

South East Midlands Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP)

FINAL

Progress Report June 2025



Funded by
UK Government

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Purpose of the Report

The purpose of the progress report is to clearly communicate in a consistent manner across all areas, the overall progress that has been made since the publication of the LSIP in 2023, to evidence the impact the LSIP is having and to encourage further and continued engagement and 'buy-in'. This progress report:

- Explains which actions/changes set out in the LSIP have been achieved, highlights the impact and benefits of the changes and sets out what still needs to be achieved, including any new or more granular intelligence or more specific actions that will help achieve this.
- The primary focus of this progress report is on the local priorities and actions needed to better align the skills system with employer and local labour market needs. The progress report does **not** provide feedback or critique on national policies

The primary audience(s)

- Employers who have engaged in developing and/or implementing the LSIP, to understand how their engagement has supported the process, direction of travel and achievements
- Employers who have not yet engaged in development and/or implementation of the LSIP to understand what is happening, how they might benefit from the LSIP and how to get involved
- Training Providers such as Further Education (FE) Colleges, Sixth Form Colleges, independent Training Providers (ITPs) and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) that deliver English-funded post-16 technical education and training in carrying out the duties placed upon them in respect to LSIPs. This is to ensure they all understand overall progress and have sight of new or more granular intelligence on employer skills needs to help shape provision planning
- Other local stakeholders with an interest in skills and who are playing, or could play, an important role in the implementation of the LSIP such as:
 - Local authorities – including functions such as the Adult Education (Skills) Budget
 - Other employer member organisations, sectoral bodies and centres of innovation such as Catapult centres
 - The Jobcentre Plus network and career, education, information advice and guidance (CEIAG) providers
 - Other organisations that understand the needs of employees and learners, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds/special educational needs and disabilities.
- In addition to engaging a local audience, this information will be useful to Skills England and aims to ensure we have the skilled workforce our economy needs at a national, regional and local level.

Who has been engaged?

In developing the progress report, we have obtained progress updates from local and regional employers, providers and other key stakeholders who support the delivery of the LSIP in some way. Stakeholders have shared information about how they are responding to the LSIP and any signs of impact, including information and impact on any Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF) projects they have delivered.

The LSIP is also promoted and informed across the following employment and skills governing bodies and working groups throughout the South Midlands (SM) which is Bedfordshire, Northamptonshire and Milton Keynes: network groups/sector bodies, SM Creative and Cultural Industries Group, Greater South East Retrofit Training Network Steering Group, Logistics Employer Advisory Board, Bedford College, East Midlands Advisory Group, STEM Learning, CoSEM, Further Education College Principals Group, South Midlands University Vice Chancellors, Bedford Borough Council, Skills Core Delivery Partnership, Employment and Skills Scrutiny and Improvement Board, Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough Councils, Luton Adult Learning, Luton Borough Council, Employment and Skills Provider Forum, Luton Borough Council, Adult Learning and Apprenticeship Performance Board, North Northamptonshire Council Skills Working Group, BIG 50 Strategy Vision, North Northamptonshire Council, Restart Local Engagement, Jobs 22, Post 16 Engagement into Employment, Milton Keynes Post-16 Planning Strategy Group, SEND Employment, Wider Determinants of Health Economy Employment and Skills, West Northamptonshire Local Authority Economic Development Officers – Business Survey feedback

Please note, this progress report aims to reflect progress at a point in time.

Summary of the LSIP

- Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) were introduced in the Skills for Jobs White Paper in January 2021. The Skills for Jobs White Paper set out an ambitious plan to put employers more firmly at the heart of the skills system to help ensure businesses and people have the skills they need to thrive and progress.
- A link to the LSIP published in August 2023 and the progress report from 2024 is provided below for reference.

<https://northants-chamber.co.uk/support/local-skills-improvement-plans-lsip/>

- The geographical area covered by this LSIP is the South Midlands, comprising of six Local Authority areas: Bedford, Central Bedfordshire, Luton, Milton Keynes, North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire.
- The LSIP details the aims and objectives of the area's specific key skills challenges and problems that we are trying to address/tackle in order to support local growth & productivity. It aims to drive change through cultural shift and developing and understanding of post-16 provision through the delivery of priorities and support for LSIF (Local Skills Improvement Fund) by regional stakeholders.
 - Skills Gaps continue to occur in local Lower layer Super Output Areas (LSOA's) across the region where individuals may not have access to the resources or support needed to acquire advanced skills or training. This mismatch between available skills and job requirements can lead to a higher prevalence of low-skilled jobs. The LSIP is working collaboratively with stakeholders (Local Authorities, Job Centre Plus, Providers and other interested bodies) to identify how support programmes (such as Restart, Connect to Work, Keep Britain Working etc.) can be aligned to other funding streams and resources such as UKSPF, central core funding etc. in order to reduce the mis-match
 - Our region contains a large number of rural and semi-rural areas and transport/mobility is a continuing issue for people who live in areas of deprivation without access to a vehicle or good transport. Poor transport links into urban, industrial and business areas challenges not just employers and employees but also learners when attending training. Whilst online helps with this many skills (construction, engineering, catering etc.) need to be done in person. The LSIP aims to highlight this with Local Authority Planning and Transport in order to identify possible improvement
 - Our region is facing skills shortages (people) in various business sectors. The growth in demand for the Construction and Health sectors require additional, qualified, people. The demographics of the workforce within the key local sector of Logistics and Transport highlights the many workers approaching retirement that need replacing, and demands for more Management, Administration and Digital staff across all sectors also continues to stay robust. Annex A provides detail. The LSIP has directly highlighted areas such as Construction and Logistics as not having a "licence to practice" as a barrier to employment (see Case Study p.12) and will continue to collaborate with relevant stakeholders (trade bodies, Job Centre Plus, Providers, Local Authorities) to identify and address barriers
 - As identified from LSIP stakeholder task and finish groups, we know the key challenge in our area is not provision of courses (although there are some stated gaps in provision, based on the top 60 occupations, lots of funded provision is already in place), it is **communication**. The LSIP will continue running the Task and Finish groups regionally to support increased communication between employers, providers and other stakeholders
 - Raising employers awareness and education about the ever changing Further Education (FE) offer and landscape, and how to successfully navigate it in a way they understand (and therefore engage), is key to success. LSIP dedicated staff will continue to network and present to employers across our region in order to support this.

Strategic and economic context update

Political control of both Northamptonshire Unitaries changed at the local elections of May 2025 and we await details regarding how this may affect the local skills landscape, net zero/green and social inclusion projects. This may or may not affect future LSIP reports and their direction of travel

Despite the current differing regional political views, it is important to have a united strategy for the region and additional underpinning work is required to link with the subregional plans. In the transition of the LEP functions, government set aspirations for a regional economic strategy. Discussions have been held about growth plans in relation to future devolution of the South Midlands area and aligning to this piece of work to best position the region for the future.

A regional Business Board was formed late 2024 and has met twice to date. Some published detail and weblinks from these meetings, relating to devolution, are in Annex H. The LSIP is directly represented and provides updates to the Board.

More information can be found in Appendix H

Alignment with the Modern Industrial Strategy and Skills England Priorities

In October 2024, the Government published the Invest 2035: the UK's modern industrial strategy which included stimulating investment and activity in eight sectors with the highest potential for growth. In addition, Skills England have included the eight growth-driving sectors identified in the Industrial Strategy and construction and health and social care as priority sectors.

Whilst no clear definition of the SIC or SOC codes for sectors has been provided as yet, Annex B provides an overview of our analysis of the local quotients for employment (LQs) for the priority sectors vs those for England. (NB: Location Quotient is a measure of a region's industrial specialisation relative to England. A LQ greater than 1.0 means that the South Midlands has a higher level of specialisation than is seen across England)

The South Midlands economy displays alignment with priority sectors, the strongest specialisms (location quotients) across the South Midlands being with advanced manufacturing and professional & business services with clusters and/or key businesses for:

- Advanced manufacturing – High in Central Bedfordshire, Luton, North & West Northants;
- Clean energy industries – High in West Northamptonshire;
- Construction – High in Bedford and Central Bedfordshire;
- Defence – High in Central Bedfordshire;
- Digital & technologies – High in Milton Keynes;
- Financial services – High in Milton Keynes;
- Health – High in Bedford and West Northamptonshire;
- Life sciences – High in Bedford;
- Professional & business services – High in Luton, Milton Keynes and West Northamptonshire;
- Social Care – High in Bedford and West Northamptonshire.

More information is available in Appendix B

Labour market impact and the Further Education and Apprenticeship Pipelines

The following table shows the trends for occupations in highest demand in the priority sectors directly related to the occupational routes and pathway pipeline priorities within the LSIP/LSIF:

SOC	Occupation	Employment	Job Postings	Status
Health and Social Care				
6135	Care Workers and Home Carers	Increasing	Decreasing	Meeting need
2461	Social Workers	Increasing	Increasing	Growing need
2237	Other Registered Nursing Professionals	Increasing	Decreasing	Meeting need
1171	Health Services and Public Health Managers & Directors	Increasing	Decreasing	Meeting need
2212	Specialist Medical Practitioners	Increasing	Increasing	Growing need
2234	Registered Nurse Practitioners	Increasing	Decreasing	Meeting need
3219	Health Associate Professionals n.e.c.	Increasing	Increasing	Growing need
3213	Medical and Dental Technicians	Increasing	Increasing	Growing need
2222	Occupational Therapists	Increasing	Stable	Growing need
Digital				
2134	Programmers and Software Development Professionals	Increasing	Decreasing	Meeting need
2133	IT Business Analysts, Architects and Systems Designers	Increasing	Decreasing	Meeting need
3132	IT User Support Technicians	Increasing	Decreasing	Meeting need
1137	Information Technology Directors	Increasing	Increasing	Growing need
Green Technology (Associated)				
5319	Construction and Building Trades n.e.c.	Increasing	Increasing	Growing need
9129	Elementary Construction Occupations n.e.c.	Increasing	Increasing	Growing need
5330	Construction and Building Trades Supervisors	Increasing	Stable	Growing need

For more information see Appendix E

Outside of the priority sectors the Wholesale and the Logistics and Supply Chain sectors remain a high specialisation across the South Midlands together with Other Transport in Luton related to the airport. From analysis in Annexes A and B, sectors that will be focused on and reason(s) are listed below;

- Health and Social Care - Skills England Focus/People Serving;
- Business administration & support services - Growth-Driving Sectors;
- Transport & storage - Local Economic Strength;
- Manufacturing - Growth-Driving Sectors;
- Education - People Serving;
- Professional, scientific & technical - Growth-Driving Sectors;
- Wholesale - Local Economic Strength;
- Construction - Skills England Focus /Growth-Driving Sectors (Clean Energy);
- Information & communication - Growth-Driving Sectors;
- Motor trades - Growth-Driving Sectors (Clean Energy);
- Financial & insurance - Growth-Driving Sectors.

