but found it difficult to identify any work won as a result of using these portals and many found them cumbersome to identify relevant opportunities. Paid for portals (such as Tenders Direct, EIC and various Achilles powered portals) were only used if compelled to by buyers. As with free portals, these were not seen as a valuable business development tool. Different procurement approaches by developers added to the confusion. Those with significant public ownership tended to use TED. Others use their own portals and others still used a variant of a third-party system such as Achilles. These different approaches led to duplicated effort and increased the cost of sale.

A significant number of suppliers had become despondent with the offshore wind opportunity, with some citing the lack of UK based OEMs as a reason behind limited opportunities for lower tiers to play a significant role in projects. With OEMs increasingly looking to lock clients into long term O&M contracts, the opportunities for local suppliers could be reduced further.

Supplier requirement for an advertising portal

An effective advertising portal for suppliers would have the following capabilities:

- Easy and free to use.
- A single source of all offshore wind opportunities with degree of compulsion to use the portal for all opportunities.

- Buyers able to identify and engage with appropriate suppliers.
- Ability to 'triage' suppliers for potential opportunities using only 'just sufficient' data and criteria or keyword profiling suppliers for buyers to identify potential new suppliers.
- Suppliers to self-assess what keywords identify appropriate opportunities.
- Visible pipeline of opportunities – opportunities to be advertised at Expression of Interest stage rather than RFP/ITT to enable suppliers to prepare for future RFPs. This would give a forward view of up to five years in advance.
- The ability to drill down into detailed specific scope of works to enable complete understanding of requirements.
- Search function that allows buyers to search by supply chain type.
- Clear guidance on registration and response.
- Ability to engage with other suppliers and buyers for direct communication and to establish relationships.
- Ability to form consortia over the portal to fill individual capability gaps.
- Education on how to respond and position themselves for offshore wind.
- Relevant information proactively pushed out (via setting contact preferences).
- Wide geographic coverage.
- Ability to promote services on site.
- Latest relevant industry news, calendar of events.
- Visible progress of projects updated by developers would be useful.
- Policing of coding/identification to ensure correct categorisation of suppliers and opportunities, and.
- Management of companies registered to ensure relevance/accuracy.

4.2. Buyers

Buyers recognised the need and desirability of increasing engagement with local supply chain. Many map the local supply chain to identify capabilities. This mapping is done at tender stage and often involves the use of supply chain directories. Clusters and trade organisations were mentioned as being particularly useful. Buyers are keen to ensure the right level of competition amongst suppliers

The key procurement test for selecting local suppliers was based on capability. Buyers are prepared to pay a small price premium if required for local supply, providing capability and quality is maintained.

For buyers, in general 'local' opportunities is synonymous with smaller opportunities, reflecting the lack of UK manufacturing capabilities for larger wind farm components.

Buyers feel meet the buyer events were a good way to meet new potential suppliers and present opportunities.

Local suppliers that they do engage tend to be in the service sector and have been in situ for many years.

New suppliers were also discovered as a result of persistent, relevant and informed contact by suppliers.

Ideally buyers would work together with their immediate suppliers to achieve local content, but timing and cost pressures make that difficult.

Suppliers need to know how to position themselves and to demonstrate what value they add. As well as the value of increasing local content, local suppliers should also be able to help buyers lower risk and increase the speed of response. For buyers, too many potential suppliers have a misconception of the who buyer is and are poor at demonstrating the value they can bring.

In principle, buyers are open to an industry wide advertising portal but would only want to share limited information for fear of losing competitive advantage.

From a buyer's point of view, a successful advertising portal should:

- Have a clear benefit to buyers
- Not increase procurement complexity
- Quickly identify relevant suppliers, and
- Have enough information to allow suppliers to make an informed expression of interest but not enough to break commercial confidentiality.

4.3. Portal owners/enablers

There are no 'pure play' offshore wind advertising portals currently available. Portals considered in this work were either in-development offshore wind specific portals (such as LiveLead's proposed new product and Sector Key) or covered sectors in addition to offshore wind (such as Open4Business and BIP).

The portal owners suggested the following criteria for a successful advertising portal:

- Have buy in across all industry stakeholders.

