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WARWICKSHIRE LOCAL SKILLS IMPROVEMENT PLAN

ANNEX A: FURTHER EXPLANATORY INFORMATION ON SKILLS NEEDS



Coventry & Warwickshire
Chamber of
Commerce
The Ultimate Business Network



LSIP

Local Skills
Improvement Plan
Warwickshire

Quantitative Survey Findings

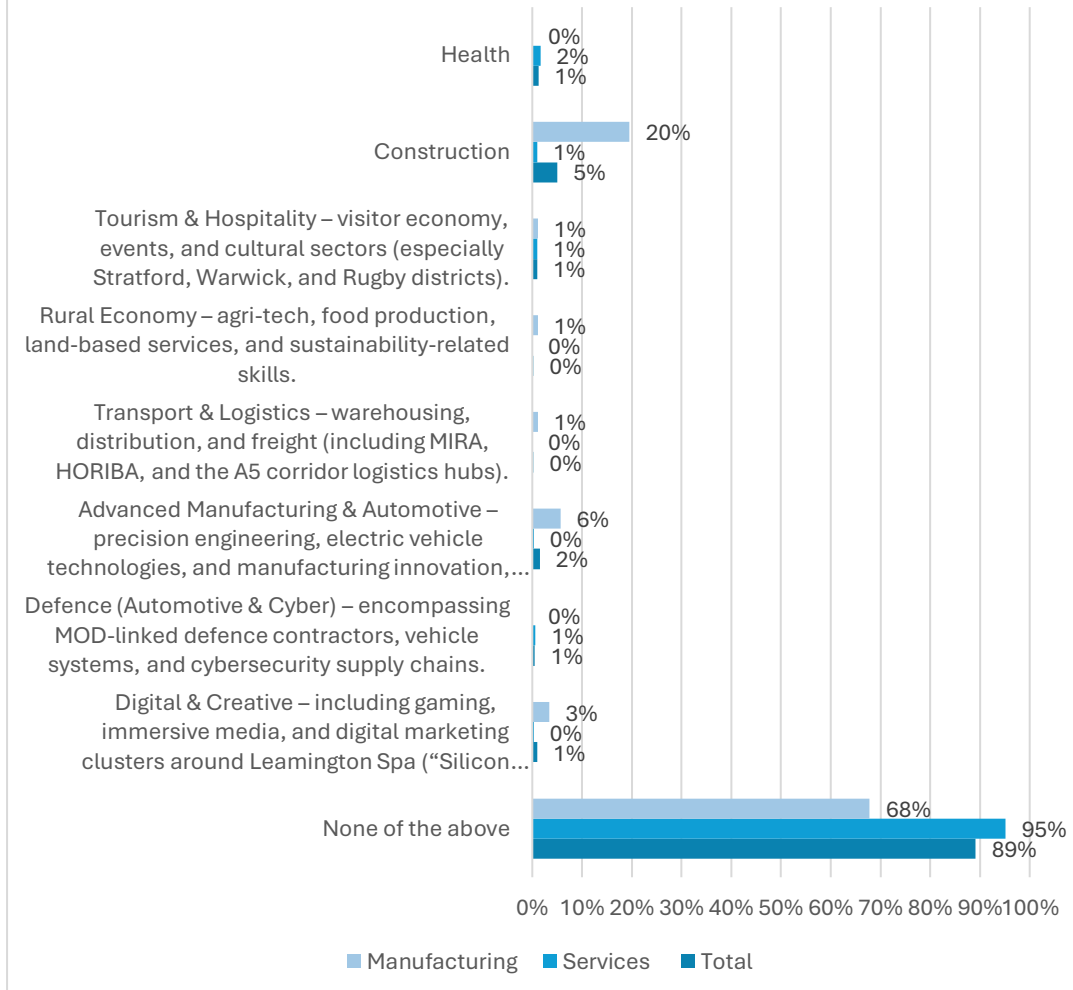
Please note, Annex C of the LSIP sets out the full methodology behind the following data, including the distribution of responses by size, industry sector (as self-reported) and, for comparison, the distribution of Warwickshire businesses by the same measures.

Unless stated otherwise, analyses of the quantitative survey findings in this report are based on all respondents less those who chose not to answer specific questions. Where figures do not sum to 100%, it is due either to rounding and/ or participants being able to select multiple answers. The following graphs show results from the total number of participants involved. For the purpose of analysis, broad business sector (a breakdown between service firms and manufacturing firms) comparisons have also been included.

For comparative purposes, all those who identified the following as their main business activity were grouped as broad 'services' sector businesses: health, public administration, motor trades, wholesale, retail, transport & storage (inc postal), accommodation & food services, information & communication, finance & insurance, property, professional, scientific & technical, business administration and support services and education.

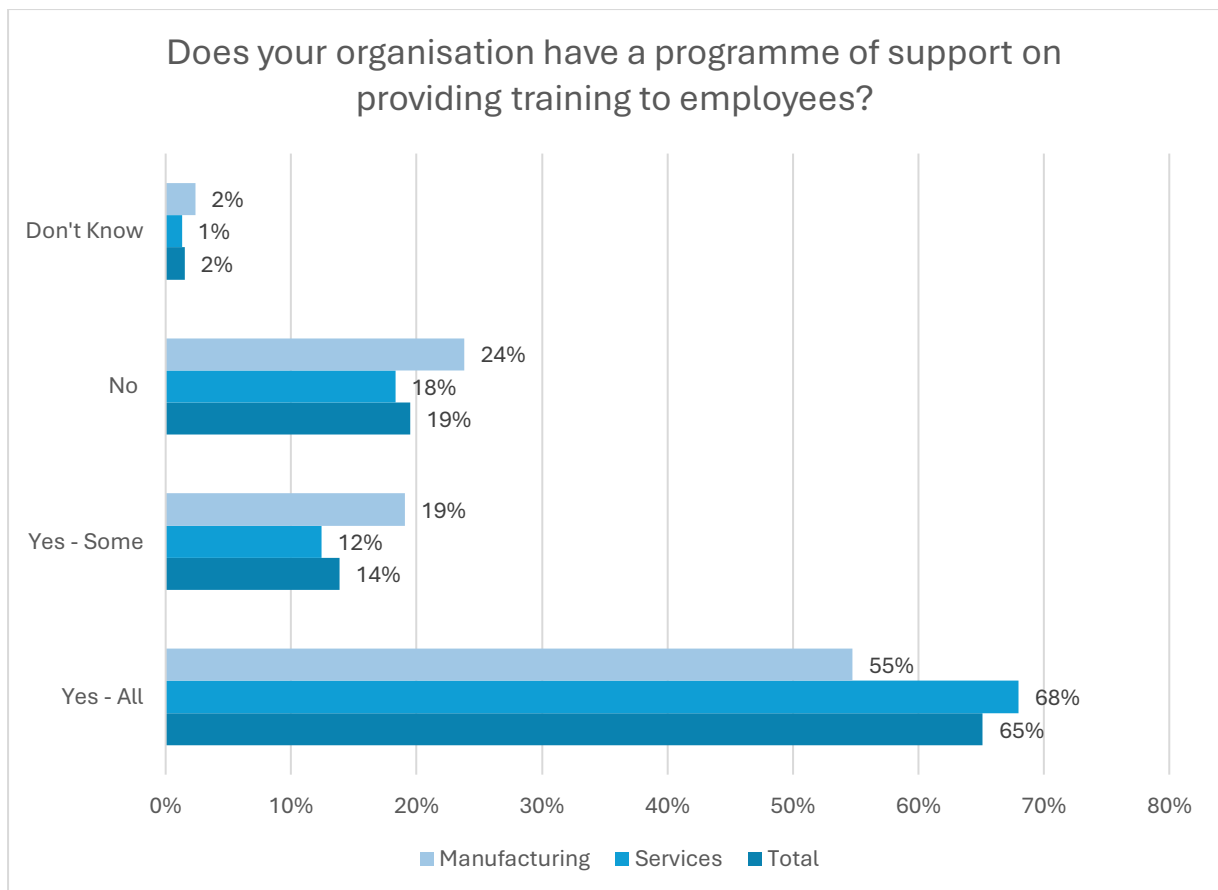
Those who identified the following as their main business activity were grouped as 'manufacturing' sector businesses: manufacturing, construction, agriculture, forestry and fishing, mining and quarrying.

Is your organisation part of any of the following Warwickshire priority growth sectors or their supply chains?



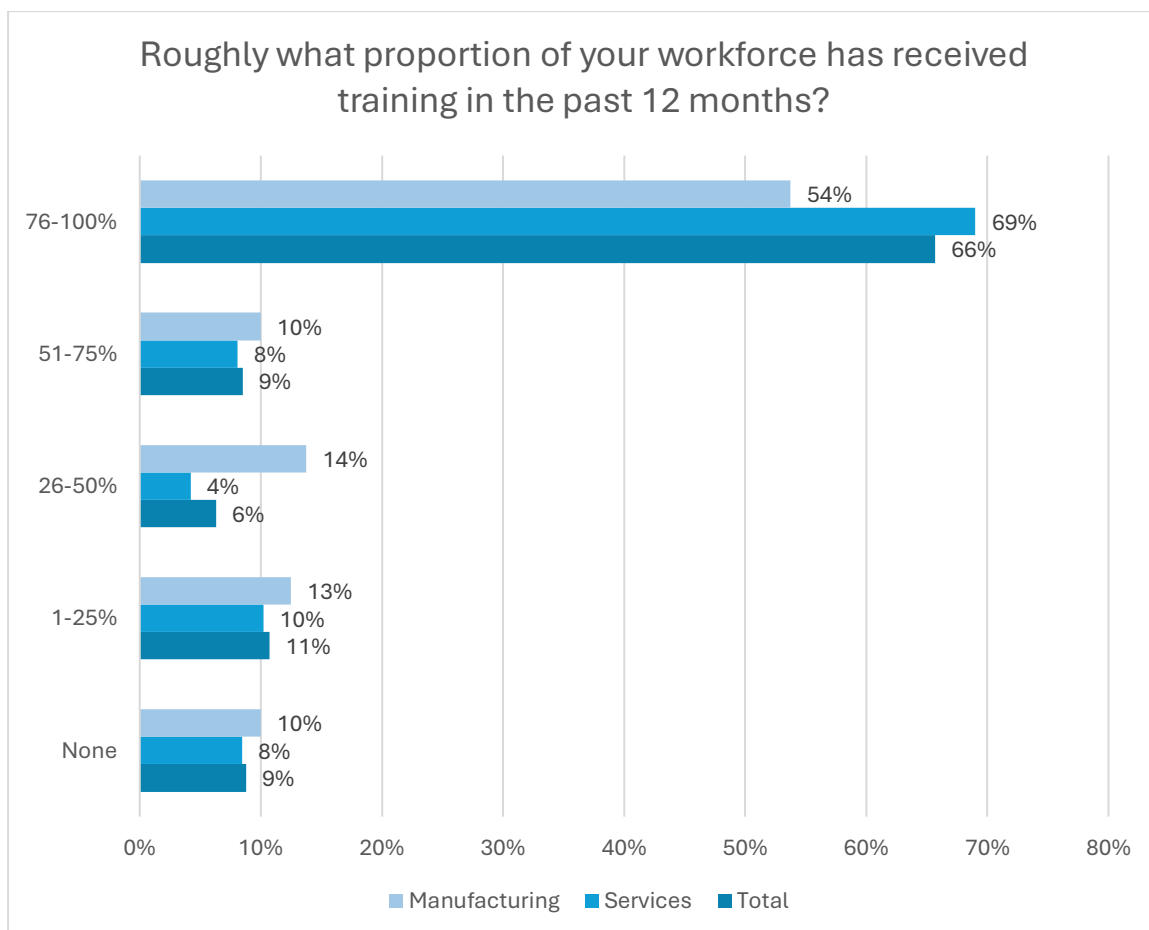
Most businesses surveyed (89%) reported that they are not part of any of the Warwickshire priority growth sectors listed, or their supply chains. Among those that did report involvement, construction was the most commonly selected sector (5%), followed by advanced manufacturing and automotive (2%). All other sectors were selected by around 1% of businesses or fewer.

There were some differences between sectors. Services firms were more likely to report no involvement in the sectors listed (95% compared to 68% of manufacturing firms). Manufacturing firms were more likely to report involvement in construction (20% compared to 1% of services firms) and advanced manufacturing and automotive (6% compared to 0%). A small proportion of services firms reported operating in health (2%), while tourism and hospitality was reported by 1% of firms in both sectors.



Most businesses surveyed (65%) reported that they provide training support for all employees. A further 14% indicated that they provide support for some employees, while 19% reported that they do not have a programme of support for providing training. Only 2% said they did not know.

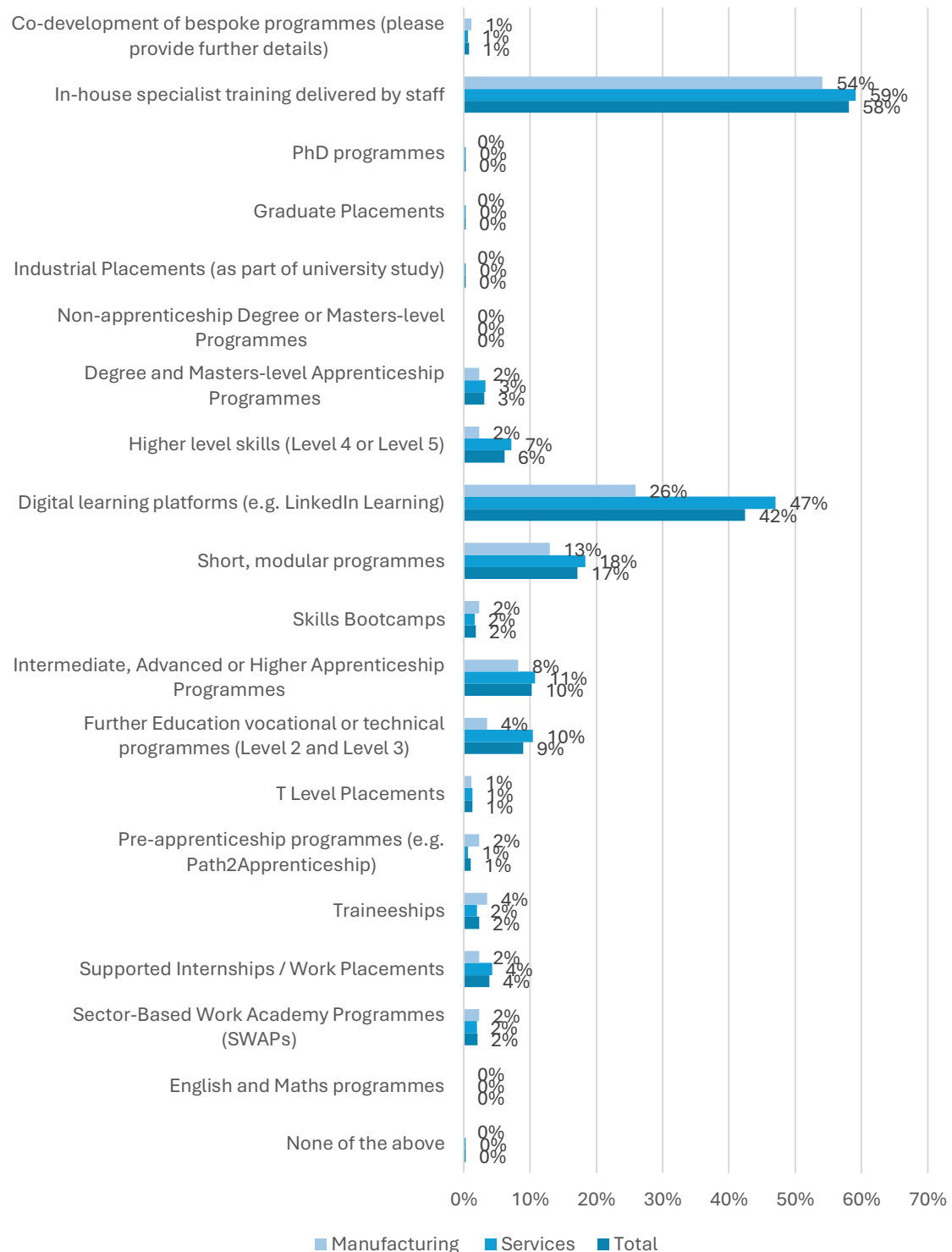
For services firms, 68% reported providing training support for all employees, compared with 55% of manufacturing firms. Manufacturing firms were more likely to report providing support for some employees (19% compared to 12% of services firms) and were also slightly more likely to report that they do not provide training support (24% compared to 18% of services firms).