Accommodation & food services will potentially require additional focus due to potential growth through inward investment. *More information is available in Appendix C*

Employability Skills

- Continued increase in demand for Technical and Vocational Skills.
- Increasing emphasis from employers for Core Transferable Skills, Attitudes and Behaviours.
- Decrease in demand for academic qualifications.
- Continued increase in demand for level 6 qualifications.
- Fall off in demand for levels 2, 3, 4 and 5 qualifications from mid-2024.
- Increasing demand for Microsoft Office and Presentation digital literacy skills.
- Increasing demand for Python programming language, data analysis, software development, data management and Windows PowerShell digital skills.

More information is available in Appendix F

Regional Business and Employment

- The manufacturing sector within Luton has been impacted with the closure of the Stellantis facility and the loss of 1,100 jobs
- Plans for a new business park in Luton have been approved by Luton Borough Council, with the move promising 600 jobs for the town. Developer Prologis UK submitted the designs for the Prologis Park Luton to the council, outlining the “new high-quality logistics and business park”. The development will be carried out in stages, with the first focusing on demolishing the former Vauxhall Motors headquarters
- The new owners of the Vauxhall van manufacturing factory in Luton have announced plans to regenerate the site with plans that could create more than 1,700 direct jobs
- A Universal Theme Park covering 475 acres will be built on the site of a former brickworks near Bedford. A 500 room hotel, new lake, entertainment complexes and rides are all part of the plans for the park, which is expected to be open by 2031. It will create 28,000 jobs – around 20,000 in the construction of the venue and another 8,000 in hospitality and staffing once the park is open. It is expected that approximately 80% of employees will come from Bedford, Central Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes
- Amazon to build a new fulfilment centre at the SEGRO Logistics Park by 2026, creating 1,400 to 2,000 jobs by 2029. It is expected to generate in excess of 7,450 jobs when developed
- There is currently no LSIF funding available, and other sources of funding will need to be used to support capital/revenue projects within FE
- Nike UK has signed a 20-year lease agreement for a 1.3 million ft² logistics campus at Magna Park Corby in Northamptonshire. The site is set to become ‘the principal hub of Nike’s UK supply chain’. The campus will create hundreds of jobs and be comprised of warehousing and offices, as well as sports and recreation facilities, in a single building.
- Towcester Park development, a landmark Employment Park on the A43, bringing forward over 1,400 jobs and boosting the local economy, Employment & Skills opportunities
- A new skills, innovation and business hub at Morton House that will support 200 jobs for Luton and improve the employment prospects of more than 1,500 adults every year has recently opened. The project has been delivered by Luton Rising, the Luton Council company that owns the airport and associated assets for community benefit, and supported with growth funding from the former South-East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership
- The expansion at Luton Airport is projected to add up to 11,000 new, high-quality, and well-paid jobs at the airport and in the supply chain across the region. The increased demand for labour will necessitate a focus on skills development and training to ensure the workforce is equipped to meet the needs of the expanded airport.
- Positive sector employment trends for Health; Transport & storage; Manufacturing; Education; Professional, scientific & technical; Wholesale; Financial & insurance; Arts, entertainment, recreation; Property (ONS, Business Register and Survey 2023).
- Negative sector employment trends for Business administration & support services; Retail; Accommodation & food services; Construction; Public administration & defence; Information & communication; Motor trades; Agriculture, forestry & fishing (ONS, Business Register and Survey).

More information is available in Appendix A

What has been achieved so far?

This sections highlights some of the achievements partners have made to delivering LSIP priorities – it is not exhaustive. Please see Roadmap – Annex A for more information and detail

Northamptonshire Adult Learning are a post 16 provider of education embedded directly within both North Northamptonshire Council and West Northamptonshire Council. As part of a wider transformation plan the service has amended its strategic aims and priorities with a view to ensuring an ongoing commitment to aiding those furthest from the workplace into economic activity. As part of this focus, they have aligned strategies, plans and accountability statement to the LSIP, supporting all priorities with a direct **focus on Priority 7**

- **Increasing Awareness and Meaning**
Service and curriculum have been restructured to ensure that educational terms have real meaning that is used commonly, including simplifying language for universal understanding. A newly appointed marketing role is reviewing our communication to standardise terminology such as "technical skills," "soft skills," "core skills," "employability skills," and "digital skills"—ensuring clarity for learners, providers, and employers. This work ensures that the skills needs identified within the LSIP are communicated effectively to all stakeholders.
- **Improved Partnership Working**
Improved partnership working with other educational partners has been a key movement. This includes have representation from local GFE colleges on the Adult Learning Board, as well as economic development collages and the VCSE sector, helping to shape a more cohesive and coordinated offer across the region. The curriculum has also been aligned to support the economic growth priorities of both West and North Northamptonshire, ensuring provision meets local employer demands and future workforce needs.
- **Dedicated Adult Learning and Digital Skills Hubs**
A dedicated Adult Learning and Digital Skills Hub in Northampton town centre, with a satellite hub in Towcester is being established during 2025. These spaces will offer easier access to a range of courses, including ESOL, digital, and essential skills training. The LSIP and SEM data both emphasise the importance of digital skills, with skilled use of basic digital platforms like Microsoft Excel (93% of relevant job postings) and MS Office (90%) appearing highly in local job postings. The LSIP, supported by SEM, has developed a framework definition for 'skills for the future' which includes IT/digital as a core transferable skill alongside strong English and maths. Plans are already underway to expand with additional hubs across North Northamptonshire by mid-2026 to further improve reach and accessibility.
- **Focus on Essential Skills**
The commitment to equipping learners with the foundational skills necessary for success in the workplace and further learning is paramount. English and maths provision underpins all current local and national priorities, as highlighted in the Funding and Accountability Agreement 24/25, which demonstrates the need for providers to offer more essential skills up to Level 2 in English, mathematics, and Level 1 for digital. The LSIP also prioritises providers working with employers to effectively develop 'readiness for work' and understand the evolving need for 'soft skills' and 'core skills' in the post-COVID workplace landscape. Skilled use of basic digital platforms appears highly in local job postings, as evidenced within the LSIP.

Luton

- **Working effectively with partner educational organisations to ensure that learners have a seamless skills pathway.** Work carried out by the Employer Representative Body for the LSIP and the Employment and Skills Partnership Board, which includes Adult Learning, Senior Leaders from the local FE and Sixth Form Colleges and the University of Bedfordshire, shows that lack of English is a barrier to learning in Luton. By extending the Engagement Officer post for an additional year, this will further support the integration of ethnic minority communities and ensure they have access to skills pathways via English for Speakers of other Languages courses and Passport to Employment and Wellbeing courses. This supports LSIP Priority 7
- **Impact and/or Contribution towards National, Regional and Local Priorities for Learning and Skills, focused at supporting Priority 3:** - By 31st July 2026 workforce gaps in priority subject areas linked to the level 2 and 3 entitlements will be filled, have increased the team of casual Learning Support Assistants that further support residents to take advantage of their Level 2 & 3 entitlement, provide more support in the classroom and support for events that promote the level 2 & 3 entitlement to residents and delivered a minimum of 4 Community Events to promote level 2 & 3 entitlement to residents.

Barnfield College

Direct support for priority 7:

- Employers help to shape the strategic design of our course offering. For example:
 - Informing our selection of qualifications which align with current or future needs in the workforce
 - Requesting specific types of courses, such as apprenticeships or licence-to-practice qualifications
 - Collaboration on strategic projects, such as our work with the NHS workforce pipeline
 - Offering guidance on industry-standard equipment suitable for use in teaching and learning; in some cases, employers also assist with providing facilities and equipment
- We design our curriculum in conjunction with employers. For example, they shape the selection of modules within our courses, and also additional training which provides learners with skills, knowledge and behaviours that go beyond their main learning aim and help them to be work-ready. These include, for example, Coaching and life-guard qualifications for those intending to progress to the sports or leisure industries, and the inclusion of training on English and maths skills that employers tell us are specific to a learner's intended occupational pathway.
- Employers routinely deliver knowledge sessions. Input into teaching and learning activities includes giving masterclasses, demonstrations and talks; these are often more than one-off contributions and are planned to bring to life our curricula. Employers also work with us to provide extensive work experiences and placements, including on-the-job training for a wide range of learners as well as apprentices. They assist with assessment, to assure quality in line with industry skills.
- Employers also assist with upskilling our teaching staff, to ensure their knowledge is up to date

Direct support for Priority 8:

- Barnfield College led the South East Midlands Strategic Development Fund project which provided the colleges across the region with green skills training equipment for solar PV, heat pumps, electric vehicle charge points, and other clean energy technologies, as well as providing industry updating (including qualifications) for lecturers.
- Green Skills - The College offers a range of courses for adults to gain the qualifications they need to install retrofit and other emerging green technologies. We train construction learners on our full-time programmes in green skills. Those on lower-level courses gain broad foundation knowledge of green technology, and those on higher level courses who, through these, gain the prerequisites and competencies for installation qualifications, can access these. All learners receive training on green technologies, practices and theory relevant to their courses.

Northampton College

- **Continue to develop and align curriculum to address local and national priorities (LSIP Priorities 4 and 6**

A town-centre delivery of ESOL to better meet learner, employer and local skills and workforce needs is being introduced. Further introduction of T-Levels: up to 8 new T levels across business, IT and digital, construction and engineering. Particular examples include T level in Construction Design, Surveying and Planning, T level in Digital Production, Design and Development (ICT) and T level in Business Management and Administration. Introduce A-Levels to facilitate the development of targeted curriculum strands addressing both academic and vocational routeways: a new Sixth Form Centre (NC6) offering a suite of up to 13 A level subjects will be introduced, initially focused on Social Sciences, English and Business (with complementary AAQ qualifications aligned to career pathways to follow). Undertake a review of the apprenticeship curriculum to identify additional curriculum strands for potential introduction (sector-specific, general business need and higher-level routes).