- Free access for suppliers.
- Minor "PQQ" to improve efficiency (financial information, etc).
- Analytics essential to prove value to all stakeholders.
- Promotion of opportunities – push email.
- Extensive promotion of the platform – using LinkedIn, GoogleAds, search engine marketing, face to face events, speaker slots, stands at marketing events.
- Assistance to help suppliers to respond.
- Clear vision of portal objectives, and.
- Proof that portal can deliver for suppliers and buyers.

5. Review of existing advertising portals

There are several supply chain directories but no dedicated advertising portal for offshore wind has yet been launched. The portals included in this section were chosen by:

- Recommendation from SOWEC
- BVGA's knowledge of procurement portals
- Portals mentioned as part of the engagement exercise
- Desk research to identify portals from sectors with high local content

As well as user feedback, the portals below were tested using an online Nibbler tool for testing websites. Details of the online testing can be found in Appendix B.

5.1. Portals advertising offshore wind opportunities

Open4Business

<https://www.o4b-highlandsandislands.com/>

The O4B portal was launched in 2010/2011 by SSE to support engagement with Highlands and Islands businesses. It was launched as SSEs product for their projects (mainly for transmission projects but also generation projects, such as onshore wind farms). It was run by SSE for eight or nine years, before being taken over in 2019 by Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE).

The portal is mainly focused on energy opportunities, but it does advertise other opportunities. It has a vision to go beyond an advertising platform and being a development/learning platform for SMEs too. It has attracted a large number of registrations (over 2500).

Although having a high level of awareness (several suppliers and buyers having mentioned it) O4B has a small number of opportunities advertised on it. Functionality, reporting and ability to make changes are limited.

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Other Public sector portals

Public Contracts Scotland

<https://www.publiccontractsscotland.gov.uk/>

Sell2Wales

<https://www.sell2wales.gov.wales/>

UK Government Contract Finder

<https://www.contractsfinder.service.gov.uk/>

Tenders Electronic Daily

<https://ted.europa.eu/TED/>

The above advertising portals advertise all public sector opportunities. Private sector opportunities are occasionally advertised, especially where there is significant public sector involvements or ownership of advertising company.

These portals enjoy a large number of users and are updated regularly. Typically, dozens of opportunities are posted daily. However, they cover many sectors and it can be difficult to identify relevant content, due to the number and classification of advertised opportunities.

Both Sell2Wales and Public Contract Scotland enable relevant (as defined by keyword) opportunities to be pushed out to registered users via email.

Tenders direct

<https://www.tendersdirect.co.uk/>

Paid for public sector alerts portal. Established in 1992. Aims to provide greater awareness of relevant opportunities in the many public sector contracts that are published every day. Claim their searches are the most accurate source of low value tenders.

5.2. Oil & Gas portals

FPAL

<https://www.achilles.com/community/fpal/>

FPAL was set up by the UK oil and gas industry in 1996. It was established by The Oil and Gas Authority (OGA) working with Achilles to engage with buying organisations to communicate about new business opportunities in the oil and gas supply chain. The Forward Workplans provide an indication of future activity.

FPAL enabled potential suppliers to gain a forward view of potential opportunities in addition to current RFPs. It is more than an advertising portal as well as tender alerts and forward views it also offered document management and audits. It is now known as Achilles Oil and Gas Europe.

OGA "Pathfinder" Pointing Tool for O&G supply chain

<https://www.ogauthority.co.uk/supply-chain/oil-gas-pathfinder-previously-project-pathfinder/>

The Oil & Gas Pathfinder was previously known as the Project Pathfinder. It provides a real-time view of oil and gas projects and the decommissioning programmes on the UK Continental Shelf (UKCS). It now also includes 'projects to support the energy transition including CCS'.

It only provides general information and aims to provide additional information to existing forums. The user interface looks basic. It is suggested that this should be better integrated into existing portals rather than having (yet) another portal for potential suppliers to interrogate.