Most businesses surveyed (66%) reported that between 76–100% of their workforce had received training in the past 12 months. Smaller proportions reported lower levels of training coverage, including 11% where 1–25% of employees had received training, 9% where 51–75% had received training, and 6% where 26–50% had received training. A small proportion of firms (9%) reported that none of their workforce had received training.

For services firms, 69% reported that 76–100% of their workforce had received training. Among manufacturing firms, this figure was lower at 54%, with a higher proportion reporting that 26–50% of employees had received training (14% compared to 4% of services firms). A slightly higher proportion of manufacturing firms also reported that none of their workforce had received training (10% compared to 8% of services firms).

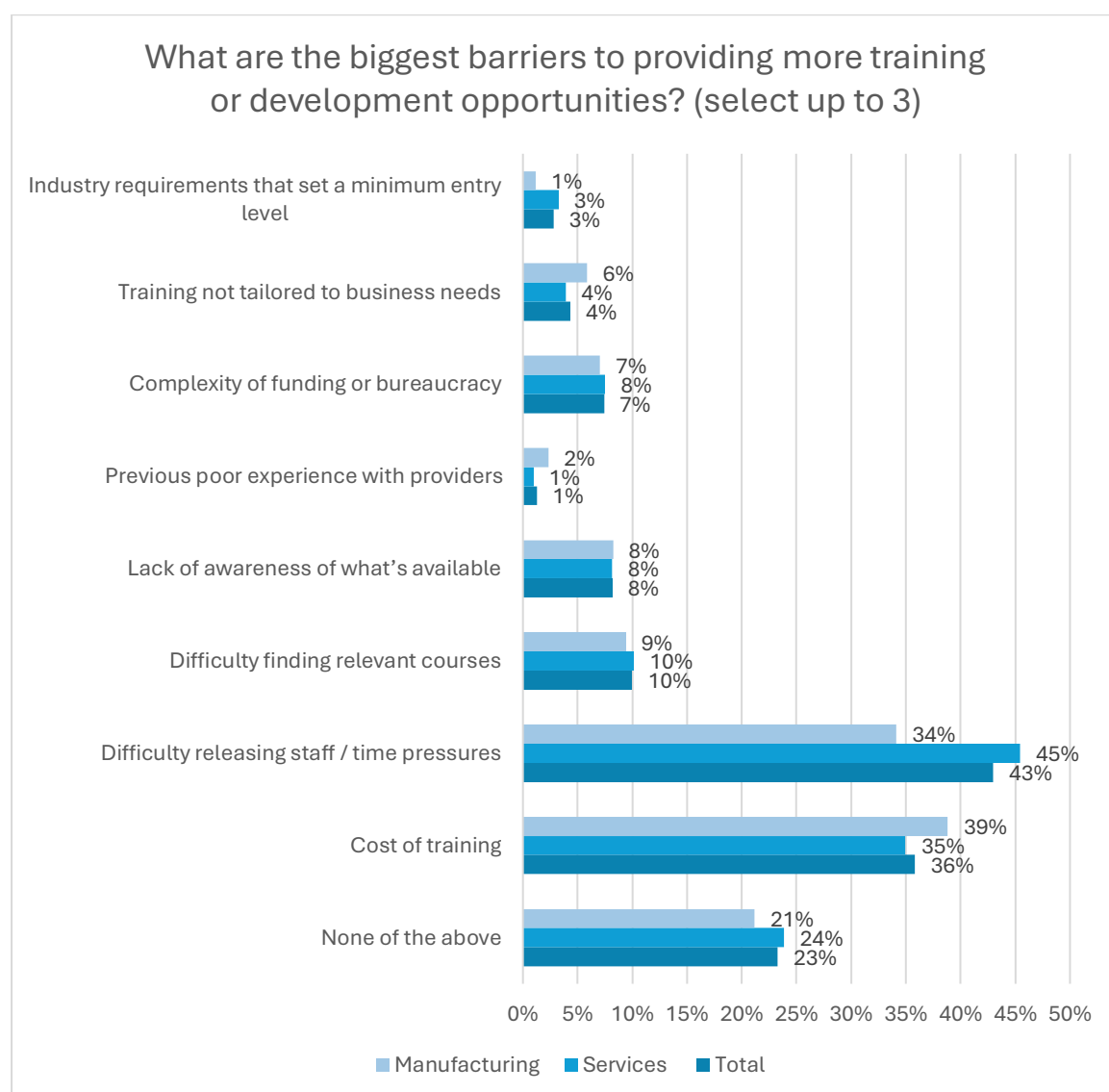
What type of training did your workforce access in the past 12 months? (please select all that apply)



The most commonly reported types of training accessed by businesses in the past 12 months were in-house specialist training delivered by staff (58%), digital learning platforms such as LinkedIn Learning (42%), and short, modular programmes (17%).

A similar pattern is seen for services firms, where the most common forms of training were in-house specialist training delivered by staff (59%), digital learning platforms (47%), and short, modular programmes (18%).

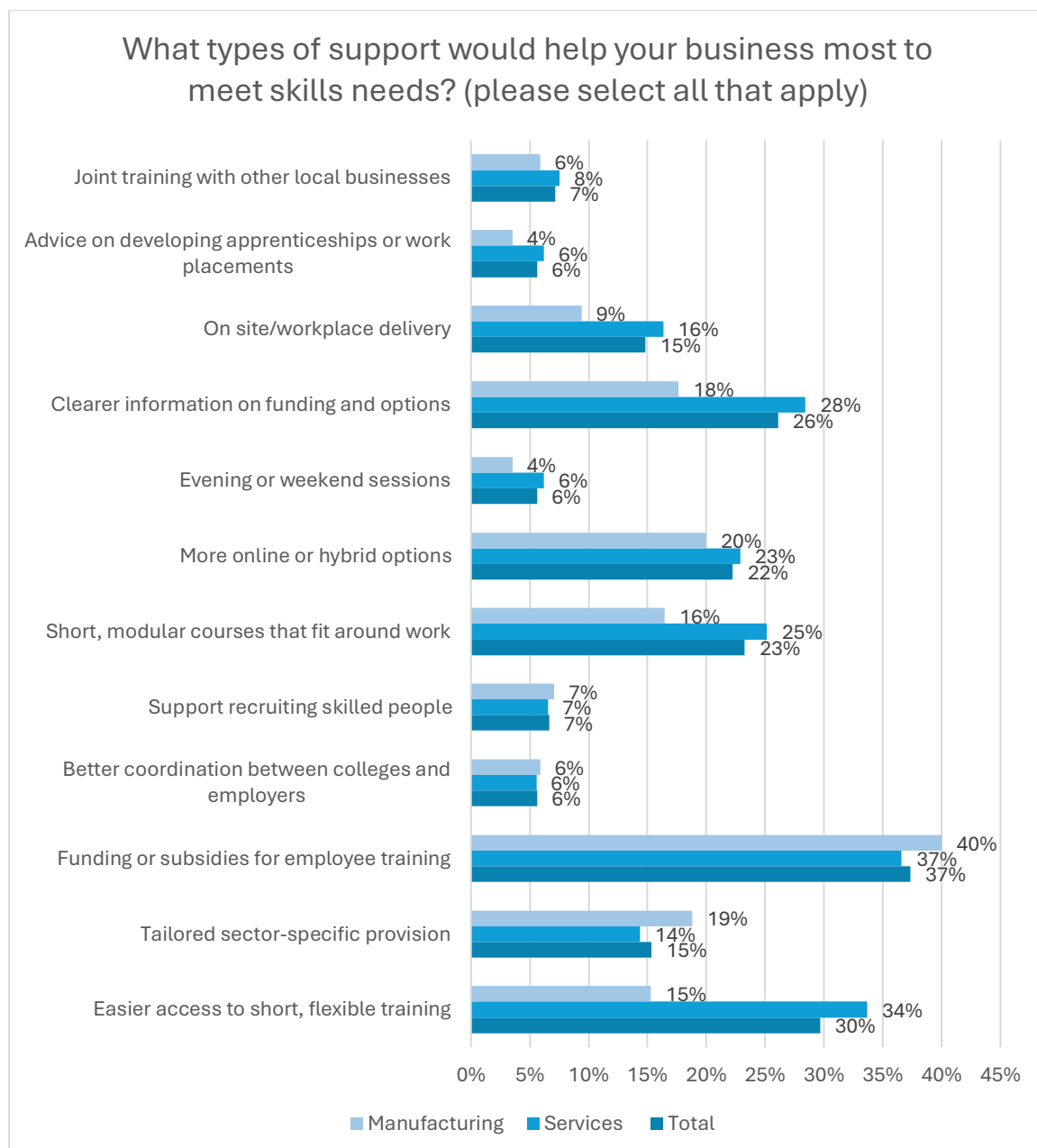
Among manufacturing firms, in-house specialist training delivered by staff was also the most common (54%), followed by digital learning platforms (26%) and short, modular programmes (13%).



The most commonly reported barriers to providing more training or development opportunities were difficulty releasing staff or time pressures (43%) and the cost of training (36%). A smaller proportion of businesses also reported difficulty finding relevant courses (10%).

For services firms, difficulty releasing staff or time pressures was the most frequently reported barrier (45%), followed by the cost of training (35%). Difficulty finding relevant courses was the next most common issue (10%).

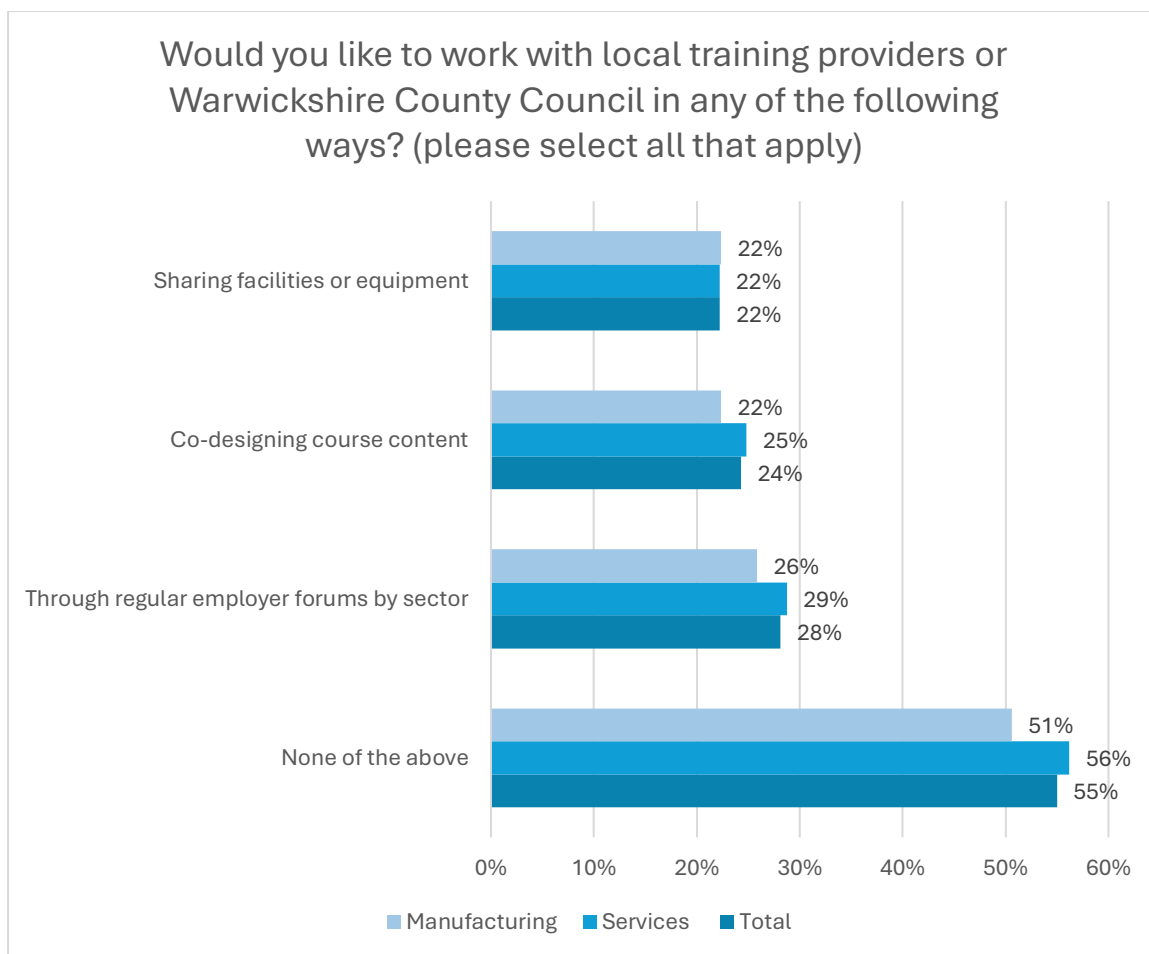
For manufacturing firms, the cost of training was reported most often (39%), followed by difficulty releasing staff or time pressures (34%). Difficulty finding relevant courses was also reported by a small proportion of firms (9%).



The most commonly reported type of support that would help businesses meet their skills needs was funding or subsidies for employee training (37%). This was followed by easier access to short, flexible training (30%) and clearer information on funding and options (26%).

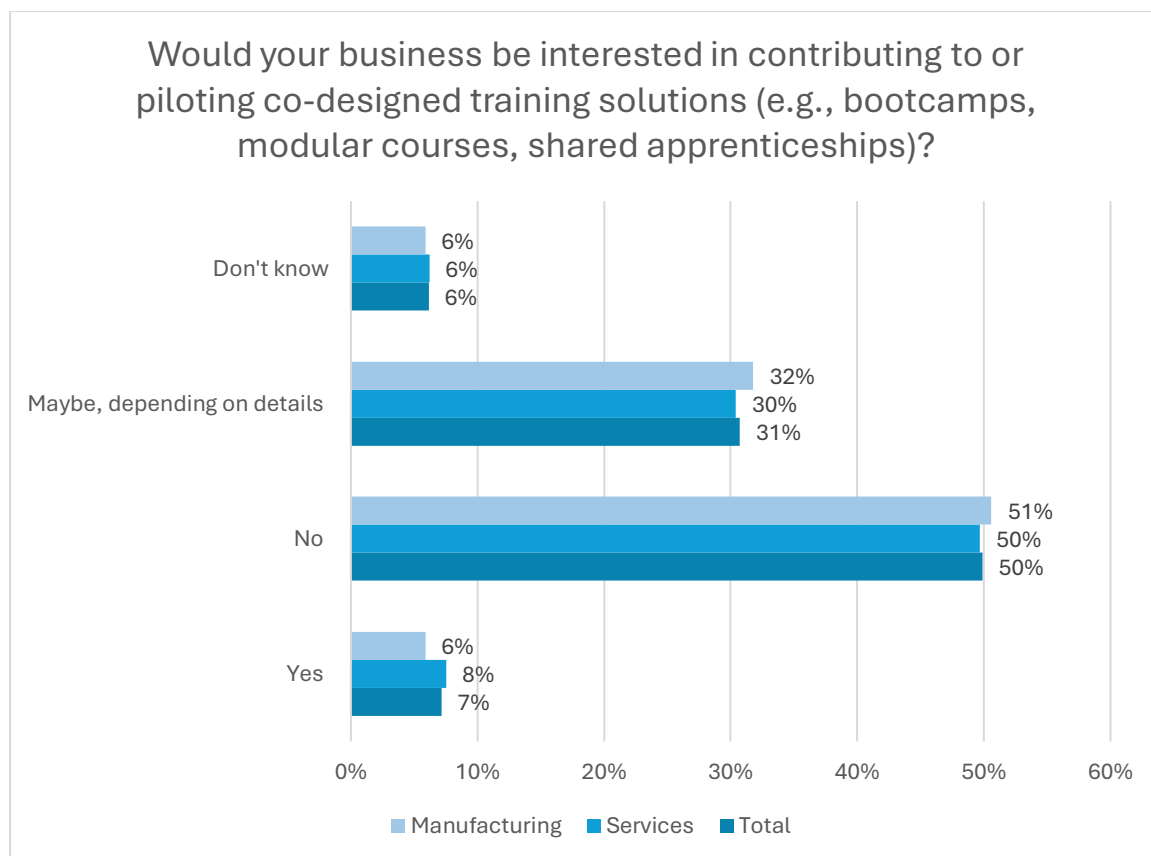
For services firms, the top three were funding or subsidies for employee training (37%), easier access to short, flexible training (34%), and clearer information on funding and options (28%).