- **Further develop delivery and use of digital technologies – LSIP Priority 1**, including revising and implementing the digital strategy across the college to more impactfully enhance the digital literacy and specialised digital skills of both students and staff, integrating advanced technologies like AI (Artificial Intelligence) into teaching and assessment methodologies and enhancing staff skills in using latest digital technology to improve efficiency and educational outcomes.
- **Review and strengthen curriculum in engineering and advanced manufacturing** to ensure it maintains industrial relevance, fully exploring latest advances in technology and meet the skills needs of our region. This will particularly focus on the extent to which the current curriculum addresses latest developments such as automation, robotics, artificial intelligence and hybrid/electrical vehicle technologies and will guide future investment.

- **Build on and extend leadership in sustainability and environmental (LSIP Priority 8)**, including a new Green Skills Centre (part funded by LSIF) to further extend the delivery of skills in installing and maintaining environmental and sustainability technologies and support the wider delivery of sustainability in other curriculum areas.
- **Further strengthen progression pathways and curriculum to higher level education** by further strengthening partnerships with local HE institutions including, as appropriate, progression agreements, joint curriculum development/ delivery and collaborative HE curriculum to align and strengthen progression in priority sectors.

Milton Keynes (MK)

LSIP Priority 1

- **Digital skills - AI & Ethics**
Employees identified a need for a better understanding of artificial intelligence. To address this need, the College have worked alongside an employer to create an AI Ethics course to ensure people gain an understanding of how AI is incorporated into the everyday and when considering its use ensure ethics are applied. The course aims to demystify AI, promotes critical thinking and key questioning skills.
- **SCIoT Advisory Board**
An employer advisory board, made up of local employers who primarily work within the digital sector, meets quarterly with subgroups focused on project lines meeting separately to drive forward areas of special interest. Bedfordshire College Group are focused on increasing the awareness and opportunities that exist within local organisations. Their insight with regards to innovation are considered and woven into curriculum using expert guest speakers, they are currently focussing on four MK City wide projects exploring entrepreneurial opportunities and coaching for your people, information for parents on qualifications and careers advice.

LSIP Priority 8

- **SkillUP:MK**
Working with the Open University, Santander and MK City Council a programme designed for residents and businesses of MK City area is being launched in 2025, the learning offer includes digital, Leadership and Management and Net Zero. The courses, supported by Milton Keynes City Council, are offered both online and in person to support all levels of knowledge and to engage with all areas of our community providing skills pathways for individuals and employees to follow. This programme will be fully measured with tracking elements within the website and regular reviews by the four partners to monitor uptake and measure learner completions.
- **Green Skills**
MK College has been working with a large employer partner to offer a bursary of financial support for trade people who engage with the green centre qualification in EV, PV and battery storage qualifications, making the much-needed skill more accessible. Using the base data provided by the LSIP they have worked with labour market intelligence and employers to define the phase 1 curriculum offer and the details of how the curriculum needs to be taught ensuring the offer provides participants with the knowledge, skills and qualifications to grow their business in the MK area.

LSIP Priority 4

- **Collaborative and new courses**
 - The STEMx collaboration with Red Bull is in year 1 delivery, from March 2025 to July 2025 2500 young people will have engaged with the programme. Delivered in schools in MK and the surrounding area this promotes hands on activities using the excitement of Formula one, promoting careers and pathways to the jobs of the future.
 - T Level and tech courses are being run in the community from Bletchley. These are designed to engage individuals with basic technical skills and start from using devices and connecting in a digital world and are very successful.
 - New apprenticeships launching in response to LSIP Labour Market Intelligence – including Quantity Surveyor L4, Site Supervisor L4 and Data Technician L4

Moulton College

- **Increasing Employer and FE Collaboration (LSIP Priority 4)**
The College has embedded a market-led approach to curriculum planning using Labour Market Intelligence (LMI), direct employer feedback, and data from learners. Industry Skills Boards and employer panels actively influence curriculum design, with employers supporting course co-design, delivery, and resource allocation. Significant partnerships include Geary's Bakery, which supports

apprenticeship training through state-of-the-art facilities and equipment, and the Huddersfield University partnership, which now enables internal teacher training and CPD. SkillBuild engagement with the School of Construction provides students with competition experience aligned to LSIP priorities

- **Work Experience and Industry Placements**

Strong partnerships across Land-Based, Equine, and Animal Welfare ensure consistent, high-quality placement opportunities. T Level placement development in Arboriculture has progressed well. However, construction-related placements remain a priority for expansion, particularly in electrical and plumbing areas. The College tracks placement engagement via GroFar.

- **Green Skills Projects (LSIP Priority 8)**

With LSIF funding, Moulton College has expanded its green skills offer. It hosted the UK's first Solar Careers Fair and launched a successful Solar Installation SWAPs programme with GenCarbon and Job Centre Plus—training 59 participants with a 50% employment outcome. The College continues to invest in solar PV, EV charging, and air source heat pump qualifications. Plans for a new Green Skills Centre at the Rural Hub and an Agricultural Skills Bootcamp are in development to address future workforce needs.

- **Digital Innovation (LSIP Priority 1)**

Digital education has been significantly enhanced through LSIF-funded Articulate licences to support blended learning and Skills Bootcamps. The use of VR technology through Bodyswaps has supported more than 400 immersive careers sessions in four months, helping students build soft skills and employability confidence.

- **Curriculum Development Supporting all LSIP Priorities**

The School of Business and Management continues to align course content to the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), focusing on leadership, business administration, and strategic thinking. The College's participation in intercollege competitions supports engagement and practical skill development in enterprise, sustainability, and SEND-focused projects.

Bedford College Group (across all 8 LSIP Priorities)

- Building on the work of the LSIP, which emphasises the need to increase collaboration between further education and industry, there have been a number of positive developments undertaken by Bedfordshire College Group in the past 12 months. This has included things like working in partnership with the business chambers across the SEMLEP Region to run a number of skills and employer activities (such as host the first 'Breakfast in Beds' event since COVID), and partnerships with local authorities and the DWP have extended through activities such as leading the education and skills work on the North Northamptonshire Big 50 Board, and an increase in the employer and training events we have hosted which have seen over 1000 JCP clients come into the College to discover work opportunities.
- Linked to the employer engagement work has been the establishment of 14 employer academies. Amongst other things these have support 1174 students undertake T-Levels or Foundation T-Levels (the latter of which Bedfordshire College Group launched in the 24/25 Academic Year). Partnership and innovation has been strengthened in key sectors. For example, Bedfordshire College Group is working with TSA to pilot training activity in technology and social care, launching skills bootcamps in areas such as engineering and logistics.
- Furthermore, through business planning all courses are now mapped to the broad skills the LSIP articulates as being important. Through its planning, Bedfordshire College Group continues to focus on ensuring the curriculum for the future. Bedfordshire College Group has led the education for the arrival of Universal in the Region, is now engaging in aviation apprenticeships which will support, amongst other things, the expansion of Luton Airport, and has more than 70 students studying Higher Technical Qualifications.
- Additionally, Bedfordshire College Group has joined the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor Talent and Skills Committee (part of the Arc Universities Group) as the only FE member of this committee. Bedfordshire College Group continues to take a significant role in leading on the sustainability curriculum. As well as winning the Green Gown Awards for Climate Action in November 2024, Bedfordshire College Group have developed a number of sustainability qualifications, invested in technologies for sustainable farming at its Shuttleworth Campus, and Bedfordshire College Group finished in the top 10 for the 2025 Sustainable Development Teach project."

Regional positive impacts/trends in the Further Education and Apprenticeship pipelines:

- Education and training enrolments are increasing and broadly in occupational routes and pathways in demand by employers.
- Growth in achievements for education and training in Agriculture, Horticulture & Animal Care; Information & Communication Technology; Retail & Commercial Enterprise (incl. logistics); Business, Administration & Law; Construction, Planning & the Built Environment; Engineering & Manufacturing Technologies.

- Education and training achievement numbers in line with labour market demands with the top six being Health, Public Services & Care; Business, Administration & Law; Information & Communication Technology; Construction, Planning & the Built Environment; Retail & Commercial Enterprise (incl. logistics); Engineering & Manufacturing Technologies.
- Apprenticeship achievements increased in 2023/24 in line with employers needs.
- There has been consistent growth for 3 years for apprenticeship achievements in Business, Administration & Law; Engineering & Manufacturing Technologies; Health, Public Services & Care; Information & Communication Technology.
- Apprenticeship achievement numbers in line with labour market demands with the top six being Business, Administration & Law; Health, Public Services & Care; Engineering & Manufacturing Technologies; Information & Communication Technology; Retail & Commercial Enterprise (incl. logistics); Construction, Planning and the Built Environment.

Central Point for Information

The main outcome of the task and finish groups for digital, green skills and employer engagement has been the need for a central location for information and initial guidance. The conclusions of Bedfordshire College Groups and stakeholders were that content should:

- Explain why employers should engage with education and training;
- Clearly define good practice and opportunities to engage for recruitment, training and developing a talent pipeline;
- Provide an explanation of the language and terminology used in education and training;
- Include case studies;
- Sign post to further support, keeping content to a minimum;
- Capture national and local programmes.

The information is in draft form and is currently hosted on the South Midlands Growth Hub website at <https://www.southmidlands.org.uk/skills-hub/> It will be developed and promoted through relevant channels such as the colleges, local authorities and regional business networks.

Aligned with this, last year Bedford, Barnfield, Milton Keynes, Moulton and Northampton colleges, supported by LSIF funding through the Department for Education (DfE), banded together to fund wide-ranging research into what companies want and how they can better meet those needs through the training they provide. Bedfordshire College Group, known as Colleges of the South-East Midlands (CoSEM) already engages with 8,500 employers.

<https://www.mkcommunityhub.com/post/regional-colleges-work-collaboratively-to-respond-to-local-skills-needs>

What still needs to be achieved?

To successfully deliver outcomes and increase productivity across “UK Plc”, we must continue to build trust in, and belief of, a skills system by helping providers and employers to understand each other’s world and to really understand local business and employability needs in a way that employers want to be involved.

The challenges Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE) Institutions continue to face in delivering this are capacity, staff recruitment versus the private sector, curriculum changes and the fact that FE and HE income derives mainly from learners, not employers, so marketing and messaging have not, in general, been aimed at, or understood by, employers. The Department of Education, Skills and Productivity Board (understanding current and future skills needs) states that skills that are expected to see the largest growth in importance are:

- STEM knowledge: including specialist skills such as medicine and dentistry, biology, science, therapy and counselling, and psychology.
- Skills related to educating and training others, as well as being an active learner.
- People skills: including negotiation, persuasion, and resolving conflicts.
- Mental processes and application of knowledge skills: including critical and creative thinking, complex problem solving, and decision-making.
- Core transferable skills identified as being important in the economy today and in five years’ time - communication skills, digital and data skills, application of knowledge skills, people skills, and mental processes.