5.3. Planning

LiveLead (<https://www.livelead.co.uk/>)

LiveLead aims to give everyone access to important information about suppliers, buyers and tenders. It has a focus on data and metrics to ensure suppliers have a good understanding of the tender and making sure only the most appropriate suppliers apply. Information provided includes value, status, how long left to submit, relevant planning data and how many applicants, so that suppliers can make a desktop decision. This is supported by an SQL database that allows data to be sliced and diced easily to provide management information quickly. This can be linked to supplier's social media to customise advertising. It uses AI to flag relevant opportunities to suppliers. Opportunities are communicated via email with excel attachment with relevant information – relevant tenders and available information. Local press is used to publicise success via news stories. Other promotion includes social media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram).

LiveLead have ambitions to launch an offshore wind specific service and are in conversations with some North Sea developers.

5.4. Rail and Road

Office of Rail and Road:

<https://orr.bravosolution.co.uk/web/login.shtml>

The ORR eTendering service aims to provide "a simple, secure and efficient means for managing tendering activity and contract negotiations with suppliers over the internet".

Suppliers can view the current contract opportunities and can express an interest if registered.

Tender documentation such as notices, pre-qualification questionnaires and invitations to tender are all available online and can be submitted, evaluated and awarded through the portal.

Communication through the site is via email alerts. It is free of charge to suppliers.

The Office of Rail and Road is funded by the rail industry through licence fees and safety levies.

5.5. Characteristics of an effective advertising portal

To be successful, the portal must have the seven Cs:

- Compulsion** – users must be confident that all relevant offshore wind opportunities will be advertised on the site. Suppliers would have confidence that the portal is the single source of opportunities. Buyers would know the portal is the source of suitable suppliers. Buyers would also feel confident that competitors are not gaining some commercial advantage from the information they reveal. Compulsion will be most effectively achieved by buyers and suppliers **wanting** and well as **having** to use the portal. The desire to use the portal can be increased by generating commercial FOMO (fear of missing out). This will mean that if buyers do not use the portal to advertise opportunities, they feel they will be at a commercial disadvantage. If buyers can be persuaded that the portal is generating real benefits for the industry as a whole, that will generate a ‘moral’ compulsion. A regulatory compulsion, where use of the portal is mandated as a condition of development would help all buyers feel using the portal represented a level playing field. If compulsion is achieved **only** by regulation it will have minimal impact in supply chain development. If buyers are only advertising on a portal due to coercion, this increases the possibility of gaming the portal by, for example, providing incomplete information, very short deadlines or challenging conditions for potential new suppliers.
- Clear-cut** – it must be easy for users to register, use, and integrate the portal. For suppliers, registration should be easy and require only essential information that is entered one time. For buyers, it should be closely integrated with their own procurement systems, allowing posting of opportunities to be easy and quick. It should also clearly be the single source of relevant opportunities. The oil and gas sector has several good portals performing specific tasks for various points in the buying cycle. A clearer, more effective approach would be to have a single portal covering all stages.
- Communication** – the portal should promote relevant opportunities to supply through push communications such as email alerts or other messaging if suppliers prefer. It should also facilitate communication between suppliers and buyers both relating to specific opportunities and more generally to allow relationships to be formed. It should also allow suppliers to promote themselves and display any relevant accreditation and other industry standards they have.
- Control** – users must be able to self-select opportunities of interest using profiles of capabilities and buyers must have confidence that these profiles reflect reality. Suppliers should also have the option to advertise opportunities only to suppliers that meet specific criteria. Portal owners should also have control over the information provided to check validity and correct any incorrect self-categorisations.
- Collaboration** – suppliers should be able to form consortia to fill capabilities gap by cooperating with complementary suppliers. It should also facilitate online networking between both suppliers and buyers. It should also be able to provide secure and customisable feeds to and from suppliers’ own systems.
- Coaching** – the portal should contain education, case studies and general guides for suppliers to understand likely buyer requirements and identify areas they need to develop to be successful. It would also promote relevant and common accreditation and other industry standards as they are developed.
- Coverage** – ideally, opportunities would be for at least the UK not just Scotland. It should also have a forward look of potential opportunities even if suppliers are not yet able to commit to work packages. As a result, ‘opportunities’ refer to all types of approaches to market - forward views, expressions of interest, requests for/invitations to tender and requests for proposals

5.6. Summary SWOT analysis of advertising portals

Table 1: SOWT analysis of selected portals

Portal	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threat
Achilles/FPAL	Industry buy-in; forward view	Complex registration requirements; costly	Single step for procurement management – advertising and procurement process on single platform	New player cooperation