For manufacturing firms, the most commonly reported support was funding or subsidies for employee training (40%), followed by tailored sector-specific provision (19%), and clearer information on funding and options (18%).



Over half of businesses surveyed (55%) reported that they would not like to work with local training providers or Warwickshire County Council in any of the ways listed. Among those that did express interest, the most common option was participating in regular employer forums by sector (28%), followed by co-designing course content (24%) and sharing facilities or equipment (22%).

Responses were broadly similar across sectors. Services firms were slightly more likely to report interest in regular employer forums by sector (29% compared to 26% of manufacturing firms) and co-designing course content (25% compared to 22%). Interest in sharing facilities or equipment was the same across both sectors (22%). A slightly higher proportion of services firms reported that none of the options applied to them (56% compared to 51% of manufacturing firms).



Half of businesses surveyed (50%) reported that they would not be interested in contributing to or piloting co-designed training solutions, such as bootcamps, modular courses, or shared apprenticeships. Around three in ten (31%) said they might be interested depending on the details, while 7% reported that they would be interested. A further 6% said they did not know.

Responses were similar across sectors. Services firms were slightly more likely to report that they would be interested (8% compared to 6% of manufacturing firms). Manufacturing firms were slightly more likely to say they might be interested depending on the details (32% compared to 30% of services firms). Around half of firms in both sectors said they would not be interested (50% of services firms and 51% of manufacturing firms), while 6% in each sector selected 'Don't know'.

Meaningful Engagement Findings

The below tables present a summary of responses received to each of the meaningful engagement questions, along with some notable, substantive responses, which reflect the key themes of the overall research.

What are the main skills or recruitment challenges facing your organisation or the employers you work with right now? Prompts: Which roles or skill levels are hardest to fill? Are these gaps new or persistent?

Employers consistently highlighted ongoing difficulties in recruiting for skilled and technical roles, particularly within construction, engineering, and manufacturing. Trades such as carpentry and specialist roles like grinders are proving especially hard to fill, largely due to a shortage of candidates with the required practical experience and hands-on expertise. Engineering roles were also frequently identified as challenging, with many organisations noting that these gaps are long-standing rather than new, often requiring businesses to invest in internal training to bridge the skills shortage.

Alongside technical skills gaps, employers raised concerns about the overall quality and work-readiness of applicants. Many reported that candidates lack relevant qualifications, practical experience, and essential soft

skills such as communication, reliability, and willingness to engage. There were also recurring concerns around low levels of digital capability, including emerging areas such as AI and cyber skills, which are becoming increasingly important across sectors. In customer-facing industries such as hospitality and care, employers emphasised the importance of attitude and interpersonal skills, which are often found to be lacking.

More broadly, structural and external factors are also contributing to recruitment challenges. Employers cited issues such as low pay in certain sectors, difficulties with staff retention, and the impact of shift patterns or locations not being well served by public transport. In some cases, salary expectations from candidates were misaligned with what businesses could offer, further narrowing the talent pool. Overall, these challenges point to a combination of persistent skills shortages, gaps in work-readiness, and wider labour market constraints that continue to affect recruitment across multiple sectors.

What are the main skills or recruitment challenges facing your organisation or the employers you work with right now? Prompts: Which roles or skill levels are hardest to fill? Are these gaps new or persistent?
Responses include:
<i>Carpentry is currently the most difficult trade for us to recruit. We rarely receive enquiries from individuals with this skillset, and when we do it can be challenging to find candidates who have the practical experience and attitude needed to work effectively within a small site-based team.</i>
<i>Recruiting experienced engineers is extremely difficult and we often need to train internally.</i>
<i>Engineers are the hardest role to recruit for, and it is a more persistent issue.</i>
<i>The main recruitment challenge is filling skilled grinder roles. While much of the engineering work uses CNC machines, grinder positions require manual expertise, making them harder to fill.</i>
<i>The main recruitment challenge is the lack of candidates applying for roles.</i>
<i>Many applicants lack relevant qualifications, practical experience and hospitality skills.</i>
<i>Not job ready don't turn up on time and don't want to engage.</i>
<i>Communication, emotional intelligence, self-awareness, willingness and collaboration.</i>
<i>Low level digital skills not work ready.</i>
<i>AI literacy.</i>
<i>Digital and cyber.</i>
<i>Recruiting for housekeeping is very difficult as working to zero-hour contracts.</i>
<i>Issues relevant experiences in the industry of care and we don't really struggle with applications but struggle with retaining staff as it's a low paid area.</i>
<i>Staff recruitment in key sector areas is a challenge - Construction engineering health and social care.</i>
<i>Finding the right apprentice to meet higher level administration roles in the service industry has been challenging.</i>
<i>Salary expectations can make it difficult to recruit suitable candidates.</i>
<i>Location not supplied by public transport around times our shifts start.</i>
<i>Shortage of appropriate candidates for many roles across the business.</i>

How are these skills needs currently being addressed? Prompts: Are you using in-house training, colleges, universities, commercial providers, Bootcamps, apprenticeships, or publicly funded skills training? What drives those choices?

Employers described a very practical, hands-on approach to dealing with skills gaps, with most relying heavily on in-house training. Rather than expecting candidates to arrive fully skilled, many businesses are bringing people in with the right attitude or basic capabilities and then developing them internally. This includes structured onboarding, shadowing, and ongoing training, as well as more formal approaches such as NVQs, internal development programmes, and learning management systems. In several cases, employers are also testing candidates during recruitment (for example, through Excel tests) to make sure they have the baseline skills needed before investing further in training.

Alongside this, some organisations are using external routes such as apprenticeships, college partnerships, and publicly funded training, although these are not always seen as a perfect fit. Employers also rely on recruitment agencies, job boards, and personal networks to find candidates, often trying to make roles more appealing through better pay, benefits, or flexible working. A few have taken more proactive steps, such as setting up their own academies or structured training pathways, to help build a pipeline of talent where it doesn't already exist.

That said, the picture is quite mixed. While some employers have well-developed training and recruitment processes in place, others admitted they are not addressing skills gaps in a structured way, particularly where they rely on self-employed staff. In several cases, recruitment challenges persist despite ongoing efforts, suggesting that businesses are still having to work hard to fill gaps themselves rather than relying on a steady flow of job-ready candidates.

How are these skills needs currently being addressed? Prompts: Are you using in-house training, colleges, universities, commercial providers, Bootcamps, apprenticeships, or publicly funded skills training? What drives those choices?

Responses include:

Employability skills but those should be tailor-made the specific employers

In House Delivering core levels

We tend to use word of mouth or referral through a connection to get people in.

These needs are being addressed through competitive pay, employment packages, and training programs such as a chef academy. The employer also works to challenge the sector's negative reputation to attract more candidates.

These needs are being addressed by offering competitive salaries to make the roles more attractive and help with recruitment.

We are having to bring people in with good admin skills and then having to do a lot of in-house training.

We look to recruit internally by placing ads on indeed and we have looked at apprentices also. We are fully staffed at the moment.

These skills needs are currently not being formally addressed, as the employer works with self-employed staff and does not offer in-house training or incentives for upskilling.

This has been an ongoing challenge for the past couple of years, with attempts to recruit not proving successful.

These skills needs are currently being addressed by offering an attractive employee package to recruit and retain staff for operational roles.

These skills needs are being addressed by investing in a new learning management system, which helps structure the onboarding process. This has created a more organised and structured approach to training and how the business operates.

These recruitment issues with retaining staff are currently being addressed by offering performance bonuses.

We are recommending staff to do the level 2 English course without making them feel that they are not able.

These skills needs are addressed through rigorous exams and training for couriers. The company ensures staff are well-prepared by testing general knowledge and specific skills to confirm they are competent before starting work.

These skills needs are currently being addressed by recruiting new team members who can offer full flexibility, helping to bridge gaps in the workforce.

The company isn't currently recruiting graduates from universities because their pay expectations tend to be higher. Instead, they focus on hiring for lower-paid roles and developing staff through apprenticeships.

We make sure that we have training and recruitment procedures in place and we do mainly do in-house training.

We mainly use In-house training to be able to address any issues.

We have introduced an excel test during the recruitment process to be able to see that people are as good on excel as they say they are.

We can elaborate exactly what we look for on the job advertisements when we use the temp agencies to advertise the jobs.

<i>These skills needs are currently addressed by working with a recruitment agency familiar with the company and its roles. The organisation focuses on selling the roles to candidates and offering a competitive benefits package, including pay, hybrid working, holidays, and medical benefits. Using the right agency and incentives helps attract suitable candidates.</i>
<i>These skills needs are currently addressed through in-house training, focusing on developing existing employees. The organisation also invests in training younger workers to build the skills needed for these specialised roles over time.</i>
<i>These skills needs are addressed by providing training opportunities for existing staff. Employees are supported to attend relevant courses, including mandatory compliance training through the SRA and other professional development courses. The organisation also puts development plans in place to help staff progress in their careers.</i>
<i>We do advertising for roles and recruitment agencies to try and find the right calibre to fill a role.</i>
<i>In house training, recruitment selection</i>
<i>Take people from other organisations to train, challenges to find right skills set</i>
<i>In house development programmes. Shadowing. Robust inductions. NVQs</i>
<i>in-house L&D team, partner with local college for level 2 and 3 using government funded AEB diplomas as apprenticeship model does not work well for us</i>
<i>Apprenticeships and training</i>
<i>All onboarding colleagues have a suite of online and in-person opportunities to learn</i>
<i>In house training at the moment, and also publicly funded skills training.</i>
<i>in house training, outsourcing training as well</i>

What influences whether you/an employer engages with a particular training route or provider? Prompts: Cost, relevance, flexibility, quality, past experience, funding availability, ease of access, bureaucracy, trust?

What really shapes decisions around training is whether it feels useful to the business. There's a clear preference for training that is practical, tailored, and closely aligned to day-to-day work. Many feel that generic courses don't quite hit the mark, especially in more specialised or niche areas, which is why in-house training is often seen as a better option. Time is also a big factor if staff are taken away from their roles, there needs to be a clear benefit and something tangible gained from it.

Cost naturally comes into play as well, but it's usually weighed up alongside value. If the training is relevant and worthwhile, there's more willingness to invest. However, access to funding, particularly for apprenticeships can make a real difference. Where processes are overly complicated or unclear, it can put organisations off entirely. Some shared that they had chosen not to go ahead with training simply because it felt too time-consuming or difficult to navigate.

Relationships and trust also matter more than might be expected. Where there's been a positive experience with a provider before, organisations are far more likely to return. Ease of access, flexibility, and clear communication all contribute to this. Local provision, simple processes, and the ability to respond to specific or immediate needs make a big difference. Overall, it comes down to finding training that fits both in terms of the business itself and the practical realities of delivering it.

What influences whether you/an employer engages with a particular training route or provider? Prompts: Cost, relevance, flexibility, quality, past experience, funding availability, ease of access, bureaucracy, trust?
Responses include:
<i>I said it should be bespoke training and being involved included in their training</i>
<i>Cost And ease of navigation</i>
<i>All training needs to be done in house as there are no courses for exactly what we do.</i>
<i>Our biggest influence would be the availability and relevance of the courses and to ensure that we get knowledge out of the training as it uses up business hours.</i>

<i>The biggest influence would be the relevance of the training making sure it meets what we need.</i>
<i>Engagement with a training provider is mainly influenced by cost and the relevance of the training to the employer's needs.</i>
<i>Past experience and having a good relationship with a training provider strongly influence whether the employer engages with them again.</i>
<i>Because it is so niche what we do we struggle to access training as there is only 2 or 3 providers for what we do.</i>
<i>Our biggest influence is getting funding for apprentices. We did not go through with a training course for our receptionist because they made it complicated and difficult to understand so I think some courses need to be simplified. They were also asking for at least 6-8 work hours, so another issue is having the time to do it.</i>
<i>The employer is most influenced by the relevance of the training to their work, as many courses are not directly applicable. Cost is the second most important factor when deciding whether to engage with a training provider.</i>
<i>Engagement with a training provider is mainly influenced by past experience and trusted relationships. If the employer has worked with a provider before and had a positive experience, they are more likely to engage with them again.</i>
<i>Engagement with a training provider is mainly influenced by relevance to the role. In this case, any required licences must be paid for by the individual, as all workers are self-employed. If they want to work for the employer, they need to have the necessary qualifications themselves.</i>
<i>Engagement with a training provider is influenced by factors such as cost, relevance of the training, flexibility, funding availability, and ease of access. Locality is also important, and the employer has recently been speaking with Coventry College, which has a new welding workshop that may support training needs.</i>
<i>Engagement with a training provider is primarily driven by ad hoc business requirements. Once a need is identified, cost becomes the next most important consideration.</i>
<i>Engagement with training providers is influenced by the need for specific, mandatory training such as health and safety, first aid, or medical qualifications. For roles like event manager or account manager, most training happens on the job, as there aren't formal courses available for these positions.</i>
<i>Engagement with a training provider is influenced by historic relationships.</i>
<i>Engagement with a training provider is mainly influenced by relevance, as most training is delivered in-house to meet the specific needs of the business.</i>
<i>Ease of access, Cost, relevance, flexibility, quality, and past experience.</i>
<i>Engagement with a training provider is influenced by past experience and the need to provide a high-quality, well-organised service. The company also uses in-house training and specific training models to ensure staff are fully prepared for particular assignments, such as transporting sensitive items like blood.</i>
<i>Cost and relevance</i>

What stops you/employers from engaging more fully with training and upskilling support? Prompts: Awareness, time, trust, capacity, funding rules, eligibility criteria, inflexible provision, administrative burden?

Time and cost come through very strongly as the biggest barriers. For many organisations, especially smaller businesses, it's simply not easy to take staff away from day-to-day work to attend training. Client demands and operational pressures tend to take priority, and even when there is interest in upskilling, finding the time to do it can be difficult. Cost adds another layer, training can feel like a significant expense, particularly when budgets are tight or when the return on investment isn't immediately clear.

There are also concerns around whether training is worth it. If it doesn't feel directly relevant or applicable to the business, it's unlikely to be prioritised. Some organisations mentioned past experiences where training didn't quite deliver what was expected, or where education providers were disorganised, which makes them more cautious about engaging again. In a few cases, there's also a more fundamental issue around the existing workforce, with some candidates lacking basic skills, making it harder to build on training in the first place.

On top of this, there are practical challenges around access and awareness. It's not always clear what training is available, how to access it, or whether it's suitable. Funding rules and eligibility criteria can feel confusing or

restrictive, and in some cases, communication around available support hasn't been strong enough. Location and convenience matter too, training needs to be easy to access and fit around the working day. Altogether, it's a mix of limited time, financial pressures, and uncertainty that holds organisations back from engaging more fully.

What stops you/employers from engaging more fully with training and upskilling support? Prompts: Awareness, time, trust, capacity, funding rules, eligibility criteria, inflexible provision, administrative burden?
Responses include:
<i>Possibly timer funding rules</i>
<i>Finding suitable candidates is hard to do as there is not much interest in this side of mechanics.</i>
<i>A main barrier for us would be knowing if the training is going to be worthwhile as if we spend 3 hours on training then need to know whether it is applicable.</i>
<i>The convenience of the training would be a barrier as it would need to be local and easy to access. Also, knowing that the right things are available is important.</i>
<i>The main barrier to engaging with training and upskilling support is the cost of the programs.</i>
<i>The cost of training can be a barrier, which may prevent employers from engaging more fully with training and upskilling support.</i>
<i>What stops us is finding people with actual basic skills for example we have got a graduate working that lacks on basic skills.</i>
<i>Overall, the main thigs that stop us from engaging more is the cost of training and having the time to be able to do it.</i>
<i>The main barrier is the time commitment required for training. Employers often have to prioritise client work over training, making it difficult to be available and fully engage with upskilling opportunities.</i>
<i>Employers are held back from engaging fully with training and upskilling due to unorganised training providers and high costs. Current economic pressures and tough times also make it difficult to prioritise training.</i>
<i>The main barriers are time and cost, particularly the difficulty of releasing staff from work to attend training.</i>
<i>Employers do seek out training, but a key barrier is cost—it needs to be reasonably priced for them to engage fully.</i>
<i>The main barriers are understanding what training opportunities are available, along with considerations around competence and cost. The financial implications of training also play an important role in whether employers choose to engage.</i>
<i>The main barrier is relevance. If the training isn't directly applicable to the business or roles, employers and staff are unlikely to engage with it.</i>
<i>Time, capacity, and funding rules.</i>
<i>The main barriers are time and capacity, as it's difficult to release staff to attend training events without affecting day-to-day operations.</i>
<i>The main barriers are time constraints and not being able to release staff for training. Employers also consider whether the training is relevant to the business and provides good value for money.</i>
<i>The main factor stopping fuller engagement is relevance. If the training isn't directly relevant to the business or the roles, it's less likely to be taken up.</i>
<i>It is really difficult to schedule and ends up being an expensive exercise.</i>
<i>Overall, the main barrier for me is the cost and having availability as a one-man band.</i>
<i>The main thing that would stop her engaging more fully with training is time, as she is part of a small business it is hard for her to release staff and organise time for training.</i>

Can you share any examples of successful employer–provider collaboration you've seen or been part of? Prompts: What made it work (e.g., co-design, flexibility, shared costs, trusted relationships)? How could it be scaled or replicated across the region?

