ILG research Bursary Proforma

1. **Project Title (maximum 10 words)**

Determining the value of information literacy for employers

2. **Principal Investigator**

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3. **Co-Investigator(s)**

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4. **Partner(s)**

N/A

5. **Summary of the project – If the project is funded ILG will use this in any publicity material or announcements. (Maximum 300 words)**

The purpose of the project is to develop a methodology that will allow for the identification of quantitative and qualitative data that demonstrate the benefits of developing IL in workplace settings and assess the return on investment (ROI) of such initiatives. Our approach will be entirely pragmatic: we wish to propose, in terms that enterprises can understand and relate to, a way of identifying, or at least estimating the value that is added by information literacy; in other words, the value that is added by employing and training individuals that have appropriate and relevant know-how, competencies and skills in the use and handling of information and data, whatever form that takes. The value might be financial, but it might also relate to other factors that are important to enterprises, such as enhanced efficiency or competitive advantage.

We will achieve this by identifying and engaging with three employers; to achieve a balanced view, we are approaching one each in the commercial, public and not-for-profit sectors. We will work with individuals who occupy relevant roles within these organisations in order to inform the development of a tool that expresses the methodology which we are proposing, and which can be subsequently deployed by employers or anyone interested in IL in workplace settings, to demonstrate the value of IL. The project, particularly the promotion of its outputs, will be well-placed to exploit the networks and channels of communication with relevant organisations which are emerging through initiatives such as InformAll and through CILIP engagement with workplace issues.

6. **Risk assessment – Please state any risks you envisage on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being low and 5 being a high risk**

Difficulty in identifying three organisations to focus on (note: two of the organisations have already been identified): 1

Difficulty in identifying/contacting relevant individuals/groups within these two organisations: 2

Difficulty in attracting the interest of relevant stakeholders in the outputs of the project: 3

Difficulty in getting stakeholders to disseminate information about the outputs through their channels and networks: 2

Possibility of one of the project partners leaving the project after it has started (if this were to happen, the project will be sustained by the remaining partner without a need to change the calendar): 2

7. **Stakeholders**

The outputs of the project are directed principally at enterprises, whether in the commercial, public or not-for-profit sectors; and at other players, such as representative organisations, that have an interest in staff/professional development, skills in an employment context and lifelong learning, and relevant public bodies, including Government Departments (notably BIS and the Cabinet Office). The outputs may also be of value to academics and IL practitioners interested in exploiting the potential of the proposed tool to develop the evidence base on the benefits of IL in employment settings.

8. **Aims and Objectives**

The aims and objectives meet the SMART criteria:

- The principal aim of the project is to produce a practical, tangible and identifiable resource, in the form of a tool with well-defined variables, which can be used to demonstrate the value of investments in developing IL in employment settings *[specific and measurable]*.

- The project has been scaled realistically to provide evidence from just three organisations. But it will do so sufficient depth, by drawing from the perspectives of different organisational players, to provide a rounded view of what might constitute the value of investing in IL *[achievable].*

- The project addresses key areas of concern identified by the IL Group: workplace and skills agenda notably *[relevant].*

- There is increased realization of the importance of viewing IL in employment contexts. For instance, it is currently a strategic issue for CILIP, it is one of the themes of LILAC2015 and it has been a recurring issue at ECIL. There are also important policy developments in the UK in the area of digital inclusion (e.g. the implementation of the Government's Digital Inclusion Strategy); such developments provide an opportunity to highlight the contribution that workplace IL could make to fostering digital inclusion *[timely]*.

9. Milestones

The project will run for 15 weeks, starting on 2 March 2015 and ending on 12 June. It should be noted that the timescale will incorporate the two-week Easter holiday period, from 30 March to 10 April (also including the three days of LILAC2015), during which the rate of activity is likely to be lessened. Milestones are indicated on the Gantt chart below:

	Week nr														
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Surveying key themes from the bibliography and lit review	-				X	X	X								
Confirming and contacting relevant individuals to speak to		-	-		X	X	X								
Desk research on organisational documents			-	-	X	X	-								
Devising interview schedule				-	X	X	X								
Interviews with relevant individuals					X	X	X	-	-	-					
Analysing findings from desk research and interviews					X	X	X		-	-	-	-			
Producing methodology and tool that will express it					X	X	X					-	-	-	-

'Quiet' Easter / LILAC period	X

10. Description (Maximum 1,000 words)

What benefits do employers derive from recruiting, retaining and developing individuals who are information literate? What return on investment would they derive by providing relevant training to their employees, and better recognising information literacy, or aspects of it, in the professional and career development of their employees? What does the IL of employees, at all levels, add to the performance of enterprises in the private, public and not-for-profit sectors? There is no shortage of evidence on the way that information-related know-how, competences and skills are perceived and deployed in employment contexts (it is understood that they are rarely referred to explicitly as

information literacy); and on the relationship of these attributes to better recognised business factors such as knowledge-sharing, problem solving and business communication. But there is very little evidence of the impact of IL on enterprises; on how, for instance, it contributes to efficiency; or conversely, how poor information literacy may lead to weakened corporate performance. As recognised by Williams *et al*, greater evidence of impact of IL, expressed in terms that relate to industry and professional priority areas is urgently needed if business, government and professions are to be convinced of the relevance and significance of IL.