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Portal	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threat
Office of Rail and Road	Sector specific; compulsion; free to use; high usage and awareness	Detailed registration required	Current rail infrastructure project	Reliant on major government infrastructure expenditure
Open4Business (O4B)	Awareness; well established	Lack of reporting; inflexible structure; not app enabled; poor search	Posting more opportunities;	IT architecture; disillusioned users
Other Public Sector portals	Good search; regularly updated; high compulsion;	Public sector contract dominated; not offshore wind specific	Greater promotion; more private sector	Other portals offering 'one stop shop'
Tenders Direct	One stop shop for all public sector tenders	Paying for information that is available for free elsewhere	Expand beyond public sectors	Expansion/awareness of free portals

6. Recommendations

Key recommendation

- To be successful, an offshore wind advertising portal has to be compulsory for buyers. Buyers should want as well as have to use the portal.
- A new advertising portal should be developed rather than seeking to develop an existing portal.
- An advertising portal should not require PQQ completion to respond to advertisements. Supplier information requirements should be limited to that required for buyers to carry out initial triage.
- Any portal must have demonstrable benefits for both suppliers and buyers.
- A UK-wide portal would be optimal, although a Scottish-only portal is likely to be viable.
- As well as advertising current opportunities, portal should add value to users by providing collaboration, learning, advertising and a forward-looking view of opportunities that are likely to arising in the coming months and years.

There is a definite untapped demand for a single portal that advertises offshore wind opportunities for suppliers. Done correctly, this would also have the support of buyers.

While a Scotland only portal would generate value, a UK wide portal would increase the opportunities and value generated for the Scottish supply chain, albeit with the risk that it could open up Scottish opportunities for non-Scottish companies.

6.1. Developing a portal

It is recommended that any advertising portal is single minded in its purpose. Its purpose should be to increase the awareness and consideration of offshore wind opportunities for local suppliers. In terms of a procurement cycle, it will triage potential supplier rather than replicate PQQ or other qualified supplier systems. It should provide easy, and ideally seamless, links to such systems once suppliers have passed an initial triage.

To be effective, any portal will need active management. Therefore, as well as IT costs, administrative resources will be needed for any portal. It is recommended that this is a dedicated resource with the sole responsibility, and budget, to ensure portal success.

There are two options to deliver such a portal:

- Takeover and upgrade an existing portal.
 - Advantages: Inherit a user base; existing IT infrastructure; Gain any positive legacy; management resources already exist
 - Disadvantages: New portal carries any negative legacy of old version of portal; infrastructure may not be flexible enough to meet needs; ownership transfer of site and any personal data.
- Develop new advertising portal
 - Advantages: Flexible scope to deliver all requirements; optimal platform/architecture can be selected; no negative legacy.
 - Disadvantages: zero initial awareness; costs and project management of development; potential new administrative resources required.

It is recommended that an offshore wind advertising portal is developed from first principles. Building or adapting existing portals is unlikely to be any quicker or easier. Further, any portal based on existing sites would be likely to also inherit the current generally negative perception of existing portals.

Owners and developers of successful portals from other sectors (such as LiveLead, Achilles and the Office of Road and Rail) should be asked to provide proposals for developing an offshore wind portal.

6.2. Outline user experience

All users of the portal should have an “app-like” experience where navigation is easy and portal is equally effective on all devices.

Suppliers

Entry into website – the home page should contain basic information about the portal and a log-in/registration button. Information about potential opportunities should only be available on registration/log-on.

Registration – online registration via a simple form. The form should contain only essential information for a supplier triage. This will be agreed with key suppliers but should use ‘predictive’ data to minimise required input. For example, a Companies House number and an active website could be considered sufficient evidence that the supplier exists. A “good enough for a triage” approach should allow a parsimonious approach to data collection. Registration should also require companies to identify their capabilities using a predefined list such as the detailed BVGA offshore supply chain taxonomy. Suppliers should also have the option to specify opportunity preferences, such as value, geographic location, length of contract.

Finding opportunities – on login, suppliers should be presented with opportunities suited to their profile and preferences as well as industry news. There should also be the ability to search all other opportunities using key words and dates. Suppliers will also be able to sign-up to opportunity alerts, delivered using their mediums of choice (email, SMS or other messaging).