Across the responses, the most positive examples of collaboration tend to centre around apprenticeships and work placements. These are seen as working well because they combine learning with real, hands-on experience, giving individuals the chance to develop practical skills while being part of a working environment. Employers value this approach as it helps bring in people who are already familiar with the role and the business, while learners benefit from gaining confidence and understanding what the job actually involves day to day.

What really makes these collaborations successful is the level of involvement from both sides. When employers are actively engaged, whether that's helping to shape course content, sitting on advisory boards, or working closely with education providers to explain their skills needs, the training tends to be much more relevant. There are also good examples of education providers listening to feedback and adapting their courses to better reflect industry requirements, which helps build trust and encourages ongoing partnerships.

There's a sense that this kind of approach could be used more widely. Strengthening relationships between education providers and local employers, and creating more opportunities for co-design and regular feedback, would help ensure training stays aligned with real business needs. Expanding access to placements and apprenticeships, particularly in sectors facing skills shortages, could also make a big difference. Overall, it's about keeping that close link between learning and the workplace and making sure both sides continue to work together rather than in isolation.

Can you share any examples of successful employer-provider collaboration you've seen or been part of? Prompts: What made it work (e.g., co-design, flexibility, shared costs, trusted relationships)? How could it be scaled or replicated across the region?

Responses include:

Apprenticeships that allow learners to work and gain practical experience while studying.

Work placements organised through colleges that allow students to gain experience within the business.

Providers working closely with employers to understand their skills needs.

Employers being involved in the design of training programmes.

Colleges engaging with local employers to make sure courses meet industry requirements.

Apprenticeship programmes developed in partnership with employers.

Employers providing placements for students from local colleges and universities.

Training providers working with employers to develop sector specific training.

Employers supporting training providers by offering work experience opportunities.

Employers helping shape course content, so it reflects industry needs.

Colleges working with employers to provide practical learning opportunities.

Employers engaging with colleges through advisory boards.

Training providers responding to employer feedback when designing courses.

Industry placements organised through training providers.

Collaboration through apprenticeship programmes.

Providers working with employers to improve employability skills.

What does meaningful co-design of training look like from your perspective? Prompts: How much involvement do employers want in shaping course content, delivery modes, or assessment? What would make it easier to collaborate?

For many, meaningful co-design comes down to one simple thing: making sure the training reflects what the business needs. There's a clear appetite for being involved early on having a say in shaping course content, so it aligns with real roles, challenges, and day-to-day tasks. At the same time, there's an understanding that education providers bring expertise in delivery, so it's about getting the balance right, employers help define what's needed, and education providers take the lead in structuring and delivering it. Where this works well, it tends to feel more like a partnership than a transaction.

Flexibility is another big part of it. Businesses want training that fits around how they operate, whether that's a mix of on-the-job learning, online modules, or face-to-face sessions. A one-size-fits-all approach doesn't really work, especially across different sectors or even within the same workforce. Some also highlighted the need for training to adapt over time, whether that's keeping up with changes in legislation or evolving business needs. Being able to adjust content, delivery style, and even assessment methods make a big difference.

That said, there are still some practical challenges. Smaller organisations can struggle to find education providers that offer training relevant to what they do, or they may not always have the time or capacity to get involved in co-design. Clear communication, simpler processes, and more flexibility from education providers would make collaboration easier. There's also a sense that funding and delivery models need to better support bespoke training, especially for niche roles where standard courses just don't exist. Overall, when co-design works, it feels tailored, flexible, and genuinely useful, not something businesses have to adapt themselves around.

What does meaningful co-design of training look like from your perspective? Prompts: How much involvement do employers want in shaping course content, delivery modes, or assessment? What would make it easier to collaborate?
Responses include:
<i>The funding should allow providers to deliver bespoke courses</i>
<i>Companies need to be at the table in shopping communication, Companies need to be able to engage with initiatives such as projects and scenarios. They need to be aware of business risks such as costs IP and etc. This is often the challenge with universities</i>
<i>There isn't any training to do what we do</i>
<i>It would be useful to have an input to be able to ensure that any training is applicable to what we need by specifying exactly is involved.</i>
<i>It is important to involve employers in shaping courses to tailor them to the skills that businesses require.</i>
<i>Meaningful co-design involves a combination of on-the-job training, online learning, and some off-site training. It should take into account different abilities and ages, encouraging everyone to develop their skills. A single type of training doesn't fit all, so using a mix of internal online training and external courses has been working well for the company.</i>
<i>They design the platform to meet their own needs, so they need training provider to be flexible, both online and training providers come to them</i>
<i>It would be ideal to have involvement but as we are so small training providers do not have courses for what we do.</i>
<i>Initially employers should be involved to shape the course content to help meet needs of employers but then during it should be the provider that comes out and leads it.</i>
<i>Meaningful co-design for the employer involves training that can be completed in their own time, with flexible delivery modes to suit different schedules. Flexibility in how and when training is delivered is key to effective collaboration.</i>
<i>Meaningful co-design for the employer involves active collaboration with the training provider. Modules are pre-mapped on a platform for students to follow guidance, but the employer provides feedback if the training mode is not effective. There is good communication, with the course leader regularly catching up with the company director, fostering strong professional relationships.</i>
<i>The employer does not have experience with co-design of training and cannot provide examples or perspectives at this time.</i>
<i>The employer has recently started discussions with the Warwickshire Manufacturing Group about potential training support, but it is still at an early stage so they are not yet able to comment on what meaningful co-design of training would look like.</i>
<i>He doesn't know how to answer this question</i>
<i>From my perspective, meaningful co-design means making training relevant to the business. Employers would contact the training provider beforehand to tailor the content and delivery, so it meets their specific needs.</i>

Meaningful co-design involves collaborating with training providers to create programmes that are tailored to the company. The provider can develop a framework, and the business can then review it to ensure the training is relevant and useful for its needs.

From my perspective, meaningful co-design isn't needed at the moment. If required, any training would be accessed as a quick online resource, as nothing more in-depth is currently relevant or useful.

We prefer doing training with someone who has worked in the field of care and we prefer more of face to face training which encourages more interactions and also understanding language barriers considering that some people have a challenge with the English language but once they get to understand what they are supposed to do they are very good with their practical.

From my perspective, meaningful co-design means training that can adapt to constantly changing legislation and government guidelines. Staff need to understand and apply these rules in day-to-day operations, especially for international and same-day services, so training must reflect real-world requirements and be updated regularly.

From my perspective, meaningful co-design means making training bespoke and tailored to the specific needs of the company. The training provider must be flexible to adapt content, delivery, and assessment to suit those requirements.

In your experience, how have you used public skills investments to meet your employer needs? Prompts: What's working well? What could be improved (e.g., course offer, eligibility, pace of approval, communication)?

Experiences of using public skills investment are quite mixed. Some organisations have made good use of funding streams such as apprenticeships, local authority grants, and sector-specific support like CITB or Skills for Care. In a few cases, this has worked well, particularly where funding was easy to access, quick to be approved, and clearly linked to business needs. Examples include support for apprenticeships, training through the Over-50s Fund, grants for digital transformation such as CRM implementation, and funding accessed via Innovation Funds, Growth Hubs, or post-COVID incentive schemes. Where it works, it tends to be straightforward, timely, and directly beneficial to staff development or business growth.

However, many responses suggest limited engagement or awareness. Several organisations haven't used public skills investment at all or are unsure about what is available and how to access it. In some cases, employers have investigated it but found it unsuitable, particularly where their work is niche and existing courses or funding criteria don't quite fit. Others mentioned using funding in the past, especially for apprenticeships, but without a clear understanding of how the system works, which can make it harder to engage confidently in the future.

There are also some clear areas for improvement. Simplicity and clarity stand out where processes are easy to navigate and funding is released quickly; engagement is much higher. On the other hand, complexity, lack of awareness, and limited flexibility can act as barriers. There's a sense that more could be done to better communicate what support is available and to ensure that funding aligns with a wider range of business needs, particularly for smaller organisations or those operating in specialised areas. Overall, while public skills investment can be valuable, its impact depends heavily on how accessible, relevant, and easy it is to use in practice.

In your experience, how have you used public skills investments to meet your employer needs? Prompts: What's working well? What could be improved (e.g., course offer, eligibility, pace of approval, communication)?

Responses include:

Looked at it but not been suitable because it's so niche.

The employer has not used public skills investments recently but has previously supported apprenticeships in the past.

Only the one apprentice - got one lot of funding however did not complete.

The employer has used public skills investments through a grant received from Innovate UK

<i>The employer has used government funding to support apprenticeship schemes but is not familiar with the detailed processes or specifics of the funding.</i>
<i>The employer has not used any public skills investments to meet their needs.</i>
<i>He has not used any.</i>
<i>He has used the grant scheme from Warwickshire County Council.</i>
<i>Not to his knowledge, he is not aware of it</i>
<i>We utilise the Apprenticeship Levy to support training and development.</i>
<i>He has not accessed any public skills investments.</i>
<i>We use Skills for Care and the courses they offer are very useful for us especially those ones funded by the government, but some also require us to pay.</i>
<i>I'm not entirely sure, but it's likely that public skills investments have been used in the past to support training and development within the company.</i>
<i>Not used any public skills investments</i>
<i>We have used public skills funding to support staff development, for example through the Over-50s Fund, which helped fund training for three members of staff.</i>
<i>Grants for the apprenticeships.</i>
<i>Received funding support as a consequence of stuff that happened during the pandemic which has been very useful.</i>
<i>We have had grants for purchase of machinery about 18 months ago.</i>
<i>Did get a bit of funding to cover initial cost of training which was good as there was quick release of the funds and an easy process of getting them.</i>
<i>They have used public skills investments by accessing funding from the Innovation Fund and the Growth Hub.</i>
<i>Had a grant through local council to help digitalise the business so we have implemented a CRM system where we all had training provided.</i>
<i>They have used public skills investments through the over-50s funded scheme from Warwickshire County Council, which supports up to five employees per business with funding of up to £750.</i>
<i>Not used any government funding recently</i>
<i>They have used public skills investments through a government apprenticeship scheme, including incentive payments introduced after COVID.</i>
<i>Public skills investments have been used through grants and support from the Chamber of Commerce.</i>
<i>We receive grants through the CITB which all works well.</i>
<i>Apprenticeships, have promoted these with support workers and managers and have a number of staff enrolled.</i>

How could skills funding be used more flexibly or efficiently to respond to emerging skills gaps? Prompts: Shorter courses, modular delivery, shared funding models, pooled employer consortia, fast-response pilots?

There's a strong feeling that skills funding needs to be much more adaptable to how businesses operate. One of the clearest messages is the demand for shorter, more focused courses. Long programmes can be difficult to commit to, especially when staff need to be available for day-to-day work. Short, modular training whether delivered online, face-to-face, or a mix of both would make it much easier for businesses to upskill their teams without causing disruption. There's also interest in more "learn as you go" approaches, where training can happen alongside work rather than requiring time away from it.

Relevance and responsiveness are just as important. Businesses want funding to support training that reflects current and emerging needs, whether that's niche technical skills, AI, hospitality supervision, or navigating changes like post-Brexit processes. There's a sense that funding should allow for more tailored or even in-house training, rather than expecting employers to fit into standardised programmes. Faster access is another key point waiting too long to get onto a course can mean missing the window when the training is needed. Being able to respond quickly to skills gaps, as they arise, would make funding far more effective.

Cost and accessibility also come through strongly. More flexible funding models such as shared funding, employer consortia, or support to cover staff time while training would help smaller businesses. Clearer communication about what funding is available and how to access it would also make a difference, as many still aren't sure where to start. Overall, there's a clear appetite for a system that is simpler, quicker, and more aligned with real business needs one that supports practical, targeted training rather than one-size-fits-all solutions.

How could skills funding be used more flexibly or efficiently to respond to emerging skills gaps? Prompts: Shorter courses, modular delivery, shared funding models, pooled employer consortia, fast-response pilots?
Responses
<i>I feel that the applications where funding is too straight it should be aimed at how the provider works</i>
<i>To bring industry standards training to colleges. To deliver workplace Accelerators that help bridge the gap from education to Work</i>
<i>Shorter courses would be useful to help ensure that they don't take too much work time up.</i>
<i>Shorter courses would be a useful way to use funding to ensure that employees have got the time to do them.</i>
<i>Skills funding could be used more flexibly to support hospitality skills training, so that companies do not have to cover the full cost themselves.</i>
<i>We do not fall into categories for apprenticeship or funding and so we would need funding for specific training.</i>
<i>The training is too long, and so shorter and sharper courses would be more beneficial.</i>
<i>Skills funding could be used more efficiently by supporting more relevant and up-to-date courses, particularly in niche areas.</i>
<i>Skills funding could be used more effectively by supporting more traditional apprenticeship-style training, similar to the old YTS schemes.</i>
<i>Skills funding could be used to support ad hoc training when needed.</i>
<i>Skills funding could be used to cover the cost of various courses, particularly those that offer a recognised qualification at the end.</i>
<i>Skills funding could be used more flexibly by offering shorter courses. Levy often involves longer-term commitments, so shorter training options could provide more opportunities to address skills gaps.</i>
<i>Skills funding could be more flexible by supporting targeted training in emerging areas like AI, especially for customer interactions.</i>
<i>Skills funding could be used more flexibly to support the transition from entry-level to management roles.</i>
<i>Skills funding could be more flexible by supporting training that helps businesses navigate complex and changing processes, such as customs and shipping post-Brexit.</i>
<i>It is about the identification of emerging skills gaps so having flexibility to identify and respond quickly to skills gaps.</i>
<i>Skills funding needs to remain flexible because there will always be some skills gaps.</i>
<i>Making the delivery of courses quicker and being able to tailor them to keep the training dynamic.</i>
<i>I think that having one to one training where they are coming into the business would be helpful so that your not going off site to a generic course so it can be focused and tailored to an individual.</i>
<i>Shorter courses to be able to have the time to attend the training as the length of training does put people off. Also, have some online training would be good as not everyone can go somewhere for it.</i>
<i>There needs to be a fast response to requests to get a place on a course and not having to wait a while to get on it.</i>
<i>Skills funding could be used more flexibly if companies clearly knew where to access it.</i>
<i>Skills funding could be more effective if employees were clearly informed about what funding is available and how to access it.</i>
<i>The initial training is basic so if it was free and learn as you go it would be helpful as costs a lot to get someone started especially in a small business.</i>
<i>Skills funding could be used more flexibly by providing financial support that allows employers to pay staff while they undertake training.</i>

<i>employer consortia training could potentially be an answer, particularly where there are concerns over costs and particularly where specific task related type training is required.</i>
<i>Modular delivery with mixed provisions in terms of F2F / webinars</i>
<i>Shared funding models would be advantageous</i>
<i>Short courses and modular delivery or distance learning</i>
<i>Modular learning programmes where employers and individuals can break the whole down into smaller chunks through short courses</i>
<i>Skills funding could be more effective if used for shorter, practical courses that minimize disruption to the business.</i>
<i>Skills funding could be used more flexibly by increasing support for hospitality skills, particularly supervisory and leadership training.</i>
<i>Modular more condensed delivery is critical.</i>
<i>I think modular delivery focused on skill gaps would work well.</i>
<i>The funding needs to match where the training requirements are needed</i>
<i>From an SMEs perspective shared funding / pooled employer consortium.</i>
<i>Support temporary in-house trainers to groups of three or four employers in a similar sector with similar training needs</i>
<i>Skills funding will help employers to address needs as well as future skills gaps- Providers can then easily accommodate relevant learning</i>
<i>Needs to be allocated via a larger team settlement rather than short funding with very tight Timelines</i>

What needs to happen to scale up the most effective training models region-wide? Prompts: What support, coordination, or incentives would make that possible? Which stakeholders should lead?