This project is intended to help plug that gap in the evidence base. Our aim is to develop a methodology that will allow for the identification of quantitative and qualitative data that demonstrate the benefits of developing IL in workplace settings and assess the return on investment (ROI) of such initiatives. Our approach will be entirely pragmatic: we wish to propose, in terms that enterprises can understand and relate to, a way of identifying, or at least estimating the value that is added by information literacy; in other words, the value that is added by employing and training individuals that have appropriate and relevant know-how, competencies and skills in the use and handling of information and data, whatever form that takes. The value might be financial, but it might also relate to other factors that are important to enterprises, such as enhanced efficiency, innovatory potential or competitive advantage.

We do not intend to develop a theoretical model. The methodology which we are proposing to develop will be expressed through a tool, conceivably in the form of a map or schema of variables, which can be deployed by employers or anyone interested in IL in workplace settings, to demonstrate the value of IL. The tool will be informed by input that we will seek from employers themselves. Given the small scale of the project, we cannot run a survey of large numbers of organisations, but we will instead focus on three UK employers as proof-of-concepts.

On that basis, we will undertake the following broad activities:

- By the start of the project, we will have identified the three UK employers that will form our three cases. At the stage of writing this proposal, two organisations have already agreed to be the subject of our work: the London Borough of Camden, representing the perspective of public bodies; and the Greater Manchester Council for Voluntary Organisations (GMCVO), for the not-for-profit sector. If the proposal is accepted, we will undertake to identify the third case, from the commercial sector (in all likelihood an SME) – it has not been possible to do so prior to the drafting of this proposal.

- At the start of the project, we will use the recently produced annotated bibliography by Williams *et al* (*op cit*) and the literature review by Inskip to identify key themes and questions that are relevant to the conduct of the study. These two documents are comprehensive and up-to-date, and will inform the conversations to be had with interlocutors in the three organisations later in the project.

- Initial contacts will have already been made within the three organisations, and we will use these to help us identify and approach key players within them. The timescale and resourcing of the project will allow us to talk to up to four or five individuals/groups in each case. These might logically include human resources/personnel managers, recruitment managers, business/policy strategists, finance managers, trade unions (particularly where the latter collaborate with employers on staff development and lifelong skills). The precise choice of interlocutors will depend on the nature of the organisations that we contact.

- Undertaking desk research to review the three organisations' relevant reports, strategies, policies and/or other relevant documentation; and also the relevant literature, particularly relating to staff and professional development, governing the sectors in which the three organisations operate.

- Devising and interview schedule and conducting the interviews (up to 12-15 in all), where possible face-to-face. We will want to tease out from our interlocutors how they define and calculate the added value, financial or otherwise, accounted for by staff/professional development – and by extension, the return on investment in staff/professional development; the aspects of staff/professional development, and if relevant the acquisition of lifelong skills, that are most pertinent to IL; ways in which the added value of IL-related know-how, competences and skills might be ascertained in the context of the overall value of staff/professional development; and the value of IL know-how, competences and skills acquired prior to joining the organisation, notably through the education process. In engaging with these interlocutors, care will be taken to present IL in terms that they can easily relate to (including avoidance, if appropriate, of the term 'information literacy'), and which correspond to the specificity of their sectors and/or activities.

- Analysing the findings that will have emerged from the desk research and interviews, and producing a short synthesis and review of these.

- Elaborating the tool that will form the main output of the project (see section 12 below).

11. **Dissemination strategy (maximum 500 words)**

The dissemination effort will rest heavily on the networking and outreach capacity of the InformAll initiative. Since early 2014, InformAll has been undertaking work on how IL is perceived at the interface between higher education and employment, and has consequently started building relationships with key relevant players. This outreach effort is currently being augmented through the organizing, jointly with CILIP, of a roundtable – to take place on 19 March 2015 – to explore the relevance of IL to the policies and practices of employers; the roundtable will in itself be an early occasion to raise awareness of the project, and perhaps provide input into its methodologies. These initiatives, which the investigators of this project are closely involved in, will allow us to uses the good offices and communication capacity of bodies such as the National Centre for Universities and Business, the UK Commission of Employment and Skills and the TUC's Unionlearn initiative, as well as individual enterprises, both during and after the project. Opportunities will be sought to report through such media as organisational blogs and newsletters, and we will ask for advice of these bodies on how best to promote the project outputs. The possible outputs of the InformAll/CILIP roundtable, which will take place a couple of weeks after this project would get off the ground, might provide a further opportunity to create synergy in the dissemination of messages relating to IL and employment. The advantage of an approach founded on engaging with stakeholders in the employment realm is that we will tap into networks and communities that are not frequently reached through more conventional academic or LIS fora.