Responding to opportunities – suppliers should be able to respond to opportunities using a few clicks. On expressing an interest in an opportunity, they should receive regular updates on how long there is to respond and number of respondents. Responding to opportunities may require additional information as required by the supplier but this should be minimised. As the portal just seeks to filter potential suppliers, it is envisaged information required should not be excessive. Suppliers who abuse “fair use” by excessively applying for opportunities they are not qualified for, will face sanctions.

Contacting other suppliers – the portal should contain a networking function allowing suppliers to solicit other suppliers to form a consortium to fill any opportunity capability gaps they have. This would appear as a type of opportunity on the portal.

Contacting buyers – suppliers should be able to contact buyers to develop relationship and seek to understand buyer’s needs.

Learning – the portal should contain resources to allow suppliers to improve their offering to the offshore wind industry. This would cover ‘how to’ guides and industry news.

Advertising – suppliers should be able to actively promote themselves to suppliers by submitting news stories, capability statements, event attendance and other promotional material.

Buyers

Posting opportunities – ideally the portal will be integrated with supplier procurement systems and ‘scrape’ relevant information into the portal. Should this not be possible, a simple online form with common information should be used for buyers in submitting opportunities. As with suppliers, the information should be just enough to allow meaningful triage.

Supply chain mapping – buyers should be able to slice and dice supplier information in any way they wish. Thus, the portal should be supported by an SQL database or similar.

Validating suppliers – Buyers will be able to report suppliers that have provided misleading information on their profiles.

Advertising – as well as opportunities, buyers should be able to promote other activities such as key company announcements, events and project updates.

Celebrating success – subject to commercial sensitives, suppliers will share when portal members win business via the news feed on the log-in page of all users.

Portal owner

Analytics – analytics will be key to the value add of the portal to both buyers and sellers. The portal owner should provide regular reports on number of users, responses, successes and general portal traffics. This would also allow the development of ‘next best opportunity’ identification. Suppliers who passed the triage for opportunities would be notified when similar opportunities arose – equivalent to the online websites’ “people who bought that, also bought ...”.

Validation – the portal should flag any apparent errors in registration by, for example, links to Company House data.

SOWEC supply chain and procurement: Advertising workstream

Feedback using user activity as well as feedback from other users should also be used to police users.

6.3. Promoting the portal

To achieve its objectives, the portal must have the support and the commitment of the offshore industry. This means:

- Governmental bodies visible support and encourage portal participation.
- All relevant trade organisations promote and support the portal, and
- Clusters, developers and Tier 1 organisations commit to using the portal as their only portal to advertise opportunities. Ideally this commitment would arise from a willingness to drive local supply chain participation rather than any more formal compulsion.

Portal launch activity would include:

- Banner advert on key websites for the offshore wind industry and other key sectors sites that have supply potential (such as O&G, fabrication).
- Email campaign in partnership with local chambers of commerce, trade association, clusters and local enterprise organisations.
- Press release for general and trade specific press.
- Targeted LinkedIn advertising.
- Facebook campaign (to attract relevant SMEs)
- Calling campaign to potential suppliers to encourage registration.
- Presence at relevant trade industry event.
- Limited display advertising in printed media.
- GoogleAds campaign.

On-going promotion of the portal would include:

- Activity based emails to users to encourage greater usage
- Continued online advertising
- Sharing of success stories
- Opt-in newsletter sharing
- Promotion of learning materials on social media, and
- Search engine marketing.

6.4. Paying for the portal

To be effective in recruiting new entrants, the portal should be free to use for the suppliers, at least at the points of registration and enquiry.

Some level of industry-level funding would be required. Funding could therefore be provided by Government,

existing industry bodies, or collaborative funding from developers. There is unlikely to be public sector appetite for long-term funding of any portal. Organisations such as OWIC would be well placed to organise cross-industry funding. As the portal would be an essential tool to facilitate greater local supply chain involvement, the supply chain development strategies of UK's Department of Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy or the Crown Estate Scotland may also be able to encourage industry funding.

We have not examined whether funding should be by local, regional or national government nor whether any developer/buyer funding should be voluntary or by compulsion using a form of levy.