Scaling up effective training across the region comes back to a few practical things starting with awareness and access. Many feel that good training already exists, but businesses simply don't know what's available or how to access it. Better promotion, clearer communication, and sharing success stories would go a long way in getting more employers involved. There's also a need for training to be more visible locally, whether that's through online platforms, webinars, or education providers delivering directly on-site to make it easier for businesses to engage.

Funding and support are another big part of the picture. It's not just about having funding available but making it easier to access and more flexible in how it's used. Businesses need support with things like bid applications, as well as financial help to cover staff time while they're away from work. Incentives, particularly for apprenticeships and entry into trade roles could also help bring more people into sectors that are currently struggling. There's a sense that funding should be directed more towards delivery and practical training, rather than being tied up in administration.

Stronger coordination between stakeholders would also make a difference. Employers, education providers, local authorities, and organisations like Chambers of Commerce all have a role to play, but they need to work more closely together. That means understanding business needs, involving employers in shaping provision, and creating platforms where feedback can flow both ways. There's also room to think more creatively about delivery whether that's using immersive technologies like VR, or offering more tailored, one-to-one and in-house training. Ultimately, scaling up what works will rely on better collaboration, clearer leadership, and a more joined-up approach across the region.

<i>What needs to happen to scale up the most effective training models region-wide? Prompts: What support, coordination, or incentives would make that possible? Which stakeholders should lead?</i>
<i>Responses include:</i>
<i>Could do with help to complete bids</i>
<i>Well, it takes funding Cash also needs to be spent on delivery and budget to companies and Livers trainers rather than cohort admin</i>

<i>The best ways of training we have found is that the teachers sit in on lessons and also do one on one face to face training.</i>
<i>More information of what is actually available by doing more wider advertising of it.</i>
<i>To scale up effective training models region-wide, online courses need to be made more visible and accessible to businesses.</i>
<i>Each company has different needs, so the most effective training models will vary. Approaches should be flexible to reflect the specific requirements of individual businesses.</i>
<i>There need to be more information given out in the courses - rather than all based on one topic it could be broader and actually being taught what is needed. I believe a webinar would be useful.</i>
<i>To scale up effective training models region-wide, there needs to be more support for companies, greater flexibility in course delivery, and increased awareness of available training options.</i>
<i>More training schemes and apprenticeships are needed to encourage young people into manual and trade-based roles. Greater promotion of these careers, competitive salaries, and stronger incentives would help attract new entrants.</i>
<i>To scale up effective training models region-wide, grant funding needs to be more widely available to other businesses.</i>
<i>To work with care providers to come up with relevant trainings. The Warwickshire Council should take the lead.</i>
<i>Currently, in-house apprenticeships are working very well. To scale up effective training models region-wide, it's important to raise awareness and get more employers involved.</i>
<i>To scale up effective training models region-wide, funding is key, along with provision for staff to have time out of work. It also helps if training providers can come on-site, such as to hotels, to deliver the courses directly.</i>
<i>Awareness of what is available to businesses</i>
<i>To scale up effective training models across the region, employers need better awareness of what training is available.</i>
<i>Someone having the impetus to be able to identify region wide issues and being able to push it through to scale it up.</i>
<i>Needs to be more marketing of what's available and also improving awareness of it.</i>
<i>Understanding the needs and explaining why it needs doing to the employee and enabling a platform where the employees can have their say of what they need training wise.</i>
<i>Education authorities / training providers should engage more with employers</i>
<i>The word of mouth of the newsletter and celebrating successes and communicating them to businesses so that they can see it and get involved.</i>
<i>Skills matrix is useful as it can tell us what an employee is qualified in and what might still be needed.</i>
<i>To scale up the most effective training models region-wide, essential courses such as team leadership, health and safety, risk assessments, and IOSH training should be made more widely available. If the Chamber of Commerce offered these courses directly to companies, more employers would be able to access them, increasing participation and impact.</i>
<i>To scale up the most effective training models region-wide, training needs to be more widely available and delivered locally.</i>
<i>Financial incentives to be able to manage off rota time for staff and subsidise training courses</i>
<i>Understanding what providers need. How funding can be accessed easily. Practical events for providers.</i>
<i>a key point of coordination, being able to adapt to changing business needs</i>
<i>More emphasis on moving learning forwards with the use of Virtual Reality and Immersive training where the impact is powerful.</i>

If you could change one thing about how the regional skills system operates, what would it be? Prompts: What would make the biggest difference for employers and learners in Warwickshire? What do you think should be a high priority?

If there's one thing that stands out, it's the need for much better visibility and clearer communication. Many feel that opportunities, funding, and support do exist, but they're not easy to find or understand. Employers want straightforward information like what's available, what it includes, and how to access it without having to spend too much time figuring it out. Even simple changes, like clearer course descriptions or better promotion, could make a big difference. There's also a sense that smaller businesses in particular need more direct support, rather than feeling overlooked in favour of larger education providers.

Another recurring theme is the importance of making the system feel more connected to real business needs. Employers want to be listened to, not have training designed based on assumptions. Stronger links between businesses and education providers would help ensure courses are more relevant and practical. There's also a call for more engagement with young people, bringing industry professionals into colleges, promoting vocational pathways, and encouraging apprenticeships, particularly in sectors like engineering and construction where there are ongoing shortages.

Finally, accessibility and flexibility remain key. Shorter, more manageable training options would make it easier for businesses to take part, especially where time is limited. At the same time, improving access to funding, particularly for smaller organisations would remove a major barrier. Overall, the biggest change would be creating a system that is easier to navigate, more responsive to employers, and better aligned with the realities of both businesses and learners in Warwickshire.

If you could change one thing about how the regional skills system operates, what would it be? Prompts: What would make the biggest difference for employers and learners in Warwickshire? What do you think should be a high priority?

Responses include:

Target the funding for small providers direct rather than colleague and big national providers

Engage more with the small business and listen to what's needs and not make assumptions of what they provide.

Making the courses easier to see the specifics in what the course entails which could be done by bullet points on the course advertisement to ensure that it is applicable to the training we need.

Advertising better to know what is actually available.

The employer does not feel major changes are needed but believes there should be more collaboration with colleges. Greater involvement from organisations such as the Chamber of Commerce visiting colleges and giving presentations could help raise awareness of career opportunities.

Having the time to do the training by making them shorter as easier to access.

The employer's highest priority would be government funding to allow staff or industry professionals to go into colleges and speak to young people, rather than relying on training providers or government representatives. He wants young people to gain a real understanding of what working in the industry is actually like.

Large building and manufacturing firms should be encouraged to offer more apprenticeships going forward. The employer also feels this is not just a regional issue in Warwickshire, but a national challenge that needs wider action.

I would like to see more visibility around what training opportunities are available, including clearer information about grants and funding that businesses may be entitled to.

Training should involve people who we care for so that they can recommend to us what can be trained on based on their needs. That would make a big difference.

If I could change one thing, it would be to increase awareness and visibility of the regional skills system. More information from different training providers would help employers understand the opportunities and funding available, making it easier to access and expand training.

If I could change one thing, it would be a greater focus on young people. Training isn't always tailored to their needs, so providing more vocational training for school leavers could help them develop practical skills for the workplace, although I'm not fully aware of all current provisions.

I would make the regional skills system more accessible by providing more information about available funding and training opportunities. Better communication would make it easier for employers and learners in Warwickshire to take advantage of what's on offer.

<i>As a small company, I would like to see more access to funding and changes to training requirements that make it easier to participate. Greater support and understanding of the needs of smaller businesses would make the biggest difference for employers and learners in Warwickshire.</i>
<i>Knowing where to go</i>
<i>Making it more visible and easier access to what is available.</i>
<i>I haven't personally used the regional skills system, but I would like to see more opportunities in engineering and initiatives that encourage younger people to enter the industry.</i>
<i>There should be clearer communication about the training opportunities available to employers.</i>
<i>More engagement between employers, colleges and training providers would help improve the system.</i>
<i>Training should be more aligned with what employers actually need in the workplace.</i>

Solutions Workshop Findings and Potential Solutions

Codesigned Solutions: Leadership and Management Development

In developing the LSIP proposals, a co-design approach has been central to shaping solutions for leadership and management (L&M) development in Warwickshire. This reflects the recognition that L&M challenges, particularly those relating to SME capability, workforce retention, health and wellbeing, and digital/AI adoption cannot be addressed by any single part of the system acting alone. Co-design in this context has brought together employers, education providers, sector bodies and wider stakeholders to ensure that solutions are grounded in real operational realities, including the pressures faced by SMEs in releasing staff, the needs of first-time and “accidental” managers, and the requirement for flexible, accessible provision that aligns with business cycles.

This approach builds on strong practice already evident across Warwickshire, where employers are actively engaging with apprenticeships, internal training, levy transfer schemes and sector-led provision. However, workshop feedback highlighted that while provision exists, its impact is often limited by fragmentation, lack of flexibility and misalignment with employer needs. By drawing together detailed employer insights, the co-design process has enabled a clearer understanding of both effective practice and systemic barriers, ensuring that future solutions are practical, scalable and directly informed by those who will use and deliver them.

Summarising the feedback from the Leadership & Management Development Solutions Workshop, employers consistently pointed to the need for more modular, work-integrated and flexible training, alongside clearer progression pathways and stronger relationships with education providers. There was also a strong emphasis on embedding leadership development within wider organisational practices such as workforce planning, wellbeing and culture rather than treating it as a standalone activity.

What Works (existing strengths and effective practice)

1) Apprenticeships and structured development routes

Leadership apprenticeships, particularly the Level 5 Operations Manager were widely recognised as a valuable mechanism for developing management capability, particularly in sectors such as health and care where progression pathways are critical for retention. Employers highlighted that apprenticeships provide structured learning combined with practical application, enabling individuals who have progressed from operational roles to develop the skills needed to lead effectively. The apprenticeship levy transfer scheme was also identified as a key enabler, particularly for smaller organisations that would otherwise lack the financial capacity to invest in leadership development. In practice, these approaches work best where they are aligned to clear organisational progression pathways, tailored to business needs, and supported by flexible delivery rather than rigid programme structures.

2) Internal training and “grow your own” leadership models

Many organisations, particularly SMEs have developed internal approaches to leadership development in response to limited budgets and external constraints. These include structured internal frameworks (such as

“basic–better–best” models), shadowing opportunities, and promoting staff from within to build capability over time. Employers emphasised that “growing their own” leaders support retention, strengthens organisational culture, and ensures that managers understand the operational context of the business. In some cases, internal experts deliver training sessions or provide mentoring, particularly in areas such as digital skills or operational processes. These approaches are most effective where leadership development is embedded into everyday practice, supported by senior leadership, and linked to long-term workforce planning.

3) Modular, bite-sized and targeted learning

Employers consistently identified short, targeted modules as the most practical and effective form of training. Rather than committing to long, fixed programmes, organisations prefer the ability to select and combine modules that address specific business needs such as managing difficult conversations, planning and organisational skills, or leadership fundamentals. This “pick and mix” approach allows training to be more responsive, cost-effective and relevant, particularly for SMEs with limited time and resources. Level 3 and Level 5 modules were highlighted as particularly useful for supporting progression, while short courses enable incremental development for experienced staff looking to take the next step. The key success factor is that learning is immediately applicable and does not require extended time away from the workplace.

4) Practical, work-integrated and experiential learning

Employers strongly favoured learning models that are embedded within the workplace and aligned to real business challenges. Approaches based on the 70-20-10 model where the majority of learning takes place through experience, supported by coaching and complemented by formal training were seen as particularly effective. Employers highlighted that leadership capability is best developed through doing, rather than through theoretical learning alone. Programmes that incorporate real projects, problem-solving activities and reflective practice were valued, particularly where education providers maintain engagement after delivery to support implementation. This ensures that learning translates into behavioural change and improved organisational performance.

5) Flexible and blended delivery models

A combination of delivery formats was identified as essential to meeting employer needs. Face-to-face learning remains important for developing confidence, communication and interpersonal skills, as it allows for interaction, discussion and peer learning. However, employers also emphasised the need for flexibility, including on-site delivery, hybrid approaches and recorded sessions that can be accessed later. Shorter sessions, typically up to three hours or half-day formats were preferred over full-day training, as they reduce disruption to operations and allow participants to reflect and apply learning between sessions. Employers also noted that online-only delivery can reduce engagement if not supported by interactive elements or clear expectations.

6) Employer-provider collaboration and co-designed provision

Strong examples of collaboration between employers and education providers were highlighted as effective practice, particularly where training is co-designed to reflect real business needs. For example, modularised training offers developed in response to employer feedback, and innovation-led programmes (such as those linked to Innovate UK), demonstrate how provision can be tailored to emerging skills requirements. Employers valued opportunities to influence content, delivery and outcomes, particularly in areas such as digital and AI skills. These partnerships help ensure that training remains relevant, practical and aligned with sector-specific challenges.

7) Leadership development linked to retention, wellbeing and culture

Employers sectors such as care highlighted that leadership development plays a critical role in improving retention, morale and organisational culture. Training that supports emotional intelligence, inclusive leadership and employee wellbeing was seen as particularly impactful, helping managers to better support their teams and create positive working environments. Employers also noted that investing in training can make employees feel valued, reducing disengagement and improving commitment. In this context, leadership development is not just about skills, but about shaping behaviours and organisational culture.

Challenges

1) Fragmented ecosystem and navigation barriers

Despite the availability of a wide range of training provision, employers reported significant challenges in navigating the system. There is limited awareness of what is available, how to access it, and which education providers are most appropriate. This creates a perception of both overload and inaccessibility, particularly for SMEs without dedicated HR or training functions. Employers highlighted the need for a clearer, more coordinated system that simplifies access and reduces the time required to identify suitable provision.

2) Time, cost and capacity constraints for SMEs

A major barrier to engagement is the difficulty of releasing staff for training, particularly in small organisations where employees perform multiple roles. Employers highlighted that even where training is available, operational pressures make it difficult to prioritise development. Limited budgets further restrict investment, leading many organisations to rely on internal training approaches, which may not always provide the breadth or quality of external provision. These challenges are particularly acute in growing businesses and service-based sectors.

3) Inflexible and overly generic provision

Employers expressed frustration with training that is too generic or not aligned to their specific needs. Overly broad programmes that combine multiple topics (e.g. finance, AI, leadership) can lack clarity and relevance, while long, fixed programmes are difficult to accommodate. There is a clear preference for targeted, modular and sector-relevant provision that can be adapted to different organisational contexts.

4) Apprenticeship and funding constraints

While apprenticeships are valued, employers identified several limitations, including rigid programme structures, complex requirements and limited flexibility. For example, the requirement for project-based assessment can be challenging for SMEs with limited capacity to provide varied project opportunities. Funding rules were also seen as restrictive, with a lack of alignment between funding criteria and employer needs. The removal of certain higher-level apprenticeships was also noted as a disincentive for progression.

5) Gaps in core management capability

Employers highlighted significant gaps in fundamental leadership skills, particularly among first-time managers. These include lack of confidence, difficulties managing people, handling difficult conversations, conducting performance reviews, and managing absence or wellbeing issues. In some cases, managers hold responsibility without sufficient authority, leading to over-reliance on HR and reduced effectiveness. These gaps highlight the need for more structured and accessible management training.

6) Workforce and participation barriers

Broader workforce challenges such as health conditions, caring responsibilities and lack of inclusive practices impact participation in training and progression. Employers highlighted the need for managers to be better equipped to support employee wellbeing, particularly in relation to mental health and MSK conditions. Addressing these challenges is critical to improving retention and workforce participation (Get Warwickshire Working).

7) Lack of clear ROI and impact measurement

Employers emphasised that investment in leadership development must be justified through clear, measurable outcomes. However, there is often a lack of clarity around the impact of training, making it difficult to assess value. Employers highlighted the need for better evidence linking training to outcomes such as productivity, retention, employee engagement and organisational performance.