The statement within the report states *“Identifying or designing education and training programmes that produce skills that are potentially in shortage now, even those that are likely to decline in importance in future, alongside core transferable skills may be a particularly effective way of filling potential skills shortages”*.

We must take note of, and develop a skills system that addresses these key areas. By creating a cultural shift (thinking and acting differently) through sustained stakeholder collaboration and the promotion of benefits and opportunities created through open recruitment, development and retention of the workforce, we can support skills provision that develops management, is more flexible and accessible and is both understood by, and relevant to, employers through the efficient use of time and content that adds value to their organisation.

From the recent South Midlands Business Survey, the main reasons for small and medium enterprises not engaging in the development of skills within the talent pipeline within education were:

- Lack of time
- Not knowing, or understanding, the relevance of available provision
- Concern over red tape/bureaucracy

An additional challenge is **head teachers citing a lack of time available within the timetable** for specific activities related to skills development through applied learning, especially at the secondary education phase.

From feedback from employers and young people there are two main activities required to facilitate future skills which still need addressing within FE and HE:

1. **Use of a common language and promotion** of better understanding between educators, businesses/employers and individuals about what skills are relevant to employment in the future. For example:
 - The use of plain English with clear definitions will ensure all stakeholders understand the skills needed and their importance. For this reason, an expansion of the current description of ‘employability skills’ in the LSIP is preferred.
 - More people engaged within the learner pipeline for occupations with local need through changing

perceptions and understanding of opportunities within sectors, existing provision and future needs – increasing learner engagement and achievements and reducing barriers

- Clarifying terms such as “green jobs”, “life/soft skills” etc. as they are still often mis-understood and detract from take-up
- Creating accessible and communication channels between stakeholders that add value
- Providers re-focusing websites, social media, marketing materials and communication channels to employers to lead with skills attained, not the qualification, awarding body or educational establishment brand.
- Less use of internal acronyms that are not understood or relevant to employers

2. **Development through applied learning and evidencing of skills** attained at all phases of education, especially for secondary, further and higher education through employer engagement.

- A vocational education and training system with clear pathways
- More flexible, portable training with corresponding micro-credentials or accreditation where they add value, licenced to providers to mitigate the risk in quality of delivery.
- Collaboration of stakeholders in the development of provision to meet our labour market demand including: co-designing of programmes alongside new/innovative learning methods & use of technology
- More employers engaged and invested in all types of skills provision and training (including T levels, Apprenticeships, non-accredited, modular and vocational)

One of the challenges we face in delivering LSIP priorities is how we can support groups such as the economically inactive and long term unemployed to get the skills they need to get into meaningful employment. This prevents business growth and UK productivity as well as creating societal isolation.

Licence to practice case study

From the Local Skills Improvement Plan (progress report June 2024) and LSIP employer task and finish group, came a direct, stated need from employers to provide people with a "licence to practice" in several of our important sectors - namely: Construction, IT, Childcare and Logistics. These "licences" are the ones that those industries recognise as being the "standard" but are either not funded or available in mainstream further education so many young people are facing challenges when leaving education and trying to enter the world of work. (As a note, the figures are c.1,000 people per annum in Northamptonshire alone).

Another point highlighted was that a number of people (every year) who have a construction qualification end up claiming benefits and we should look to identify funds and work alongside DWP to get their customers who have these qualifications, up-skilled with green cards.

This case study demonstrates that the LSIP is affecting positive change and making real impact. Different types of stakeholders are working together to appeal to the wide target audience. It highlights some of the collaborative work that has been happening to try and reduce local economically inactive figures, provide 16-24 year olds (and unemployed) with skills and employment opportunities and also support employers to have people as "job ready" as possible.

- The LSIP employer task and finish group highlighted FE sector could benefit from more assessors, trainers and verifiers - but noted that this will not solve the issue of people not going into the construction upon achieving a construction qualification. We already have thousands and thousands of people with qualifications who are not in construction (some 70-75 percent of the total number of people who achieve a qualification do not then go into the sector) mainly due to lack of social mobility and/or a green card to get on site - not because they haven't a qualification.
- Every year tens of thousands of people across England achieve a construction qualification and (as stated) can't go on site because they don't have a green card. An LSIP discussion point was to influence DFE /Colleges to embed green cards in the curriculum and/or get colleges to become CITB training centres.

Over the last few months one of our local VCSE providers have been working with Northampton College, Northamptonshire Chamber of Commerce, Moulton College, CITB, Job Centre Plus, West Northamptonshire Unitary Authority and North Northamptonshire Unitary Authority to provide a "licence to practice" for the construction sector to economically inactive 18-24 year olds in our region.

This has been funded through UKSPF to a number of learners on T levels who are at college but economically inactive. Getting their green cards meant they could go on site for the work experience part of their T level learning to do "real work" and therefore increase their employment opportunities. By the end of March 2025, the provider had supported nearly 150 people to gain their CSCS Green Cards and therefore improve their chances of employment

The provider also took a number of direct referrals from Job Centres, Prospects (NEETS) and local VCSE organisations to help individuals who are out of work get their CSCS green cards (again, funded through UKSPF) so that they can also have increased employment opportunities when approaching employers. To date over 50 people have accessed this support across our region

Construction Apprenticeships, T level work placements and therefore achievement rates are not going to be as effective as they should be without green cards and an employer awareness of FE providing green cards to learners. The College employer engagement teams working with the provider have already stated there is an increase in take up of young people by employers to do either apprenticeships or T levels once learners have achieved their "licence to practice" - i.e. green card.

As a note, this licence to practice issue is also prevalent in Logistics (fork lift truck licences - RTITB or ITSAR qualifications are the recognised industry licence but are not generally funded by DfE) and IT (Microsoft and Cisco industry recognised qualifications - which are offered free by Cisco academies but not (generally) used by FE).

The provider has also been working with Childminding UK, Job Centres and DWP centrally to deliver UKSPF funded programmes that will allow people to get qualifications that allow them to either start a business as a childminder or to apply for roles with primary schools or nurseries. Obviously with recent changes to childcare, this demand is growing. Depending on the levels of 2025/6 UKSPF funding, they believe they could directly support at least 500 people next year across our region to get a range of these licences

Going forward:

Collaborating with stakeholders. the South Midlands Growth Hub should become a focal point for regional skills development with employer engagement in the area, **within primary and secondary education**, providing a conduit and advising employers to change perceptions and remove any concerns over safety and red tape. This Hub should promote and not deliver, activities based on genuine best practice, i.e. clear evidence of impact, for the development skills, attitudes and behaviours; providing role models through sharing knowledge, insights and experience; highlighting the opportunities within businesses and the area in the future.

The collaboration of further education colleges, and as a legacy of the Local Skills Improvement Fund, should provide a **focal point for employers in collaboration with Local Authorities**. This should be enhanced through the facilities within the 'skills hubs' within the local colleges, acting as focal points for activity. The Business Survey indicated that engagement with local universities and FE by employers is increasing, however there is a need to engage further with SMEs and vice versa. All of the above should be packaged together and a campaign using a central resource portal promoted through channels to employers such as the business networks and local authorities.

There are also some current **negative skills trends** that we need to be aware of, and look to address, in future stakeholder discussions:

- Apprenticeship starts are slightly down for the third year in succession.
- The numbers for starts in apprenticeships and enrolments for education and training in STEM related occupational routes and pathways are insufficient to meet the demand by employers.

- For Engineering and Manufacturing, the number of students starting apprenticeships is decreasing and the number enrolling for education and training for the occupational route/pathway of Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies is static.
- For Health, Public Services and Care, apprenticeship starts are decreasing and enrolments in education and training are static with achievements decreasing.
- For Retail and Commercial Enterprise (including logistics), the number of students starting apprenticeships is static and apprenticeship achievement numbers are decreasing.

The focus on the priority sectors has highlighted the challenges for fulfilling STEM related occupations with high demand (other than Digital, Health, Green Technology). These include:

SOC	Occupation	Employment	Job Postings	Status
5231	Vehicle Technicians, Mechanics and Electricians	Increasing	Increasing	Growing need
2122	Mechanical Engineers	Decreasing	Increasing	Shortages
2125	Production and Process Engineers	Stable	Increasing	Growing need
3113	Engineering Technicians	Increasing	Increasing	Growing need
2453	Quantity Surveyors	Increasing	Increasing	Growing need

Wider ecosystem

- Bureaucracy needs to be streamlined and reduced.
- Reflecting on Business Link: Consider successes, what went wrong and learn from past decisions.
- Fully inclusive support: Ensure support is available for all types of businesses (including startups, scalable, lifestyle) regardless of sector, aspirations, or ambitions.
- Personalised support: Provide 1:1 interactions initially in order that businesses can discuss their specific requirements with a real person, then guide users to group-led pathways and routes.
- Public sector support awareness is low among SMEs.
- Ensuring businesses know about the business support ecosystem as although stakeholders promote their activity and what business support mechanisms they have available to them a proportion of companies do not engage with any business support and why this is needs to be identified.
- Identify a process for stakeholders to identify those businesses that don't engage and approach them.
- Providers such as Chamber of Commerce and Growth Hubs are great at business support and engagement, FSBs are brilliant at policy and championing, providers need to build on supporting each other to ensure businesses receive the service they need.
- Fit for purpose language: Ensure businesses understand the language used in templates and resource documents.

More information: Annex E

Granular intelligence that has been gathered from employers and other sources of evidence

LSIP and Stakeholder Collaborations

There have been a number of strong, collaborative engagements with stakeholders over the last year which is set to continue. This has led to local granular intelligence on skills needs and a positive perception from the wider network of how the system is working, including improved “join up” between organisations, flexibility of training provision and availability.