The broader InformAll network will be exploited, and the range of members and organisations associated with InformAll will be asked to disseminate information about the project outputs to their own contacts.

We will also seek to disseminate our findings through major, multi-community international events. In particular, we would look to present at the European Conference on Information Literacy (ECIL2015) in October 2015. InformAll's panel session on IL and employability, at ECIL2014, attracted much interest, and we would capitalise on this. It is now too late to present at the 5th Information, Interactions and Impact Conference (i³) in June and at LILAC2015, but we could certainly envisage a presentation at LILAC2016 (*note:* there will be an InformAll symposium at LILAC2015, which will also focus on IL and employability; that event will constitute a further opportunity to flag up the project).

Finally, we will seek to identify opportunities for presentations and/or briefings for organisations that employers would more readily identify with, such as BIS, UK Commission for Employment and Skills, TUC, etc.

12. Outputs

The principal output of the project will be a tool that expresses a methodology for identifying quantitative and qualitative data which demonstrates the benefits of IL in workplace settings, as described in section 10 above. The tool will be practical and presented in a way that users (employers or any stakeholder with an interest in IL in employment settings) can easily understand and use. As we have explained, the tool would be used to demonstrate how IL adds value for enterprises. But beyond that, it would have the potential to help develop the evidence base on the benefits of IL in the workplace; and thereby of demonstrating to a range of stakeholders – not least policymakers in government, business and the professions (see above) – that IL is an important contributor to the capacity of enterprises to thrive and innovate. Importantly, the tool may also help to raise awareness of any relationship between the benefits accruing from IL in the workplace and those that stem from fostering digital inclusion; it is beyond the scope of the project fully to explore any such relationship, but it is worth flagging up in the light of current national policy initiatives directed towards digital inclusion.

It is important to stress that the tool and the underlying methodology would, to an extent, be experimental, and would represent a first step in the elaboration of an approach/product that necessarily has to be understandable to employers and others – we elaborate on this further in section 13 below, under evaluation strategy.

The short synthesis and review of the project's findings will constitute a secondary output; we envisage that this could be used as a basis for a future scholarly articles (targeted at business and management studies journals as well as the IL literature), but also blogs, articles in magazines and other non-scholarly publications, and for the purpose of the dissemination described in section 11 above.

13. Evaluation strategy (maximum 500 words)

Given that the main output of the project will be a practical resource, we will necessarily pay attention to ensuring that this resource is recognised, adopted and ultimately used by as many stakeholders as possible. The evaluation strategy of the project will be founded on this requirement, as follows:

- At the outset, we will set out a short project plan which reflects the phased objectives set out at section 10 above. We will jointly take stock at the end of each of these phases, informally assess the work undertaken in the light of the meeting of our aims, and consider how this should inform the conduct of the following phase.

- The principal output of the project will be a tangible product. Although its exact shape and content cannot be determined precisely at this stage, we know that it will be an identifiable tool, so that its production will be easily verifiable.

- The impact of the project cannot be ascertained in the short term. The principal output will be a proof of concept that will reflect the evidence and views that we will have garnered, on a relatively

small scale, during the course of the project. However, the tool will necessarily be experimental, and would act as no more than an initial basis for stakeholders to consider the value of IL in workplace settings, and to put IL on their organisational mind-map. The dissemination strategy outlined above would be an opening move, a starting point for framing a consideration, by a range of interested parties, of the value of IL. But beyond that, it is likely that far more would need to be done to encourage interest and take-up, and almost inevitably to adapt and refine the tool (and the methodology that underpins it) in the light of reactions. Such activity lies beyond the scope of this project and probably could not be undertaken without further resourcing, because of the extensive liaison and engagement that is likely to be required. However, the project would lay down solid ground for a bid for funding to support a larger scale project, perhaps from the ESRC, or any other funder (e.g. Rowntree, British Academy) with a mandate to support research in the social sciences relevant to the interests of business, government and society.

- The value added by the project will be determined by the reaction to the tool and the underlying methodology, as suggested in the paragraph above. We feel that the sort of approach that we suggest represents a reasonable and practical to raise awareness of the relevance and significance of IL in employment settings, and to help produce the evidence that will make enterprises understand and appreciate the benefits of IL. The value added would only be demonstrated if and when, as a result of our work, IL becomes better recognised as a feature of the career/professional development landscape.

14. Financial breakdown

The financial breakdown is based on the following daily rates for the two investigators:
- Stéphane Goldstein: £500
- Andrew Whitworth: £654

The overall costs are broken down as follows:
Staff costs, SG – 12 days @ £500	£ 6,000
Staff costs, AW – 5 days @ £654	£ 3,270
Travel costs	£ 700
TOTAL	£ 9,970

All costs are inclusive of VAT