Potential Solutions

A) Establish a clear, coordinated “front door” for L&M support

Develop a single, visible and trusted entry point for leadership and management development in Warwickshire, building on existing infrastructure such as the Warwickshire Skills Hub. This should function not just as an information portal, but as an active brokerage and advisory service that helps employers navigate the system. This could include a “route-mapping” tool that outlines available training options, eligibility, delivery formats, duration and expected outcomes, alongside light-touch diagnostics to direct employers to the most relevant

provision. Given the current fragmentation and low awareness, this function should also proactively engage employers, simplify access to funding (e.g. levy transfer, Adult Skills Fund), and reduce administrative burden. The aim is to save time, increase confidence in the system, and ensure employers can quickly access the right support aligned to their business needs.

B) Expand modular, flexible and SME-focused leadership pathways

Develop a coherent suite of modular, stackable leadership and management pathways (e.g. Level 3 to Level 5+) that are specifically designed for SME contexts. These pathways should allow employers to select targeted modules based on immediate needs such as managing difficult conversations, performance management, managing absence, decision-making, and understanding employment responsibilities, rather than committing to full qualifications. Modules should be designed to “stack” into recognised qualifications over time, ensuring both flexibility and progression. There should also be a clear distinction between pathways for first-time managers, aspiring leaders and senior leaders, with content tailored accordingly. This approach responds directly to employer demand for shorter, more relevant and accessible training, while still enabling long-term career development.

C) Strengthen work-based and experiential learning models

Embed “learn–apply–reflect” approaches across all leadership and management provision, ensuring that training is directly linked to workplace practice. This includes integrating real business challenges, live projects and problem-solving activities into programme design, enabling managers to apply learning immediately. Coaching and mentoring should be a core component, particularly for first-time managers who require ongoing support rather than one-off training. Employers highlighted the value of follow-up engagement from education providers, so programmes should include structured check-ins, implementation support and opportunities for reflection. Aligning delivery with the 70-20-10 model will help ensure that learning leads to behavioural change, improved decision-making and measurable business impact.

D) Improve flexibility in funding and delivery

Leverage the devolution of the Adult Skills Fund (from August 2026) to enable more flexible, locally tailored provision, including modular courses, micro-credentials and blended delivery models. Funding mechanisms should better align with employer needs, allowing for shorter courses, partial qualifications and non-traditional delivery formats. There is also a need to explore more flexible use of apprenticeship funding, including modular approaches and reduced administrative complexity, to make programmes more accessible to SMEs. Consideration should also be given to supporting “protected learning time” or backfill arrangements, enabling businesses to release staff without compromising operations. This will be critical to increasing participation and ensuring equitable access to training.

E) Enhance employer-provider collaboration and co-design

Strengthen and formalise partnerships between employers, colleges, independent training education providers and sector bodies to co-design leadership and management provision. This should include mechanisms for continuous feedback, ensuring that content remains relevant to evolving business needs, particularly in areas such as digital and AI adoption. Employers should be actively involved in shaping curricula, delivery models and assessment approaches, with opportunities to share real-world challenges and case studies. Collaborative models such as sector-based groups or cross-sector workshops can also support peer learning and the sharing of good practice. This will help ensure that provision is not only relevant but also responsive and future focused.

F) Embed inclusive, health-aware and people-focused leadership

Ensure that leadership and management programmes explicitly incorporate inclusive practices, employee wellbeing and work & health considerations. This includes equipping managers with the skills to support employees with mental health challenges, MSK conditions and other barriers to participation, as well as promoting inclusive recruitment and progression practices. Training should also address emotional intelligence, cultural awareness and managing diverse teams, reflecting employer demand for more people-centred leadership. Aligning provision with wider initiatives such as Get Warwickshire Working and WorkWell will help create a more integrated approach, supporting both business performance and workforce participation.

G) Strengthen measurement and demonstrate impact

Develop a clear and consistent framework for measuring the impact of leadership and management development, moving beyond traditional metrics such as qualification completion. This should include indicators such as improved retention, reduced absence, increased productivity, enhanced employee engagement, progression (including lateral progression), and overall business performance. Programmes should define expected outcomes at the outset and track progress over time, supported by both quantitative data and qualitative feedback. Case studies and evidence of return on investment should be captured and shared to build employer confidence and encourage further investment in leadership development. Establishing this clear line of sight between training and business outcomes will be critical to driving sustained engagement.

Codesigned Solutions: Digital Skills, AI and Adoption of New Technologies

In developing the LSIP proposals, a co-design approach has been central to shaping solutions for digital skills, AI adoption and the integration of new technologies across Warwickshire. This reflects the recognition that digital challenges particularly those relating to SME capability, workforce confidence, data security, rapid technological change and digital inclusion cannot be addressed by any single part of the system acting alone. Co-design in this context has brought together employers, education providers, sector bodies and wider stakeholders to ensure that solutions are grounded in real operational realities, including the pressures faced by SMEs in releasing staff, the varying levels of digital confidence across the workforce, and the need for flexible, accessible provision that aligns with business needs and pace of change.

This approach builds on strong foundations already evident across Warwickshire's economy, including a tech-intensive business base, established digital and creative clusters such as Silicon Spa, and increasing employer engagement with digital tools and platforms. However, workshop feedback highlighted that while awareness and use of digital tools particularly AI is growing, its impact is often limited by fragmentation, lack of trust, low confidence and misalignment with real business application. Many organisations remain at a basic stage of adoption, using tools such as ChatGPT or Copilot without fully understanding how to embed them into workflows or generate measurable value. By drawing together detailed employer insights, the co-design process has enabled a clearer understanding of both effective practice and systemic barriers, ensuring that future solutions are practical, scalable and directly informed by those who will use and deliver them.

Summarising the feedback from the Digital Skills, AI & Adoption of New Technologies Solutions Workshop, employers consistently pointed to the need for more modular, work-integrated and flexible training, alongside clearer guidance on what digital and AI skills are required within their organisations. There was also a strong emphasis on building confidence and trust in digital technologies, supporting practical application through real business use cases, and embedding digital capability within wider organisational practices such as workforce development, operational processes and continuous learning rather than treating it as a standalone or purely technical activity.

What Works (existing strengths and effective practice)

1) Informal learning, self-directed learning and digital familiarity

A key strength identified by employers is the widespread engagement with informal and self-directed digital learning across the workforce. Many employees, particularly younger individuals, are already developing digital capabilities through online platforms such as YouTube, social media and independent experimentation with tools like ChatGPT. This creates a strong baseline of digital familiarity, even where formal training is limited. Employers highlighted that while these skills are often not fully aligned with workplace requirements, they provide a valuable starting point that can be built upon through structured learning. For example, individuals who are confident in navigating digital platforms can more easily transition into using workplace tools such as data systems, communication platforms or basic AI applications. This "learn by doing" culture also reduces

barriers to engagement, as employees are more willing to experiment and adopt new tools when supported appropriately. Leveraging this existing behaviour through curated, practical and guided learning pathways can therefore accelerate digital upskilling and improve workforce readiness.

2) Bite-sized, modular and flexible learning approaches

Employers consistently identified bite-sized and modular learning as the most effective way to deliver digital and AI skills. Short, targeted sessions such as introductory “What is AI?” workshops, AI basics bootcamps or half-day training modules allow employees to engage with learning without significant disruption to business operations. This approach works particularly well for SMEs, where releasing staff for extended periods is often not feasible. Employers emphasised that modular learning enables a “pick and mix” approach, allowing organisations to select specific topics such as data literacy, cyber security or AI applications based on immediate business needs. This incremental model supports continuous learning, where employees can build skills over time rather than committing to long, rigid programmes. The inclusion of practical formats such as YouTube-style videos combined with interactive sessions or check-ins further enhances accessibility and engagement, ensuring that learning is both flexible and immediately applicable.

3) Workplace-integrated and role-specific training

Training that is embedded within the workplace and tailored to specific job roles was identified as highly effective in supporting digital adoption. Employers highlighted the value of education providers delivering training directly within organisations, enabling content to be aligned with real business processes and operational challenges. For example, sector-specific training in areas such as logistics automation, digital construction tools or AI-enabled customer processes allows employees to understand how digital skills apply directly to their work. This approach ensures that learning is immediately relevant and can be applied in real time, improving both confidence and productivity. It also addresses employer concerns around return on investment, as training outcomes can be directly linked to improvements in efficiency, workflow optimisation and decision-making. Embedding learning within day-to-day operations therefore enables organisations to move beyond theoretical understanding and towards practical implementation of digital technologies.

4) Peer learning, digital champions and shared knowledge models

Employers highlighted the effectiveness of peer-led learning and the role of internal “digital champions” in supporting adoption. These individuals act as intermediaries between formal training and practical application, helping to translate complex digital or AI concepts into simple, actionable steps for colleagues. For example, an AI champion within a team may demonstrate how to use tools to automate routine tasks or improve communication workflows, building confidence among other employees. This approach is particularly effective in addressing resistance and fear, as learning is delivered by trusted peers rather than external education providers. In addition, employers emphasised the value of shared knowledge platforms, such as directories of approved education providers or skills hubs, which enable organisations to access and share good practice. These collaborative approaches help create a culture of continuous learning and reduce duplication, while also supporting cross-sector innovation.

5) Blended and hybrid delivery models

A blended approach combining face-to-face, online and hybrid delivery was identified as essential to meeting diverse employer needs. Face-to-face learning remains important for building confidence, facilitating discussion and supporting peer interaction, particularly when introducing new or complex topics such as AI. At the same time, online delivery provides flexibility, allowing employees to access training at a time and pace that suits them. Hybrid models, such as virtual sessions with breakout discussions, enable both interaction and convenience, making them particularly effective for distributed teams. Employers also highlighted the importance of keeping content up to date, given the rapid pace of technological change, and ensuring that online learning is interactive rather than passive. By combining different delivery methods, training can be tailored to different learning styles and operational constraints, improving both accessibility and impact.

6) Cross-sector applicability and transferable digital skills

Employers emphasised that digital skills are increasingly required across all sectors, not just within specialist technology roles. For example, digital construction tools and green technologies are becoming essential within construction, while logistics and warehousing are increasingly reliant on automation, telematics and data

analytics. Similarly, health and care sectors require digital competencies in data handling and technology-enabled care, while creative industries demand advanced digital and interactive skills. This cross-sector applicability highlights the importance of developing transferable digital skills that can be applied in different contexts. It also creates opportunities for workforce mobility, enabling individuals to move between sectors as demand evolves. Embedding digital capability across all job roles therefore supports both business resilience and long-term employability.

Challenges

1) Limited progression beyond basic AI usage

Despite widespread awareness of AI tools such as ChatGPT and Copilot, employers reported that most organisations remain at a basic level of usage, with limited progression towards more advanced or strategic applications. Employees are often using AI for simple tasks such as drafting content or basic queries but are not applying it to more complex business functions such as workflow optimisation, data analysis or decision support. This is largely due to a lack of understanding of how AI can be integrated into business processes, combined with limited access to training that demonstrates real-world applications. As a result, organisations struggle to realise measurable value or return on investment, leading to uncertainty and underutilisation of available technologies.

2) Lack of confidence, trust and cultural resistance

A significant barrier to digital adoption is the lack of confidence and trust in AI and digital technologies. Employers highlighted concerns around data security, GDPR compliance and potential data breaches, with some organisations actively avoiding certain tools due to perceived risks. In addition, there is a widespread fear particularly among older workers that AI may replace jobs rather than enhance them, creating resistance to adoption. This is compounded by a lack of clear guidance on ethical use and governance, making organisations hesitant to experiment with new technologies. As a result, cultural resistance becomes a major barrier, preventing businesses from fully embracing digital transformation.

3) Fragmented system and lack of clarity on skills needs

Employers reported significant challenges in identifying what digital skills are required within their organisations and how to access appropriate training. The current system is perceived as fragmented, with multiple education providers, courses and funding streams that are difficult to navigate. This creates confusion and delays in accessing support, particularly for SMEs without dedicated HR or training functions. In addition, employers often struggle to understand the value of digital training, questioning how it will benefit their business and what outcomes can be expected. This lack of clarity highlights the need for better diagnostics, clearer pathways and more coordinated provision.

4) Inflexible, outdated and poorly aligned provision

Training provision is often perceived as too generic, outdated or not aligned with real business needs. Employers highlighted that many courses are overly theoretical, lack sector-specific relevance, or are delivered by individuals without current industry experience. In addition, the rapid pace of technological change means that content can quickly become outdated, reducing its usefulness. This misalignment between training and practical application limits engagement and reduces the effectiveness of provision. Employers therefore require more agile, responsive and industry-led training that reflects current technologies and real-world use cases.

5) Time, cost and operational constraints

Time and capacity constraints remain a major barrier to engagement, particularly for SMEs. Employers highlighted the difficulty of releasing staff for training without impacting productivity, especially where roles are multi-functional. Limited budgets further restrict investment in digital skills development, particularly where the benefits are not immediately clear. These challenges are compounded by inflexible delivery models and funding structures, which do not always align with business needs. As a result, many organisations rely on informal or internal training approaches, which may not provide the depth or consistency required.

6) Digital exclusion and inequality

Digital transformation risks widening existing inequalities, with certain groups being left behind. Older workers,

individuals with low digital confidence, and those without access to devices or reliable internet face significant barriers to participation. Rural communities may also experience connectivity challenges, limiting access to online training and digital opportunities. At the same time, younger individuals may have strong informal digital skills but lack the ability to apply these effectively in professional contexts. This creates a divide across both age groups and socio-economic backgrounds, highlighting the need for inclusive and accessible approaches to digital skills development.

7) Gaps in soft skills and workplace capability

Employers highlighted a growing gap in soft skills, including communication, problem-solving and critical thinking, particularly among younger workers who rely heavily on digital tools. For example, employees may be able to generate outputs using AI but lack the ability to interpret, validate or communicate results effectively. This can lead to reduced confidence in decision-making and limited ability to engage with colleagues or clients. In contrast, older workers often possess strong interpersonal skills but lack digital confidence, creating a mismatch within the workforce. Addressing this imbalance requires a more integrated approach that combines digital and behavioural skills development.

8) Specialist skills shortages and pipeline challenges

There are ongoing shortages in advanced digital roles such as software development, data engineering and cyber security, driven by high demand and competition for talent. At the same time, entry-level opportunities have declined significantly, making it more difficult for young people to enter the workforce. This creates a disconnect between education and employment, with insufficient pathways into digital careers. Employers also highlighted challenges in recruitment processes, including the increasing use of AI tools in applications and difficulties assessing genuine capability. These factors contribute to a constrained talent pipeline and highlight the need for more structured entry routes and progression pathways.

Potential Solutions

A) Develop a clear, joined-up digital skills brokerage and diagnostic system

There is a need to establish a single, coordinated entry point for digital skills support, building on existing infrastructure such as the Warwickshire Skills Hub. This should go beyond a simple information portal and function as an active brokerage service, helping employers to identify their specific digital skills needs and navigate available provision. For example, an AI or digital skills diagnostic tool could assess an organisation's current capability and recommend tailored training pathways, including appropriate courses, funding options and delivery formats. This would address the current fragmentation and lack of clarity, saving time for employers and increasing engagement with training.

B) Expand modular, flexible and sector-specific digital training

Training provision should be redesigned to offer modular, stackable and sector-specific learning pathways that reflect real business needs. This includes developing short courses focused on practical applications of AI, data literacy, cyber security and digital operations across sectors such as construction, logistics, health and creative industries. Modules should be designed to build progressively into recognised qualifications, allowing individuals to develop skills over time. This approach responds directly to employer demand for flexible, relevant and accessible training that can be integrated into the workplace.

C) Embed workplace-integrated and applied learning models

Learning should be embedded within the workplace through "learn-apply-reflect" approaches that link training directly to business practice. This includes incorporating real projects, problem-solving activities and trial-and-error learning using digital tools. For example, employees could apply AI tools to improve workflows or automate routine tasks as part of their training. Education providers should also offer follow-up support, including check-ins and coaching, to ensure that learning translates into measurable outcomes. This approach ensures that training delivers tangible business benefits and supports sustained adoption.

D) Build digital champions and peer learning networks

Organisations should be supported to develop internal digital champions who can lead adoption and support colleagues in applying new technologies. These individuals can act as a bridge between formal training and

day-to-day practice, helping to build confidence and reduce resistance. In addition, wider peer learning networks and knowledge-sharing platforms should be developed to enable collaboration across sectors and organisations. This will support the sharing of good practice, reduce duplication and create a culture of continuous learning.