- Increased level of engagement with the Regional Growth Hub to work together with Stakeholders on a regional level at:
 - Core delivery partnership meetings, Employment and Skills Partnership Board (ESPB), MKSH (Milton Keynes Secondary Heads), Post 16 Regional Strategy Group, Adult Learning and Apprenticeship Performance Board, Logistics Industry Advisory Group, the Further Education Principals Group and the DWP regional Keep Britain Working and Connect to Work programmes
- Board membership and meeting attendance at North Northamptonshire Council and West Northamptonshire Council Adult Learning and Luton Adult Learning providing updates on LSIP and LSIF plus labour market information for shaping provision.
- Membership and participation of Bedfordshire Employment and Skills Scrutiny and Improvement Board and Ofsted support for the Bedfordshire Employment and Skills Academy (BESA) (Good).
- Representation at Ofsted inspection for Northampton College and Bedford College Group.
- Participation in West Herts College (Barnfield College) apprenticeship, careers and employer engagement self-assessment reviews.
- Consultation with University of Bedfordshire regarding short courses relevant to LSIP outcomes.
- Presentation to Milton Keynes Head Teachers of LSIP report and activity including emphasis on STEM pipeline and poor English/maths transitions into further education.
- Updates to and feedback from South Midlands Growth Hub and Careers Hub.
- Consultation in the development of North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire Economic Strategies.
- Promotion of LSIP activity and findings to LEP Consultants as part of development of South Midlands Economic Growth Strategy.
- Update to Local Authority Economic Development Officers on LSIP progress and promotion of activities to avoid duplication and leverage local provision.
- Review of Skills Bootcamp delivery and support for proposal through Bedford College Group in line with LSIP findings.
- Presented at South Midlands Employment and Skills Forums with promotion of activity, update and call for feedback.
- Meetings with Jobs 22 (Restart delivery) and Shaw Trust to promote provision and update on LSIP activity.
- LMI resources produced for Adult Skills Fund holders.
- Meeting with CITB re promotion of green skills and National Skills Academy linking with local provision. Engagement with both CITB and Energy Efficiency Association re support for local provision
- Attendance at South Midlands Growth Hub Networks
- Meeting with STEM Returners to explore synergy with local pathways and future promotion activity.
- Attendance at national Automotive Skills Working Group for SMMT.
- Attendance at Collaborate MK network group to update on LSIP activity.
- Participation at Luton BC Employment and Skills Partnership Board.
- Presentation to Silverstone Technology Cluster re STEM provision including digital and feedback on needs and challenges. Pilot activity underway for employer engagement funded through West Northants Council using LSIP guidance.
- Launch of Green Skills and Health facilities/provision - funded through LSIF at Northampton College, Milton Keynes College and Barnfield College

When planning next steps, we will continue to consider the range of responses we received since 2023 and look through comments wherever possible for improvement. In order to help deliver the LSIP priorities, we will continue to partner and work with those delivering skills based contracts, (Further Education, Higher Education providers, Adult Learner, Community Learner Services within Local Authorities, National Career Service, Restart, Work and Health Programme providers) plus commissioners such as Crown Commercial Services, Ministry of Justice, Dept of Work and Pensions, Local Authorities, Dept of Education. Trade bodies as well as other Employer Representative Bodies, Employers from all industries/sectors and Skills/Careers Hub

Annex A - Priorities and actions (Roadmap)

There are many collaborative projects happening in our region, due both to osmosis and through raised awareness of LSIP actions. The ERB has had interest from over 100 interested parties in supporting the delivery of LSIP priorities and actions and is now working Across the region to drive changes needed. If you are interested in being involved, **please contact us on:** lsip@northants-chamber.co.uk

The information below on the ERB's role, partners, timescales, implementation and monitoring relates to ALL priorities:

The ERB has a watching brief in several of the priorities and engages directly with providers, employers, Local Authorities (LA's) and Trade Bodies to take updates on skills plans which are fed to employer groups for their comments – which is then relayed to stakeholders. We will continue with:

- Task and Finish groups with regional stakeholders will be meeting during 2025/6 to take actions forward and gather feedback that FE/Employer/Stakeholders are collaborating on projects, skills & provision
- Mapping of local provision, review of Top 60 occupational changes and future demand
- Collaborative, joint working to align regional stakeholder groups and associated funding streams – e.g.: Adult Skills Budget, UKSPF, Connect to Work, Restart, Integrated Care Place Board, LSIF projects, DWP Flexible Support Fund etc.

Partners across priorities include:

- East Midlands Advisory Group, Skills Working Groups, South East Midlands Business Engagement Group (network groups/sector bodies), Adult Bedford College, Electric Corby, Blue Cube, Digital Northants, Luton Council Adult Learning, MK College, West Northamptonshire Authority, North Northamptonshire Authority, Dept of Work and Pensions, Bedford College Group, IT sector employers Further Education, Higher Education providers, Adult Learner, Community Learner Services within Local Authorities, National Career Service, Restart, Work and Health Programme providers plus commissioners such as Crown Commercial Services, Ministry of Justice, Dept of Work and Pensions, Local Authorities, Dept of Education, Trade bodies as well as other Employer Representative Bodies and Employers from all industries/sectors and Skills/Careers Hub

Timescales:

- Alongside attendance at many stakeholder groups as detailed in the main report, there are regular presentations made by the ERB to employer networking groups where employer and stakeholder plans, T levels, skills bootcamps and provision are discussed along with hard and soft figures detailing employer awareness and changes to engagement with FE etc. Timescales for implementation of priorities are ongoing throughout 2025
- A single contact point (LSIP website (draft)) is now live. Employer Task and Finish groups(s) will be reviewing and updating this before wider networks are linked by end of 2025

Implementation:

- Employer engagement actions relating to LSIP priorities has been happening since May 2024 and we are beginning to see results on communications and changes to employer attitudes to FE provision by The Task and Finish Group will be meeting late 2025 to review the LSIP website and feedback will be published online through Chambers of Commerce and Stakeholders websites

Monitoring arrangements:

- All Priorities are ongoing and are reviewed regularly at monitoring meetings through feedback at employer forums, new task and finish groups, meetings involving Employers, Project leads across all involved FE's and colleagues involved in LSIF.
- Progress is also measured through MK College report(s) on Employer engagement with FE. There are monthly Network and Learn meetings held by South East Midlands Growth Hub. Research / Labour Market Information (LMI) / Data analysis through the Growth Hub, one to one and group meetings with Colleges / Independent Training Providers (ITPs) / Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) at operational and Senior Management levels, Cross college / provider groups through existing forums, Various conferences / working groups / project groups etc. A mixture of providers, employers and stakeholders, Marketing and promotion (yet to start), Employer engagement – networking to discuss planned changes and take feedback that is presented to stakeholders, Discussions around Mainstream skills funding such as 16-19 formula funding, the Adult Skills Budget (ASB), apprenticeships, Skills Bootcamps, Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs), Feedback on LSIF, CITB, Levelling up, Multiply and UKSPF Projects
- The ERB and LEP accesses a range of datasets to monitor regional change, including Lightcast, IfATE (whose functions have now been transferred to Skills England) and Local market intelligence. There is also regular feedback from FE on new/existing employers engaged
- This includes the ERB directly delivering activity with other employer facing groups and employers, research /Labour Market Information (LMI) / Data analysis, developing targets, trajectories, and Key Performance Indictors (KPIs), one to one and group meetings with Colleges / Independent Training Providers (ITPs) / Higher Education Institutions, cross college / provider groups, conferences / working groups / project groups for providers, employers, stakeholders, marketing and promotion, LSIF working groups, CITB and UKSPF Projects

Priority	Activity/Milestones	Progress
Tackling the Digital Skills Gap (priority 1)	To help businesses, particularly SME's to identify new shifts in business needs and to understand, develop, work with and take advantage of skills provision available through identified future technologies	Bedfordshire <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Digital innovation hubs launched in Tresham College, Bedford College and one is planned for Central Bedfordshire College.• 'Breakfast in Beds' meeting with Bedfordshire Business Chamber, highlighting skills & apprenticeships to businesses of all sizes.• Under the banner of 'character education' all 25/26 curriculum plans are mapped to the Regional Skills matrix which covers core and transferable skills (as per the diagram in the LSIP document).

(and developments in practice) as well as new technologies already being used or available. Linked to providing accessibility and flexibility of training opportunities and a priority to engage with employers to identify how these can continue to be relevant

- There has been an extension to the work undertaken in the 19+ arena to support developing these business skills.
- There have been new collaborations – such as with Northampton Saints, to reduce the number of NEETs.
- The 'Tresham Trailblazers' has been a scheme launched to bring businesses and students together to develop entrepreneurial skills at Tresham College.
- At Bedford College a new partnership with Bedford Giving is allowing students to learn about grant giving in the 3rd sector while at Tresham the link with Northamptonshire Community Foundation has continued its 2nd year of the 'Young Philanthropy' scheme.
- Bedford Education Services are about to go live for a new 'Learning in the Community' strand. Which will build on relationships made with local businesses across Central Beds and Bedford Borough from the Multiply programme. The 'Learning in the Community' strand will deliver low level Digital Skills, as well as other short courses, to meet the needs of the community.
- The SfWL suite is supporting local businesses, e.g.: Ocado & NHS to upskill maths and English skills, support career pathways. From August 2025, we will embed Employability sessions into these courses
- ESOL has been introduced, and proving as a popular route for residents. From August we will embed an Employability session into these courses.
- Connect to Work plans are in place, in both Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough Council, and will support residents get into employment and fill the gaps for local businesses.
- As part of UKSPF, Bedford Borough Council, has offered a range of business support programmes targeted at SMEs to help people develop their ideas as well to drive business growth and survivability by focusing on, for example future trends and skills and signposting additional sources of help and expertise.

Northamptonshire

- **Dedicated Adult Learning and Digital Skills Hubs** - Establishing a dedicated Adult Learning and Digital Skills Hub in Northampton town centre, with a satellite hub in Towcester. These spaces will offer easier access to a range of courses, including ESOL, digital, and essential skills training. The LSIP and SEM data both emphasise the importance of digital skills, with skilled use of basic digital platforms like Microsoft Excel (93% of relevant job postings) and MS Office (90%) appearing highly in local job postings. The LSIP, supported by SEM, has developed a framework definition for 'skills for the future' which includes IT/digital as a core transferable skill alongside strong English and maths. Plans are already underway to expand with additional hubs across North Northamptonshire by mid-2026 to further improve reach and accessibility.
- **Further develop delivery and use of digital technologies**, including revising and implementing our digital strategy across the college to more impactfully enhance the digital literacy and specialised digital skills of both students and staff, integrating advanced technologies like AI (Artificial Intelligence) into teaching and assessment methodologies and enhancing staff skills in using latest digital technology to improve efficiency and educational outcomes.
- **Digital Innovation**
Digital education has been significantly enhanced through LSIF-funded Articulate licences to support blended learning and Skills Bootcamps. The use of VR technology through Bodyswaps has supported more than 400 immersive careers sessions

in four months, helping students at Moulton College build soft skills and employability confidence.