We have also not assessed whether funding would be best addressed by direct funding of a portal, establishment of a not-for-profit organisation or outsourcing to an existing body.

As an alternative funding could be from charging a success fee, such as a very small percentage of value, for any contracts award as a result of activities on the portal. This would be an inferior option as it increases the cost of sales for suppliers and provides an incentive to 'go around' the portal when awarding contracts. As it is recommended that this is a focussed advertising portal (rather than a complete procurement portal) it could also be difficult to provide a complete audit trail back to the portal following contract award.

6.5. Advertising, PQQ and T&Cs

Two other SOWEC supply chain and procurement workstreams, PQQ and T&Cs, have possible commonality overlaps with the advertising portal workstream.

While it is important the advertising, PQQ and T&Cs elements should all be joined up and offer a seamless experience for both suppliers and buyers, a single 'product' for three elements is not recommended. As above, to encourage new entrants, the advertising portal should require the minimum necessary information for relevant opportunities to be identified. This will be far less than is typically required for a PQQ or compliance with T&Cs.

Once a relevant opportunity or supplier has been 'triaged', it reasonable to require provision of more detailed information. Having advertising, PQQ and T&Cs as steps in a process is better than having both suppliers and buyers having to complete all steps in one leap. There would be slight user experience benefits from having all three elements accessible from a single 'super' portal. Even with a 'super' portal, the customer journey should reflect only the specific purpose for each element.

7. Next steps

The suggested next steps are:

- SOWEC agree on establishing an advertising portal (cognizant of other workstream recommendations)
- Ascertain level of support for and sources of potential funding.
- Agree business model to be used
- Develop a full specification document for an advertising portal.
- Issue a tender containing spec to targeted potential suppliers.

Appendix A: Participant companies

Company	Category
4C Engineering	Supplier
B2B quote	Portal owner
BiP Solution	Portal owner
Ferguson Marine	Supplier
Jan de Nul	Supplier
LiveLead	Portal owner
Marine Projects	Supplier
Mistras	Supplier
NNG/EDF	Supplier
O4B	Portal owner
Oceanwinds	Supplier
Sector Key	Portal owner
Sparrows	Supplier
Spartan Solutions	Supplier
SSE	Supplier
Turner Group	Supplier
Whittaker	Supplier

Appendix B: Portal assessments

The portals below were tested using the Nibbler online tool for testing websites. Nibbler assesses the website and gives a score (out of 10) using several tests. The result of these tests is then aggregated to provide scores for the key areas of accessibility, experience, marketing and technology.

Accessibility measures how accessible the website is to mobile and disabled users. The accessibility score is based on tests for internal links, headings, mobile friendliness, page titles and URL format.

The experience score aims to measure the good the likely website user experience will be and how satisfying the website is. Factors such as printability, popularity, internal links, images, amount of content, Twitter, mobile

friendliness, server behaviour, URL format, and regularity of updates ('freshness') are used to determine the experience score.

How well the website is promoted and its popularity is measured by the marketing score. This uses how well marketed, popularity, internal links, headings, amount of content, Twitter, web analytics, page titles, back links, meta tags and freshness to determine the score.

Technology is assessed using printability, internal links, headings, images, mobile friendliness, server behaviour, meta tags and URL format.

Portals targeting a specific niche scores will normally be lower due to the likelihood of lower popularity and fewer links.

Table 2: Portal test results

Category	Name	Overall	Accessibility	Experience	Marketing	Technology
General	Open4Business (O4B)	7.1	8.7	7.7	3.8	8.6
Planning	LiveLead	8.7	9.7	8.4	6.7	9.5
General	Sell2Wales	7.4	7.4	5.9	7.6	6.7
General	Public Sector Scotland	8.1	9.1	7.6	5.9	8.5
General	UK Government Contract Finder	9.2	9.8	8.5	7.6	9.2
General	Achilles	9.3	9.9	8.6	9.3	8.7
General	Tenders Direct	8.4	9.7	8.8	8.6	8.7
O&G	FPAL	6.4	8.3	6.9	3.5	8
O&G	O&G Authority portal	6.1	6.8	4.6	4.2	6.7
Infrastructure	Office of Rail and Road	9.6	9.8	9.5	8.9	9.6