E) Strengthen AI governance, trust and awareness

To address concerns around risk and data security, training provision should include a strong focus on AI governance, GDPR compliance and ethical use of technology. This will help organisations understand how to use AI safely and responsibly, reducing fear and building trust. Clear guidance and practical examples should be provided to demonstrate how risks can be managed effectively. This is particularly important for SMEs, which may lack in-house expertise in these areas.

F) Improve inclusion and access to digital skills

A more inclusive approach to digital skills development is required, ensuring that all groups can participate and benefit from digital transformation. This includes expanding community-based learning, providing accessible and jargon-free training, and supporting individuals with low confidence or limited access to technology. Initiatives such as local skills hubs and Adult Community Learning provision can play a key role in reaching underserved groups, including older workers and rural communities. This will help ensure that digital transformation does not exacerbate existing inequalities.

G) Strengthen employer-provider collaboration and co-design

Partnerships between employers and education providers should be strengthened to ensure that training remains relevant, practical and aligned with evolving needs. This includes involving employers in curriculum design, delivery and evaluation, as well as incorporating real-world case studies and industry-led teaching. Continuous feedback mechanisms should be established to ensure that provision can adapt quickly to changes in technology and business requirements. This collaborative approach will help ensure that training is both responsive and future focused.

H) Develop clear pathways into digital careers

There is a need to strengthen entry routes into digital careers, including apprenticeships, Bootcamps, SWAPs and T Level placements aligned to local demand. These pathways should be co-designed with employers to ensure that they reflect real job roles and provide meaningful work experience. Given the decline in entry-level opportunities, additional support may be required to help young people transition into work, including targeted programmes and employer engagement. This will help address skills shortages and support the development of a sustainable talent pipeline.

I) Strengthen measurement and demonstrate impact

Finally, there is a need to develop a clear framework for measuring the impact of digital skills training, focusing on outcomes such as productivity, time savings, employee engagement and adoption rates. Employers require evidence that training delivers tangible benefits, and this should be captured through both quantitative metrics and qualitative feedback. Case studies and examples of successful implementation should be shared to build confidence and encourage further investment. Establishing a clear link between training and business performance will be critical to driving sustained engagement.

Codesigned Solutions: Developing a Workforce for the Future

In developing the LSIP proposals, a co-design approach has been central to shaping solutions for workforce development across Warwickshire. This reflects the recognition that workforce challenges particularly those relating to entry into employment, work-readiness, digital capability, inclusion and retention cannot be addressed by any single part of the system acting alone. Co-design in this context has brought together employers, education providers, sector bodies and wider stakeholders to ensure that solutions are grounded in real operational realities, including the pressures faced by SMEs, the barriers experienced by under-

represented groups, and the need for flexible, accessible and work-integrated provision that aligns with business needs and labour market demand.

This approach builds on strong practice already evident across Warwickshire, including employer engagement with apprenticeships, internal training, sector-led initiatives and programmes supporting workforce participation. However, workshop feedback highlighted that while provision exists, its impact is often constrained by fragmentation, lack of flexibility, limited awareness and misalignment with employer needs particularly in relation to entry pathways, digital skills and progression routes.

By drawing together detailed employer insights alongside labour market evidence such as declining entry-level opportunities, increasing demand for digital skills, and persistent workforce inactivity the co-design process has enabled a clearer understanding of both effective practice and systemic barriers. This ensures that future solutions are practical, scalable and directly informed by those who will use and deliver them.

Summarising the feedback from the Workforce of the Future Solutions Workshop, employers consistently emphasised the need to strengthen entry pathways, improve work-readiness, embed digital capability across roles, and create more inclusive and flexible workforce systems. There was also a strong focus on aligning skills provision with real business needs, supporting progression, and addressing structural barriers such as transport, health and access to opportunities.

What Works (existing strengths and effective practice)

1) Work-based learning, apprenticeships and “learning by doing” approaches

Employers consistently identified work-based learning as one of the most effective approaches to developing a future-ready workforce, particularly in addressing both technical and behavioural skill gaps. Apprenticeships, internships and structured on-the-job training enable individuals to gain practical experience while developing core workplace competencies such as communication, teamwork and problem-solving. Workshop examples included engineering apprenticeships, distribution centre roles where individuals progress from entry-level positions such as pickers into logistics or supervisory roles, and learning alongside experienced staff as subject matter experts. These approaches are effective because they embed learning within real work environments, allowing individuals to apply skills immediately and build confidence over time. They also support progression by creating clear pathways from entry-level roles into more skilled or leadership positions, helping to address both recruitment and retention challenges.

2) Project-based learning and real industry exposure

Project-based learning and exposure to real-world industry challenges were highlighted as critical in improving workforce readiness, particularly for young people entering the labour market. Employers emphasised that learning linked to real projects enables individuals to understand how their skills apply in practice, while also developing problem-solving, collaboration and communication skills. Examples discussed included live industry briefs, employer-led projects and initiatives such as summer schools delivered by Chambers, which provide early exposure to sectors and career pathways. This is particularly important given that “there is no exposure within the curriculum to sector-based jobs such as engineering,” meaning many young people are unaware of available opportunities. By integrating real-world experience into learning, these approaches help bridge the gap between education and employment, improve career awareness and support smoother transitions into the workforce.

3) Flexible and inclusive recruitment approaches (values-based and transferable skills)

Employers highlighted the growing adoption of more flexible recruitment practices that prioritise values, behaviours and transferable skills over traditional qualifications or direct experience. This reflects the reality that entry-level opportunities are declining and that many individuals may not have followed conventional education or career pathways. Examples included organisations moving towards “team fit” recruitment models, where candidates are assessed based on attitude, willingness to learn and alignment with organisational culture. Employers noted that some of their most successful employees had entered roles without prior experience but developed quickly through structured training and support. This approach also supports inclusion, particularly for under-represented groups, although employers acknowledged that “we’re

not doing enough to get neurodiverse people into work,” highlighting the need to further strengthen inclusive recruitment practices. By focusing on potential rather than prior experience, these models help widen participation and address workforce shortages.

4) Modular, targeted and role-specific training provision

Employers consistently emphasised the effectiveness of modular and targeted training that can be adapted to specific roles, sectors and workforce groups. Rather than broad, generic programmes, there is a strong preference for short, focused modules that address immediate skills needs such as communication, digital literacy or management capability. Workshop discussions highlighted the importance of tailoring provision to different cohorts, including younger individuals who require support with work-readiness, mid-career workers needing to develop digital skills, and individuals returning to work who may need confidence-building and re-entry support. This approach allows training to be delivered flexibly, reduces time away from work, and ensures that learning is directly relevant and immediately applicable. It also supports continuous development by enabling individuals to build skills incrementally over time.

5) Collaboration between employers and education providers

Strong collaboration between employers and education providers was identified as a key enabler of effective workforce development, particularly where provision is co-designed to reflect real business needs. Employers highlighted examples of colleges acting as feeder institutions, partnerships to develop sector-specific training, and collaboration in emerging areas such as battery technology and advanced manufacturing. There was also recognition of the need for assessors and trainers with current industry experience, ensuring that provision reflects the latest technologies and practices. These collaborative approaches are particularly important in addressing skills shortages in priority sectors and ensuring that training remains relevant, responsive and aligned with labour market demand. They also support innovation, enabling new programmes to be developed in response to emerging skills needs.

6) Workplace practices supporting retention, wellbeing and engagement

Employers highlighted a range of workplace practices that contribute to improved retention and workforce engagement, recognising that attracting talent is only part of the challenge. Examples included the introduction of wellbeing teams, which have been linked to reduced absence rates, volunteering programmes that enhance employee engagement, and flexible working arrangements such as condensed hours and hybrid models. Structured development programmes, particularly for graduates, were also identified as effective in supporting progression and retention. These practices are effective because they create positive workplace cultures, improve employee satisfaction and reduce burnout, all of which are critical in retaining talent in a competitive labour market. They also demonstrate the importance of aligning workforce development with wider organisational practices, including wellbeing and culture.

Challenges

1) Weak and fragmented entry pathways into employment

Employers highlighted that entry routes into the workforce are often unclear, inconsistent and increasingly difficult to access, particularly for young people. Many individuals lack awareness of available career opportunities due to limited exposure within the education system, especially in sectors such as engineering and manufacturing. This is compounded by a reduction in entry-level roles and limited opportunities for meaningful work experience, particularly at pre-16 level where activities are often restricted to observation rather than hands-on engagement. As a result, individuals struggle to gain the experience and confidence needed to enter employment, creating a disconnect between education and the labour market and contributing to rising youth unemployment and inactivity.

2) Work-readiness and foundational skills gaps

A significant gap exists in core employability skills, including communication, teamwork, reliability and professionalism, which employers consistently identified as critical for workplace success. While technical skills can often be developed on the job, a lack of these foundational skills creates challenges in onboarding and

performance. Employers noted that individuals frequently lack understanding of basic workplace expectations, such as timekeeping, appropriate behaviour and effective communication. This results in increased supervision requirements, slower productivity and additional training costs. Addressing these gaps is essential to improving workforce readiness and enabling individuals to succeed in employment.

3) Barriers to inclusion and participation

Employers identified a range of barriers that limit participation in the workforce, particularly for under-represented groups. These include lack of recognition of transferable skills, particularly for service leavers, education systems that prioritise academic knowledge over practical skills for SEND learners, and challenges faced by neurodiverse individuals and those with disabilities. Structural barriers such as health conditions, caring responsibilities and lack of workplace adjustments further limit participation. Employers also highlighted challenges related to unconscious bias, complex recruitment processes and lack of guidance on inclusive practices. These barriers not only restrict access to employment but also limit the ability of businesses to tap into a wider talent pool.

4) SME constraints and capacity challenges

SMEs face significant challenges in engaging with workforce development due to limited resources, capacity and funding. Providing work experience, placements or training can be difficult due to operational pressures, safeguarding requirements and associated costs. Employers noted that these constraints often prevent smaller organisations from fully participating in the skills system, despite a strong willingness to engage. This creates disparities between larger organisations, which have greater capacity to invest in training, and SMEs, which form a significant part of the local economy but may struggle to access and deliver workforce development initiatives.

5) Fragmented system and lack of coordination

The skills and training system was widely described as fragmented and difficult to navigate, with employers reporting low awareness of available provision and inconsistent quality across education providers. This complexity creates confusion and reduces engagement, particularly among SMEs without dedicated HR or training functions. There is also a lack of alignment between training provision and employer needs, with some programmes not reflecting real job roles or evolving skills requirements. This disconnect limits the effectiveness of training and reduces confidence in the system.

6) Progression and retention challenges

Employers highlighted that progression within the workforce is often unclear or inconsistent, leading to challenges in retaining talent. Individuals may leave organisations after gaining initial skills due to lack of development opportunities or clear career pathways. Additionally, progression into management roles can be problematic where individuals are promoted based on technical ability rather than leadership skills, resulting in capability gaps. These challenges impact both employee satisfaction and organisational performance, highlighting the need for clearer progression routes and structured development opportunities.

7) Place-based and access barriers

Transport and digital access were identified as significant barriers to workforce participation, particularly in rural areas. Limited public transport, high travel costs and misalignment with shift patterns restrict access to both employment and training opportunities. Digital exclusion, including lack of access to devices or connectivity, further limits participation in online learning and job applications. These place-based barriers disproportionately affect disadvantaged groups and contribute to inequalities in access to employment across the county.

Potential Solutions

A) Strengthen and map clear entry pathways into employment

A consistent and clearly articulated “first step” pathway into employment should be developed across Warwickshire, ensuring that individuals can move seamlessly from education into work. This should include

structured routes such as pre-employment programmes, meaningful work experience, T-Level placements, apprenticeships and sector-based work academies, all aligned to employer demand. Workshop feedback highlighted that current entry routes are fragmented and often lack visibility, with young people having limited exposure to sectors such as engineering and manufacturing and poor understanding of available career options. To address this, earlier and more consistent employer engagement in schools should be embedded, including teacher encounters, project-based learning and sector awareness initiatives such as summer schools and industry-led activities. Micro-placements and shorter, flexible work experience opportunities should also be introduced to reduce the burden on employers, particularly SMEs, while still providing learners with real workplace exposure. A mapped, county-wide pathway aligned to existing programmes (e.g. Get Warwickshire Working) would help ensure consistency, improve awareness and create a clearer route into employment for all groups.

B) Embed work-readiness and foundational skills across provision

Work-readiness and foundational skills should be systematically embedded across all stages of education and training provision, ensuring that individuals are prepared not only technically but also behaviourally for the workplace. Employers consistently highlighted gaps in communication, teamwork, time management, professionalism and reliability, noting that many candidates are not prepared for basic workplace expectations such as punctuality, appropriate behaviour or effective interaction with colleagues. To address this, employability skills should be integrated into curriculum through practical and applied learning approaches, including project-based tasks, workplace simulations and real-life scenarios. Education providers should work closely with employers to define expected behaviours and embed these within programmes, while also incorporating opportunities for reflection and feedback. There is also a need to strengthen English and digital communication skills, particularly in relation to workplace communication such as emails and reporting. By embedding these competencies early and reinforcing them throughout learning pathways, individuals will be better equipped to enter and succeed in the workforce, reducing onboarding time and improving productivity.

C) Expand flexible, work-integrated and modular learning models

Training provision should be redesigned to prioritise flexible, modular and work-integrated learning models that align with both employer needs and individual circumstances. Employers emphasised the importance of “learning by doing”, with approaches such as apprenticeships, on-the-job training and experiential learning delivering the most effective outcomes. Modular provision should allow learners and employers to select targeted training based on specific needs, for example digital skills, communication, or progression into supervisory roles, rather than committing to long, inflexible programmes. Workshop discussions also highlighted the value of cohort-specific approaches, recognising that different groups such as young people, mid-career workers and returners require different types of support. Delivery should be flexible, incorporating hybrid models, workplace-based learning and shorter sessions that minimise disruption to operations. Additionally, the use of technology, including AI-supported learning tools, can support personalised learning pathways and improve accessibility. This approach will enable continuous development, support progression and ensure that training remains relevant and responsive to labour market demands.

D) Improve inclusion and widen participation

A more inclusive and accessible workforce system should be developed to ensure that under-represented groups can participate fully in employment and training opportunities. Workshop discussions identified several groups that are currently under-represented, including service leavers, SEND learners, neurodiverse individuals, ethnic minority groups and those returning to work, many of whom face barriers related to recruitment processes, lack of workplace adjustments or limited awareness of opportunities. To address this, targeted pathways should be developed that provide tailored support, including mentoring, confidence-building, and practical adjustments such as flexible working arrangements or assistive technologies. Employers should also be supported through guidance, training and best practice case studies to help them understand how to create inclusive workplaces and adapt roles to meet diverse needs. Recruitment processes should be simplified and made more accessible, reducing barriers such as complex application systems or rigid requirements. By focusing on inclusion and recognising the value of diverse talent, this approach will help expand the available workforce and support more equitable access to employment.

E) Strengthen employer-provider collaboration and co-design

Collaboration between employers, education providers and stakeholders should be strengthened and formalised to ensure that training provision is aligned with real business needs and evolving labour market demands. Employers highlighted the importance of co-designing programmes, particularly in emerging areas such as digital skills, battery technology and advanced manufacturing, where industry knowledge is critical. This should include ongoing engagement mechanisms, such as sector-specific groups, regular feedback loops and collaborative programme design, enabling education providers to adapt content quickly in response to employer requirements. Colleges should also act as stronger feeder institutions, working closely with employers to support progression pathways and ensure that learners are equipped with relevant skills. Additionally, there is a need to address gaps in tutor and assessor capacity by facilitating knowledge transfer from industry into education, ensuring that training reflects current practices and technologies. This collaborative approach will improve the relevance, quality and responsiveness of provision, supporting both employers and learners.

F) Address place-based barriers and improve access

Targeted interventions are required to address place-based barriers that limit access to employment and training, particularly in rural areas and disadvantaged communities. Workshop feedback highlighted that transport remains a significant challenge, with limited public transport options, high travel costs and misalignment with shift patterns restricting access to opportunities. In some cases, even large employment sites require individuals to have a driving licence, further limiting participation. To address this, solutions could include subsidised travel schemes, employer-led transport initiatives such as shuttle buses, and the development of more localised training provision through community hubs. Digital access should also be improved, ensuring that individuals have access to devices, connectivity and digital skills required for online learning and job applications. By reducing these access barriers, more individuals will be able to participate in training and employment, supporting inclusive growth across Warwickshire.