Milton Keynes (MK) College

- **Digital skills - AI & Ethics** - Employees identified a need for a better understanding of artificial intelligence. To address this need, we have worked alongside an employer to create an AI Ethics course to ensure people gain an understanding of how AI is incorporated into the everyday and when considering its use ensure ethics are applied. The course aims to demystify AI, promotes critical thinking and key questioning skills.
- **SCIoT Advisory Board** - An employer advisory board, made up of local employers who primarily work within the digital sector, meets quarterly with subgroups focused on project lines meeting separately to drive forward areas of special interest. Bedfordshire College Group are focused on increasing the awareness and opportunities that exist within local organisations. Their insight with regards to innovation are considered and woven into curriculum using expert guest speakers, they are currently focussing on four MK City wide projects exploring entrepreneurial opportunities and coaching for your people, information for parents on qualifications and careers advice.

Barnfield College Digital and ICT skills, including tackling the digital skills gap.

- All of our young learners, irrespective of their main subject of study, complete a range of digital skills training including cyber security and AI awareness, as well as digital skills for life and work. We have continued to offer English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) learners the Essential Digital Skills Qualification (EDSQ) and have now integrated this into our ESOL courses. This is important to provide these learners, who are often looking to progress to work when they have attained a L2 in English, with the digital skills required for employment. The EDSQ gives them competence in a range of digital skills for life and work. For example, it has enabled us to transition to using online ESOL exams; learners report that they wouldn't have been able to do this without the EDSQ training. We provide higher-level computing courses including a Level 5 Coding course for adults, which leads directly to employment
- The use of digital technology in teaching is well developed at Barnfield College. In response to the identification in the LSIP of this priority, Barnfield College has worked with a leading international provider of virtual reality training to commission the creation of a portfolio of immersive personal development and employability skills training modules, including on mindset, resilience, and communication for the workplace.
- Barnfield College has a well-established Skillmakers programme which involves an extensive range of employers in curriculum design and implementation, with a close focus on the skills, knowledge and behaviours required in the region. In addition to this, each of the College's curriculum areas has established links with large numbers of employers that are particularly relevant to student interests, needs and intended destinations. Through these activities we work with employers to consider future technologies.

<p>Employer engagement (priorities 2-7)</p>	<p>Work with employers and stakeholders to identify why existing “life/soft skills” provision may not be relevant to the changing (post covid) workplace and how “readiness for work and essential skills for work – communication, attitude, resilience, problem solving etc.”) can be effectively developed and evidenced within academic, technical and vocational provision.</p>	<p>Bedfordshire</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Under the banner of ‘character education’ all the 25/26 curriculum plans are mapped to the Regional Skills matrix which covers core and transferable skills (as per the diagram in the LSIP document). • There has been an extension to the work undertaken in the 19+ arena to support developing these business skills • There have been new collaborations – such as with Northampton Saints, to reduce the number of NEETs. • The ‘Tresham Trailblazers’ has been a scheme launched to bring businesses and students together to develop entrepreneurial skills at Tresham College. • At Bedford College a new partnership with Bedford Giving is allowing students to learn about grant giving in the 3rd sector while at Tresham the link with the Northamptonshire Community Foundation has continued its second year of the ‘Young Philanthropy’ scheme. • Promotion of courses via social media, website, careers and community events, publications etc. - reaching residents and businesses about the learning offer • Telecoms has been used from November 2024 - March 2025 to reach businesses and schools in the area. This has enabled us to share our offer, but also understand the needs of the businesses. From this, we have also obtained a detailed database of businesses and contacts to enable us to reach the right person upon promotion and outreach. • We offer a career path for Early Years and Teaching Assistants, and are implementing the Level 2 Business Admin apprenticeship to allow for a better pathway into this sector. • The Engagement team are proactive in meeting schools / businesses etc. to find out needs and discuss opportunities. • UKSPF has allowed us to provide more CIAG to residents who are looking to upskill and gain employment. • In Bedford we have also used UKSPF funding to enhance our CIAG offer focusing on providing support to residents considering self-employment as an option. Delivered by Wenta the focus has been on supporting the development of entrepreneurial skills and attitudes with a focus on increasing the number of sustainable business start-ups in Bedford Borough. <p>Northamptonshire</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing Soft Skills with Employers - We are actively defining and promoting essential soft and foundation skills such as communication, collaboration, creativity, problem-solving, and digital competence, and have embedded these as central themes within our non-accredited and accredited delivery. This is supported by a dedicated business growth role focused on employer engagement, a revised approach to coordination, and ongoing curriculum development to ensure our training aligns with real workplace needs and builds confidence in those furthest from the job market for positive progression. The LSIP emphasises the need for providers to work with employers to effectively develop ‘readiness for work’ and understand the evolving need for ‘soft skills’ and ‘core skills’ in the post-COVID workplace landscape so our increased focus on employer led provision is a key commitment of our recent accountability statement.
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		<p>Barnfield College</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soft skills - Employer feedback through the Strategic Development Fund (SDF) work, and the LSIP, indicated that soft skills are a priority for employers. In response, Barnfield College has developed a suite of Virtual Reality (VR) software for employability skills, workplace communication, and confidence/resilience; our 16-19 learners complete this as part of the programme of study with us. Learners also complete a wide range of other personal development training. All of our work experience includes focus on softer skills in planning placements with employers. Learner personal development is outstanding at Barnfield College. Ofsted's findings at inspection in April 2024 noted that 'Learners develop the skills they need for their future employment, such as teamwork and communication, considerably while at the college. Most learners gain valuable additional qualifications and specific skills to help them to succeed in their chosen careers.'. Barnfield College's contribution to skills was again confirmed as Strong (the highest possible grading). Employers are integral to our delivery of soft skills, to ensure training is sharply focused on work readiness. These activities include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determining the suitability and appropriateness of the curriculum offer • Assisting teachers with the selection of qualification content • Contributing to the assessment of student work to promote industry standards • Organising simulated skills assessment centres to prepare students for future recruitment and selection expectations • Contributing to careers education sessions to advise students about job and workplace expectations and career opportunities • Contributing to the delivery of specialist and niche skills • Delivering masterclass sessions • Hosting on-the-job training and industry placements • Employer feedback through the Strategic Development Fund (SDF) work, and the LSIP, indicated that soft skills are a priority for employers. Through the SDF project we developed Virtual Reality (VR) software for employability skills and confidence/resilience; our 16-19 learners complete this as part of the programme of study with us. Learners also complete a wide range of other personal development training. All of our work experience includes focus on softer skills in planning placements with employers.
Priority 4	Raise awareness of existing provision (perhaps by individual FE) that satisfies demand in a way that employers understand and to continue to map provision against job demand and employer skills challenges so that further identified gaps in provision can be made available.	<p>Bedfordshire</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bedfordshire College Group has established an Employer Partnerships Scheme which is highly successful. To date, 14 Partnerships started or in pipeline. • Links with employers continue to grow around current provision. For example, Bedfordshire College Group has exceeded the 24/25 target of T Level students with 1174 enrolments, 130 of which are Foundation T Levels. New T levels such as Sales and Marketing will go live in Sept 2025. All of these have significant industry placement. Additionally, 70 students are enrolled on HTQs, which have a heavy employer focus and operate in priority sectors. • There continues to be significant development in priority areas such as Health Care where partnerships with industry are being extended. For example, Bedfordshire College Group is working with TSA to review a 'virtual home' learning platform for 16-18 and adult learners to raise awareness of skills needed in social care.

- Through curriculum planning, all departments have developed a skills climbing frame to support the mapping of curriculum and are developing information on the 'Big 6' careers in each technical learning area.
- The Executive Director of Curriculum is Vice Chair of the Big 50 Place Board in North Northamptonshire.
- Bedfordshire College Group has host hosted the MAKE UK Commission.
- Various Executive members are on town board deals, lead key sector groups (such as Visit Bedfordshire) and there are a range of employer stakeholder events.
- There continues to be the successful delivery of programmes such as SWAPS with DWP
- Suggestion of starting at Level 2, and growing skills in the workforce. Promoting Apprenticeship vacancies.
- Good communication with DWP. Better signposting and referrals between BESA inhouse and sub-contractors.
- A range of learning styles are met - e.g.: online, face to face and a combination, on different days and times to meet all residents needs. Initial assessments used to identify starting point.
- Introduction of in-house IAG advisor to ensure the needs of the customer is understood before suggestion a qualification route.

Northamptonshire

- Improved partnership working with other educational partners has been a key movement. We now have representation from local GFE colleges on the Adult Learning Board, as well as economic development collages and the VCSE sector, helping to shape a more cohesive and coordinated offer across the region. We have also aligned our curriculum to support the economic growth priorities of both West and North Northamptonshire, ensuring our provision meets local employer demands and future workforce needs.

Moulton College

- Work Experience and Industry Placements - Strong partnerships across Land-Based, Equine, and Animal Welfare ensure consistent, high-quality placement opportunities. T Level placement development in Arboriculture has progressed well. However, construction-related placements remain a priority for expansion, particularly in electrical and plumbing areas. The College tracks placement engagement via GroFar.

Barnfield College

- **Helping employers to understand provision and collaboration with employers.** The successful Skillmakers programme continues to be extended, which recognises employers with sustained and strategic relationships with the college. The approach of developing ongoing partnerships with employers brings substantial benefits, including access to advice from employers on the curriculum and training equipment, and extensive work-related opportunities for learners such as masterclasses and placements. Barnfield College has extensive involvement in strategic work with stakeholders including responding to local challenges, for example working with the Council and Vauxhall on training options for those losing their jobs following the closure of the car manufacturing plant in Luton. The College is also a partner on the regional Get Britain Working plans.

Northampton College

		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review and strengthen curriculum in engineering and advanced manufacturing to ensure it maintains industrial relevance, fully explore latest advances in technology and meet the skills needs of our region. This will particularly focus on the extent to which our curriculum addresses latest developments such as automation, robotics, artificial intelligence and hybrid/electrical vehicle technologies and will guide future investment.• Further develop delivery of mathematics and English in line with the national focus on these crucial skills, thereby enhancing students' foundational competencies essential for success in their course, life, work and progression to higher education. This to include further strengthening the curriculum design for mathematics and English, better equipping students to use mathematics and English in their lives and work alongside improving their fluency to support their knowledge, skills and progress in their technical and vocational curriculum.• Further strengthen progression pathways and curriculum to higher level education by further strengthening partnerships with local HE institutions including, as appropriate, progression agreements, joint curriculum development/ delivery and collaborative HE curriculum to align and strengthen progression in priority sectors. <p>Luton</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Impact and/or Contribution towards National, Regional and Local Priorities for Learning and Skills. By 31st July 2026 we will recruit to fill workforce gaps in priority subject areas linked to the level 2 and 3 entitlements, have increased our team of casual Learning Support Assistants to further support residents to take advantage of their Level 2 & 3 entitlement by providing more support in the classroom and support for events that promote the level 2 & 3 entitlement to residents and will have provided a minimum of 4 Community Events where we will promote the level 2 & 3 entitlement to residents.
Priority 5	The language(s) of business, provision and learners need to be more aligned and develop a "blended" business and learning language and bring up to date, relevant skills into FE. We need to demystify the perceptions of learner, employer, provider and stakeholder "identity and brands" by potential service users. Terms such as "green jobs", "soft skills" etc. are often mis-understood and detract from take-up	<p>Bedfordshire</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A range of learning styles are met - as mentioned above.• There has been a clear effort to do this. For example, 4 skills boot camps launched in January in Lean Warehousing, electrical engineering, and first line management. Teaching assistants launched April 2025. Furthermore, cyber and logistics are in development. All of this will support training for new students.• Bedfordshire College Group continues to effectively network into regional events to promote it colleges and campus. Recently, this has ranged from joining the Silverstone Vision 2035 cluster, to attending Chamber events to promote Further Education.• Telecoms has enabled us to better understand businesses in our local area, as have community events.• The chamber of commerce will be beneficial to further understand the needs of businesses and make relationships.• Youth engagement has enabled us to reach more schools, and better understand their needs. This has also enabled us to reach more businesses and promote the idea of supported internships, and in the future, connect to work <p>Northamptonshire</p>

- **Increasing Awareness and Meaning** - We have restructured our service and curriculum to ensure that educational terms have real meaning that is used commonly, including simplifying language for universal understanding. A newly appointed marketing role is reviewing our communication to standardise terminology such as "technical skills," "soft skills," "core skills," "employability skills," and "digital skills"—ensuring clarity for learners, providers, and employers. This work ensures that the skills needs identified within the LSIP are communicated effectively to all stakeholders.
- **Focus on Essential Skills** - Our commitment to equipping learners with the foundational skills necessary for success in the workplace and further learning is paramount. English and maths provision underpins all current local and national priorities, as highlighted in the Funding and Accountability Agreement 24/25, which demonstrates the need for providers to offer more essential skills up to Level 2 in English, mathematics, and Level 1 for digital. The LSIP also prioritises providers working with employers to effectively develop 'readiness for work' and understand the evolving need for 'soft skills' and 'core skills' in the post-COVID workplace landscape. Skilled use of basic digital platforms appears highly in local job postings, as evidenced within the LSIP.
- **Addressing ESOL Needs** - The LSIP directly recognises the need to improve the offer of ESOL provision to support local businesses in addressing current skills gaps. Increased ESOL delivery within ALS will aim to move some of those recognised as economically inactive into further training or employment, offering both economic and wellbeing benefits. This aligns with the 2021 census data showing that 1.8% of residents in North Northamptonshire and 2.2% in West Northamptonshire have limited or no English proficiency, figures significantly above the national average of 1.5%, equating to circa 16,000 residents. Enhancing ESOL provision is crucial in tackling national and local skills shortages.

Barnfield College

- work with employers is breaking down barriers related to differences in the language used in education and business. This is advanced by our staff receiving industry-upskilling from employers, and employers working closely with us in the design and delivery of our curriculum. The benefits of our training are presented to learners and employers in terms of the way they prepare individuals to be work ready. Activities to support local employers, and to demystify the training landscape for them, are extensive and include:
 - Hosting very popular jobs fairs to help employers promote their opportunities to our learners, for example a winter jobs fair which focused on seasonal employment
 - Setting up student interviews for employers seeking staff
 - Working directly with employers to find jobs for our leavers, particularly in catering and hospitality where local businesses trust us to find someone who will be the right fit for their needs
 - Promoting opportunities such as training schemes for businesses wishing to recruit to their school leaver training programmes or entry-level jobs
 - Working with leisure centres to qualify our sports learners as pool lifeguards who can take up these hard-to-fill vacancies at the same time as enhancing their own employability

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Our Foundation Learning provision includes a very successful supported internship programme which places young people with learning differences and disabilities into work, as part of a developmental training programmes
Priority 6	Provide accessible and flexible training opportunities. Alongside this is a priority to engage with employers to identify how provision can continue to be relevant	<p>Bedfordshire</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bedfordshire College Groups learning centres will undertake 1178 enrolments this Academic Year. • Digital Learning hubs have opened at Tresham College and Bedford College with employer sponsorships. • Bedfordshire College Group has fully used its flexibilities in Project S. For example, we have grown SSA6 by over 350 enrolments. • New collaborative programmes are developing all the time. English and Maths for ESOL in workplaces is being expanded to logistics, for example • Apprenticeships are employer led, and this enables the employer to gain skilled individuals that suit their business. • Delivery is available 52 weeks per year, remote access to assessors as well as face to face. • Evening sessions have been introduced for skills for work and life and provision. • Classroom options are available for learning as well as online delivery. <p>Northamptonshire</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible and Accessible Training - We have adapted and expanded our course formats to include in-class, remote, and blended learning options, along with short-term and self-paced directed learning opportunities as indicated as a key requirement by employers in the LSIP. This aligns with the LSIP's finding that local employers prioritise flexible and agile skills delivery, with short non-accredited qualifications being the second most popular preferred training provision. We've also expanded into new subject areas such as Childcare/Education, Health and Social Care, and a range of business-focused topics including Lean Management. Significantly, jobs in Childcare, Education, Health and Social Care are all identified within the roles most in need within the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP). Through our Tailored Learning Allocation, Multiply and the Shared Prosperity Fund, we've reached over 1,500 learners with courses focused on transferable skills development. <p>Moulton College</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum Development Supporting LSIP Priorities - The School of Business and Management continues to align course content to the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), focusing on leadership, business administration, and strategic thinking. The College's participation in intercollege competitions supports engagement and practical skill development in enterprise, sustainability, and SEND-focused projects <p>Northampton College</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to develop and align curriculum to address local and national priorities. Introduce town-centre delivery of ESOL to better meet learner, employer and local skills and workforce needs. Further introduction of T-Levels: up to 8 new T levels across business, IT and digital, construction and engineering. Particular examples include T level in Construction Design, Surveying and Planning, T level in Digital Production, Design and Development (ICT) and T level in Business

		<p>Management and Administration. Introduce A-Levels to facilitate the development of targeted curriculum strands addressing both academic and vocational routeways: a new Sixth Form Centre (NC6) offering a suite of up to 13 A level subjects will be introduced, initially focused on Social Sciences, English and Business (with complementary AAQ qualifications aligned to career pathways to follow). Undertake a review of the apprenticeship curriculum to identify additional curriculum strands for potential introduction (sector-specific, general business need and higher-level routes).</p> <p>Barnfield College</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building capacity to support delivery of skills training - To ensure the curriculum continues to be relevant We have made very considerable investment (circa £70m) in our estate and facilities at Barnfield College in Luton. We have now opened two new campus buildings on our Barnfield Avenue site, and the most recent of these is our construction and engineering block, equipped with industry-standard equipment. • Investment through the Local Skills Improvement Fund has included the installation at Barnfield College, and our Watford campus, of training ward facilities with equipment that replicates what is used in hospital wards. We have worked with a local hospital to provide training for staff on best practice in the use of simulation equipment in training healthcare skills; other staff upskilling has been provided by equipment manufacturers. • We have also received financial support from the Connolly Foundation for additional healthcare teaching equipment. Our installation of training ward facilities has also attracted attention from employers, and we have recently begun discussions with care providers about their training needs. As a result of our ongoing work in healthcare training, and particularly following the launch of our NHS Career Gateway programme, we have seen a huge increase in work with local NHS bodies – for example, we now have work experience placements at the Luton and Dunstable hospital and West Herts NHS Teaching Hospitals Trust, and our learners attended an emergency simulation day with BLMK ICB, who have also worked with us on a Careers Carousel event
Priority 7	Employers expressed a desire to have staff working in FE to deliver non-accredited, up to date "knowledge" sessions to learners. A milestone action is to engage with employers to identify how courses can change to satisfy this	<p>Bedfordshire</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills symposia in key sectors such as the visitor economy and creative industries are also being set up. Task and finish groups with regional bodies, such as the Chambers, to engage with employers, are also being established. • Bedfordshire College Group continues to expand and develop its curriculum. For example, there has been a detailed programme to develop a logistics Academy. This is scheduled to launch formally in September 2025 and courses for May/June 2025 are in development • BESA are also continually exploring further qualifications to meet the needs of local businesses, and listening to the needs of the community in order to do so. • As a means of encouraging others to provide opportunities for young people Bedford Borough is looking to launch a Shape Future Talent Work Experience Programme in the summer of 2025 with a focus on those aged between 14 - 18. We also work closely with the South Midlands Careers Hub and schools within the Borough and share our quarterly LMI research. This highlights, for example, emerging skills and jobs trends within the local economy to inform careers advice as well as new industries and companies to the area.

		<p>Luton</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working effectively with partner educational organisations to ensure that learners have a seamless skills pathway. Work carried out by the Employer Representative Body for the LSIP and the Employment and Skills Partnership Board, which includes Adult Learning, Senior Leaders from the local FE and Sixth Form Colleges and the University of Bedfordshire, shows that lack of English is a barrier to learning in Luton. By extending our Engagement Officer post for an additional year, we will further support the integration of ethnic minority communities by ensuring they have access to skills pathways via our English for Speakers of other Languages courses and our Passport to Employment and Wellbeing courses. By 30th September 2025, we will have enhanced our IAG offer by having one service wide IAG information session for learners per week and classroom visits from an IAG advisor at the start of every term. This supports local, regional and national priorities by giving people the opportunity to gain basic skills and the skills that employers value, so that they can improve their job prospects and wage outcomes: Luton 2040; Employment & Skills Strategy 2022-2027; Local Skills Improvement Plan; Skills & Post 16 Education Act 2022. <p>Moulton College</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing Employer and FE Collaboration. The College has embedded a market-led approach to curriculum planning using Labour Market Intelligence (LMI), direct employer feedback, and data from learners. Industry Skills Boards and employer panels actively influence curriculum design, with employers supporting course co-design, delivery, and resource allocation. Significant partnerships include Geary's Bakery, which supports apprenticeship training through state-of-the-art facilities and equipment, and the Huddersfield University partnership, which now enables internal teacher training and CPD. SkillBuild engagement with the School of Construction provides students with competition experience aligned to LSIP priorities. Moulton has also collaborated on Skills Bootcamps with Leicestershire City Council and expanded its online adult provision in digital marketing and business administration through a partnership with Pearl. <p>Barnfield College</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health and science capacity-building - The capital investment in healthcare is outlined above. The LSIF project funded us to develop a Career Gateway curriculum for new starters in the NHS; this has also enabled us to work with our local NHS Trust to train their staff. The first cohort of the NHS Career Gateway course completed in Watford in November, with another delivered in April; other colleges in the region and further afield are in discussion with their local Trusts to begin delivery of the course. We are in early stages of work with local councils in Bedfordshire and social care employers on training their staff using this model. This work has changed the way our local NHS bodies view us and we are now routinely involved in workforce training planning, for example we were invited to speak at the Education Providers Group for one ICB, and have been invited to join their 'Education Partnership' strategic group to represent the FE sector. We are involved in a large number of other ongoing conversations about NHS recruitment and training, including the national New Hospitals Programme.
Green Jobs and Skills (Priority 8)	To look at the development and availability of capital and human resource in partnership with	<p>Bedfordshire</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bedfordshire College Group won the Green Gown Award for Climate Action was won in November 2024. • All campuses have had activity on the Sustainable Development Goals and teachers are taking up Carbon Literacy Training.

sector specialists, supporting employers working on green/sustainable/decarbonisation projects or those who have recognised “green” jobs to interact with SME’s and support knowledge transfer about what “green jobs” are, facilitating an understanding of future skills needs in this area.

While activity is ongoing the targets are on track to be exceeded.

- Bedfordshire College Group has 12 new courses relating to sustainability from level 3 to 5 in development across the 3 main colleges. These include, energy efficiency, hybrid electrical training and solar panel installations.
- Bedfordshire College Group has engaged in the Teach In Leadership Board for Sustainable Development and was placed in the Top 10 nationally. This work could be shared more widely
- Over the past year, we have successfully delivered a range of impactful Green Skills courses funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.
- These programmes have included the Level 2 Award in Understanding Domestic Retrofit, the Level 3 Award in Older and Traditional Buildings, and the Level 3 Certificate in Domestic Energy Assessment. Through these initiatives, we have trained 68 individuals, significantly enhancing the skills and capabilities of both businesses and residents across Central Bedfordshire.
- Looking ahead, we are excited to further strengthen the region’s workforce by using additional funding to support the development of Construction-related skills in the upcoming 2025-2027 tender cycle.
- Following BESA’s Ofsted visit, the delivery team are now embedding community activity and understanding sustainability in to learning programmes.
- BESA now have a sustainability lead, who drives and updates the team on sustainability. This has led to better informed staff across BESA.
- Bedford Borough has also focused on green skills development as part of its UKSPF offer. Initiatives have included the "Bedford Borough Green Skills Development Programme", delivered in conjunction with Deyton Bell and Sustainable X, is designed to enhance the Borough’s businesses and individuals internal capacity for sustainability and green skills.
- It also supported individuals with a desire to shift their career into the green economy so as to supports local economic growth and promote environmental responsibility.
- Similarly, through our Bedford Borough Scholarship Programme, delivered in partnership with Cranfield School of Management we have provided opportunities and support for owners of small to medium businesses with interest in decarbonisation to develop growth plans which their business’s net zero goals as part of "Ready for Net Zero Growth".

Northamptonshire

- **Green Skills Projects**

With LSIF funding, Moulton College has expanded its green skills offer. It hosted the UK’s first Solar Careers Fair and launched a successful Solar Installation SWAPs programme with GenCarbon and Job Centre Plus—training 59 participants with a 50% employment outcome. The College continues to invest in solar PV, EV charging, and air source heat pump qualifications. Plans for a new Green Skills Centre at the Rural Hub and an Agricultural Skills Bootcamp are in development to address future workforce needs.

- **Build on and extend leadership in sustainability and environmental**, including creating a new Green Skills Centre at Northampton College (part funded by LSIF) to further extend the delivery of skills in installing and maintaining environmental and sustainability technologies and support the wider delivery of sustainability in other curriculum areas.

Barnfield College

Also to work with SME's to help them think strategically about future skills needs and recruitment in these areas, including accessing wider groups of people such as those at risk of exclusion in order to build skills and enter further education, training, and employment

- **Green Skills** - The College offers a range of courses for adults to gain the qualifications they need to install retrofit and other emerging green technologies. However, there continues to be low interest from employers in training to gain qualifications in green technology installation. Intervention in the market, and awareness raising among customers and trades people, will be needed to drive increase in demand. We train constructions learners on our full-time programmes in green skills. Those on lower-level courses gain broad foundation knowledge of green technology, and those on higher level courses who, though these, gain the prerequisites and competencies for installation qualifications, can access these.

MK College

- **Green Skills** – The College has been working with a large employer partner to offer a bursary of financial support for trade people who engage with the green centre qualification in EV, PV and batter storage qualifications, making the much-needed skill more accessible. Using the base data provided by the LSIP we have worked with labour market intelligence and employers to define the phase 1 curriculum offer and the details of how the curriculum needs to be taught ensuring the offer provides participants with the knowledge, skills and qualifications to grow their business in the MK area.
- **SkillUP:MK** - Working with the Open University, Santander and MK City Council we are launching a programme designed for residents and businesses of MK City area, the learning offer includes digital, Leadership and Management and Net Zero. The courses, supported by Milton Keynes City Council, are offered both online and in person to support all levels of knowledge and to engage with all areas of our community providing skills pathways for individuals and employees to follow. This programme will be fully measured with tracking elements within the website and regular reviews by the four partners which will ensure we measure and monitor uptake and course completion.

Bedfordshire

- We have also actively been engaged in trying to lead on the cultural shift to open up access to marginalised groups since 2022 through our internal Supported Internship Programme as part of DFN Project SEARCH. Delivered in partnership with Bedford College and Mencap the programme is open to Young People aged 17-24, who live in Bedford Borough and have an Education, Health and Care Plan and our target is that 60-80% of our supported interns will gain sustained and paid employment within 6 months of completion. We actively engage with local employers to share our experience and lessons learned as a means of increasing participation.

Northamptonshire

- **Community Outreach** - We continue to build on our community outreach, using additional funding streams to engage those furthest from the job market and work with other providers as well as our local voluntary sector. The Adult Learning Service has led on other funding streams ensuring that partners are including in the successful delivery to key targeted groups including for example support for ex-offenders, development of industry practice standards within construction via a local training provider, improved numeracy recognition and a continued focus on our community delivery through Tailored Learning.

- This work directly addresses the SEM Local Skills Report's recognition of residents within areas of high social deprivation (including Wellingborough, Corby, Kettering, and Northampton) as facing significant barriers to accessing work. By offering engagement activity within these communities, we provide the best chance to involve residents in further education as a pathway to employment or community activity. Furthermore, with a higher-than-average number of residents in both North and West Northamptonshire unable to work due to long-term ill health, our prioritised courses supporting health and wellbeing aim to reduce these barriers and support potential economic activity.
- This also aligns with the North Northamptonshire corporate plan commitments to 'Empower a thriving voluntary and community sector' and 'Promote better training, further education and employment opportunities,' as well as the West Northamptonshire corporate plan of 'Where people are proud to live, with strong sustainable communities, decent homes, a fulfilling job, and stress-free travel through well connected places,' and meets our strategic priority of "Equality and Inclusion: Accessible learning for all, with provision targeted to those most in need, to help people live healthier, independent and fulfilled lives."
- **Supporting Vulnerable Learners** - Our commitment extends to supporting vulnerable learners to ensure equitable access and positive progression. Wide access to high-quality Family Learning provision helps to meet the North Northamptonshire corporate plan commitment to 'ensure every child has access to a high standard of education' as well as West Northamptonshire's commitment to have 'Healthy, Safe and Protected Children.' Furthermore, recognising the concerning number of learners not in education, employment or training (NEET) within Northamptonshire (5.2% of 16–17-year-olds based on 2021 data), with care leavers being disproportionately represented, we are committed to offering consistent and high-quality pathway planning focused on the individual needs, aspirations, and circumstances of those with care experience. This aligns with both North and West Northamptonshire's cooperate parenting commitment to support those with care experience with future progression. To meet this commitment, we have significantly expanded our 16-18 offer to address the growing the NEETs concern across the region and align this with the local skills need.
- **Adult Learning** are a post 16 provider of education embedded directly within both North Northamptonshire Council and West Northamptonshire Council. As part of a wider transformation plan the service has amended its strategic aims and priorities with a view to ensuring an ongoing commitment to aiding those furthest from the workplace into economic activity. As part of this focus, they have aligned strategies, plans and accountability statement to the LSIP

Barnfield College

- We are a member of the South East Midlands Inter-Colleges Competition (SEMICC) collaboration. The overall aim of the SEMICC project is to create more opportunities for students to participate in skills competitions, and to promote competitions as an effective and important method of teaching and learning for skills development and attitudes and behaviours. We are running the SEND competition for the collaboration this year, which has been endorsed by WorldSkills UK. The aim of the SEND competition is to provide challenging, developmental activities for SEND learners, creating opportunities to celebrate their achievements. It provides real activities including a mock interview, teamwork task, and problem-solving task, to challenge learners and give them the opportunity to develop their skills and confidence. Learners complete a record card as evidence of achievement for job interviews, completion of learning aims, EHCP reviews, etc. Colleges are aiming for maximum participation across the SEND cohort.

Luton

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better equipping residents of all ages to get jobs. Throughout 25/26 we will continue to reflect termly on local LMI data and intel from the LSIP to inform curriculum planning. Adapting the curriculum as needed to ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of residents and local employers. By 31st July 2026 we will have delivered a minimum of 4 Job Fairs, where we will go out into our most deprived wards and deliver these events in people's locale, giving them every opportunity to attend and get advice on job vacancies, job searching and pathways to employment • Throughout 25/26 we will continue to reflect termly on local LMI data and intel from the LSIP to inform curriculum planning. Adapting the curriculum as needed to ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of residents and local employers, work carried out by the ERB and the Employment and Skills Partnership Board, which includes Adult Learning, Senior Leaders from the local FE and Sixth Form Colleges and the University of Bedfordshire, shows that lack of English is a barrier to learning in Luton. By extending our Engagement Officer post for an additional year, we will further support the integration of ethnic minority communities by ensuring they have access to skills pathways via our English for Speakers of other Languages courses and our Passport to Employment and Wellbeing courses.