G) Simplify system navigation and improve access to support

The current skills system should be simplified through the development of a single, coordinated entry point that provides clear information, guidance and brokerage services for both employers and individuals. Employers reported that the system is complex, fragmented and difficult to navigate, with limited awareness of available provision, funding and support. A “front door” approach building on existing infrastructure such as the Warwickshire Skills Hub should act as a central point of contact, helping users identify appropriate training, access funding and navigate the system more effectively. This could include diagnostic tools to assess needs, tailored recommendations, and ongoing support to ensure successful engagement with provision. For SMEs in particular, this function would reduce administrative burden and improve confidence in the system. By simplifying access and improving coordination, this approach will increase engagement, ensure better utilisation of available provision and support more effective workforce development across the county.

Supplementary Higher Level Skills Needs Research

The Warwickshire LSIP Higher-Level Skills Solutions Workshop demonstrated strong consensus that workforce development challenges cannot be addressed through isolated interventions alone. Employers, providers and stakeholders consistently highlighted the need for a more collaborative, flexible and employer-responsive skills ecosystem.

The discussions highlighted that while Warwickshire benefits from strong education provision and active employer engagement, systemic barriers around funding, flexibility, qualification structures and workforce readiness continue to limit participation and impact.

Participants emphasised that solutions must move beyond traditional qualification models and focus more strongly on practical application, workplace integration and responsiveness to employer need. This includes recognising the importance of shorter, modular learning, blended delivery models, employer-led curriculum development and clearer navigation through the skills system.

There was also strong recognition that workforce development is increasingly about broader capability rather than purely technical qualifications. Communication skills, confidence, leadership capability, adaptability, entrepreneurial awareness and digital literacy were consistently highlighted as equally important alongside formal qualifications.

The following themes summarise the key solutions and recommendations emerging from the workshop discussions.

What Works (existing strengths and effective practice)

1) Employer-provider collaboration and sector engagement

A key strength identified throughout the workshop discussions was the willingness of employers, colleges, universities and county stakeholders to engage collaboratively in shaping higher-level skills provision. Participants highlighted the value of employer steering groups, industry consultations and partnership working in helping providers understand changing workforce needs and emerging sector priorities. In particular, sectors such as gaming, creative industries and professional services demonstrated strong employer engagement through regular dialogue around skills gaps, curriculum relevance and workforce development priorities. Employers recognised the importance of maintaining these relationships to ensure provision remains aligned with operational realities and evolving labour market demands. This collaborative approach also creates opportunities for co-designed provision, live projects, work-based learning and stronger progression pathways between education and employment.

2) Flexible, bite-sized and modular learning approaches

Employers consistently identified shorter, modular and more flexible learning as one of the most effective approaches to higher-level workforce development. Short courses, workshops, micro-credentials and modular learning pathways were viewed positively because they allow employees to upskill without requiring extended periods away from work. This was particularly important for SMEs, where operational pressures and staffing constraints often make long-term study difficult. Employers highlighted that modular provision enables organisations to focus on specific priority areas such as leadership and management, AI capability, communication skills or project management while allowing employees to build qualifications gradually over time. Flexible delivery models also help improve accessibility and participation, particularly for individuals balancing work, study and personal responsibilities.

3) Workplace-integrated and employer-responsive provision

Training that is closely linked to real workplace environments and business challenges was identified as highly effective. Employers valued provision that could be tailored directly to organisational needs and delivered in ways that support immediate application within the workplace. Examples discussed included in-house training delivery, sector-specific leadership development, workplace-based projects and blended learning approaches that combine theory with practical implementation. Participants emphasised that employees are more likely to engage positively with learning when they can clearly see how it improves their performance, productivity or career progression. Embedding learning into day-to-day operations also helps businesses see clearer return on investment from workforce development activity.

4) Existing digital familiarity and self-directed learning behaviours

Workshop discussions highlighted that many individuals particularly younger workers and graduates already possess a strong baseline familiarity with digital tools and online learning environments. Employers noted that employees increasingly engage in self-directed learning through online platforms, tutorials, YouTube content and experimentation with digital and AI tools such as ChatGPT. While these skills are not always fully aligned with workplace requirements, they provide a valuable foundation that can be developed further through structured higher-level learning. This culture of independent learning and experimentation can support faster adoption of new technologies and reduce barriers to engaging with digital upskilling.

5) Blended and hybrid delivery models

Participants highlighted the effectiveness of blended and hybrid delivery approaches in supporting workforce development across different sectors and employer sizes. Combining face-to-face sessions with online learning and interactive virtual workshops allows training to be more accessible and flexible while still maintaining opportunities for collaboration and discussion. Employers noted that online delivery can help reduce time away from work and travel pressures, while face-to-face elements remain valuable for building confidence, communication skills and peer interaction. Hybrid models were also seen as particularly important for sectors with remote or distributed workforces, where fully in-person delivery may not always be practical.

6) Sector-led approaches and industry-informed provision

The workshop highlighted the value of sector-led approaches to workforce development, where industry bodies, employers and sector representatives play an active role in identifying skills priorities and shaping solutions. Participants discussed examples where sector groups and employer networks had successfully identified emerging workforce needs around areas such as AI capability, leadership and management, business skills and digital transformation. Employers felt that sector-led approaches help ensure that provision remains relevant, practical and closely aligned with real business needs, rather than being driven solely by qualification frameworks or funding structures. This approach was also viewed as important in supporting innovation and responsiveness within rapidly changing industries.

7) Practical and transferable higher-level skills

Employers consistently emphasised the importance of transferable skills that can be applied across sectors and roles. Communication, leadership, problem-solving, teamwork, commercial awareness and digital capability were all identified as strengths that support workforce adaptability and long-term employability. Participants highlighted that while technical knowledge remains important, employees increasingly need broader workplace competencies that enable them to work across different environments and respond to changing business demands. This is particularly important within sectors experiencing rapid technological and organisational change, where workforce flexibility and continuous learning are becoming essential.

8) Strong Warwickshire skills infrastructure and support networks

Warwickshire benefits from an established skills ecosystem involving colleges, universities, local authorities, employer networks and local support organisations. Participants highlighted the positive role played by initiatives such as employer boards, skills hubs, apprenticeship support services and business engagement teams in connecting employers with training opportunities and workforce support. Existing partnerships between providers and employers already provide a strong foundation for future collaboration and offer opportunities to build more coordinated and responsive higher-level skills provision across the county.

Challenges

1) Confusing qualification landscape and lack of understanding of pathways

One of the most significant challenges identified during the workshop was the complexity and lack of clarity surrounding higher-level qualifications and progression routes. Employers, learners and even some stakeholders often struggle to understand the differences between qualifications such as HTQs, HNCs, HNDs, foundation degrees, higher apprenticeships and degree pathways. Participants highlighted that many employers are unfamiliar with newer qualifications and are more likely to recognise traditional routes such as degrees or apprenticeships. This confusion creates barriers to engagement and limits employer confidence in navigating the system. Providers also highlighted that qualifications are often poorly marketed nationally, leading to low awareness and uptake despite efforts at local level. As a result, individuals and employers may fail to access pathways that could effectively meet workforce needs.

2) Weak workplace readiness and soft skills capability

Employers consistently highlighted concerns around workplace readiness, communication skills and professional confidence among graduates and younger entrants to the workforce. Issues raised included lack of confidence in presentations, difficulty communicating professionally, reluctance to answer telephones, poor initiative and limited interpersonal capability. Providers also discussed increasing levels of anxiety among

learners, particularly around communication and public speaking. While technical knowledge may be present, employers reported that many individuals struggle to apply these skills effectively within workplace environments. This gap between academic achievement and workplace capability creates additional pressures for employers, who often need to invest significant time in developing core professional behaviours.

3) Leadership and management capability gaps

A recurring theme throughout the discussions was the lack of structured leadership and management development within organisations. Employers reported that staff are frequently promoted internally based on technical competence rather than leadership readiness, resulting in managers who may lack confidence and capability in managing teams, communication and decision-making. While demand for leadership and management skills is widely recognised, providers noted inconsistencies between identified workforce gaps and actual employer participation in formal higher-level management programmes. This disconnect highlights both operational barriers and potential issues around the design, flexibility and attractiveness of current provision.

4) Inflexible funding structures and qualification rules

Participants highlighted significant frustrations around funding systems and qualification regulations, particularly in relation to higher-level learning. Employers and providers noted that many funding models remain too rigid and do not reflect the operational realities of businesses particularly SMEs. For example, the Lifelong Learning Entitlement and modular qualification structures were discussed as positive concepts in principle, but participants felt the minimum credit requirements remain too large and demanding for many employers and employees. Similarly, apprenticeship funding rules and levy systems were described as difficult to navigate and insufficiently flexible for smaller-scale or short-term training needs. These constraints limit participation and reduce the ability of providers to respond quickly to emerging skills demands.

5) Time, operational and capacity constraints for employers

Operational pressures remain one of the largest barriers preventing employer engagement with higher-level training. SMEs in particular reported difficulties releasing staff for training due to workload pressures, limited staffing capacity and the need to maintain day-to-day operations. Employers explained that even where training is valued, it can be unrealistic to release staff for a day per week or extended learning commitments. Providers acknowledged these challenges and recognised the difficulties in balancing employer demand for highly flexible provision with the logistical realities of staffing, timetabling and delivery models.

6) Slow curriculum responsiveness and lack of agility

Providers highlighted that higher-level curriculum development processes are often lengthy and inflexible, particularly where external validation and approval processes are involved. In some cases, it can take several years from identifying an employer need to implementing a new higher-level programme. This creates challenges in rapidly evolving sectors such as digital, AI, gaming and emerging technologies, where workforce requirements can change quickly. Participants felt that the pace of curriculum development often struggles to keep up with industry change, reducing the responsiveness and relevance of provision.

7) Lack of employer engagement and training demand

Although employers regularly identify workforce skills gaps, providers reported ongoing challenges in converting this demand into sustained participation in formal training programmes. Employers often express interest in training provision, particularly when funding is available, but engagement can reduce significantly once financial or operational commitments become clearer. Participants discussed how employers frequently prioritise immediate operational pressures over long-term workforce development, particularly within SMEs. This creates difficulties in sustaining provision and generating the learner numbers required to make programmes viable.

8) Fragmented skills system and navigation difficulties

The current higher-level skills system was repeatedly described as fragmented and difficult to navigate. Employers often struggle to identify appropriate providers, understand funding opportunities, or determine

which qualifications best suit their workforce needs. Smaller employers without dedicated HR or training teams are particularly affected. Participants also highlighted that multiple policy changes, qualification reforms and funding streams have created additional confusion across the skills landscape. This fragmentation contributes to delays in accessing support and reduces employer confidence in engaging with the system.

9) AI capability gaps and uncertainty around digital transformation

While awareness of AI and digital technologies is increasing, employers highlighted significant uncertainty around how these technologies should be integrated into workplace practices. Organisations often remain at a basic stage of adoption, using AI tools for simple tasks rather than embedding them strategically within workflows or decision-making processes. Participants also highlighted concerns around ethics, governance, trust and the potential impact of AI on employment. These concerns, combined with limited practical guidance and training, contribute to hesitation and underutilisation of digital technologies across sectors.

10) Growing inequality in access to higher-level development opportunities

Participants discussed the risk that some groups may become increasingly excluded from higher-level learning and digital workforce development. Older workers, individuals lacking digital confidence, and employees within smaller businesses may face greater barriers to participation due to time constraints, confidence issues or limited access to resources. At the same time, younger workers may possess strong digital familiarity but weaker professional and interpersonal skills. This creates uneven workforce capability and highlights the need for more inclusive and accessible approaches to skills development.

Potential Solutions

A) Develop a clearer and more joined-up higher-level skills system

There is a need for a simpler, more coordinated and employer-friendly higher-level skills system that improves understanding of qualifications, progression routes and funding opportunities. Employers should be able to access clear information about available pathways without needing to navigate multiple disconnected systems or terminology. A more joined-up approach would improve employer confidence, reduce confusion and support greater engagement with higher-level workforce development.

B) Expand modular, flexible and stackable provision

Participants strongly supported the expansion of modular and stackable learning pathways that allow individuals to build skills progressively over time. Shorter and more flexible programmes would better support employers particularly SMEs who cannot commit staff to long-term study commitments. Provision should allow learners to access targeted training in areas such as leadership, AI, digital capability and business skills while creating opportunities to build towards larger qualifications where appropriate.

C) Strengthen workplace-integrated and blended learning models

Learning should increasingly be embedded within workplace environments and aligned directly to operational challenges. Employers value provision that can be applied immediately within day-to-day roles and linked to real business outcomes. Expanding blended delivery models combining face-to-face, online and workplace-based learning would improve accessibility while maintaining practical engagement and interaction.

D) Improve communication and awareness around qualification pathways

Greater effort is needed to simplify and improve communication around higher-level qualifications and skills pathways. Employers, learners and parents require clearer explanations of what qualifications such as HTQs, HNCs, HNDs and higher apprenticeships actually represent, how they compare and what progression opportunities they provide. This would help improve uptake and reduce confusion across the skills system.

E) Embed employability and workplace readiness more consistently

Providers and employers should work together to strengthen the development of communication, confidence, presentation, teamwork and professional behaviours across all higher-level learning pathways. These employability skills should be embedded consistently throughout programmes rather than treated as separate

or optional components. Supporting learners to become workplace ready is increasingly important across all sectors.

F) Expand leadership and management development opportunities

There is a need for more accessible and flexible leadership and management training, particularly for employees progressing into management roles internally. Programmes should focus on practical leadership capability, people management, communication, confidence and decision-making, while being designed in ways that are manageable for SMEs and operationally constrained businesses.

G) Increase agility and responsiveness within curriculum development

Higher-level provision needs to become more agile and responsive to changing employer demand, particularly within rapidly evolving sectors such as AI, digital technologies and creative industries. Providers should be supported to develop faster mechanisms for adapting curriculum content, introducing new modules and responding to emerging workforce priorities.

H) Strengthen employer-provider collaboration and co-design

Closer collaboration between employers, providers and sector bodies is essential to ensure that higher-level provision reflects real workforce needs. Employers should be involved more actively in curriculum design, programme development and delivery planning. Sector-led approaches and employer advisory groups can help ensure provision remains practical, relevant and future-focused.

I) Improve brokerage, navigation and employer support services

Employers particularly SMEs require more practical support in identifying training opportunities, understanding funding options and engaging with workforce development programmes. Strengthening brokerage and advisory services through organisations such as Skills Hubs and employer networks could help simplify the system and improve access to relevant support.

J) Support entrepreneurial and business capability development

Participants highlighted the need for stronger entrepreneurial and commercial skills development, particularly within sectors with growing freelance and contract-based working models such as gaming, creative industries and digital production. Provision should include business management, commercial awareness, finance, legal understanding and confidence-building to support sustainable business growth.

K) Build confidence and practical understanding around AI and digital transformation

Employers and employees require more practical support in understanding how AI and digital technologies can be applied safely, effectively and strategically within workplace settings. Training should focus on practical implementation, governance, ethical use and productivity improvements rather than simply awareness of tools. Supporting confidence and reducing fear around AI adoption will be essential to enabling wider digital transformation across sectors.

Key Industry and Occupation Codes

LSIP Occupation name	Definition within the LSIP report	Relevant SOC Code(s)	LSIP sector name	Relevant SIC Code(s)	Mapping Limitations / Further Information
Leadership and management	"Employers across Warwickshire, large and small, rural and urban, and spanning sectors from manufacturing and logistics to care, hospitality, digital and the creative industries, have been clear about the challenges they face and the changes they need. They highlight significant gaps in everyday leadership and management capability, particularly among first-time managers."	2431	Cross-cutting – Leadership & Management	70.22	Cross-cutting occupational area applicable across multiple sectors within the LSIP.

First-time managers	"significant gaps in fundamental leadership skills, particularly among first-time managers"	3549	Cross-cutting – Leadership & Management	85.42	Leadership capability area spanning multiple industries and organisational contexts.
Team leadership roles	"Employers reported challenges progressing staff into higher level administration or team leadership roles"	4142	Professional Services	82.99	Broad supervisory and leadership occupational grouping.
Software development	"ongoing shortages in advanced digital roles such as software development, data engineering and cyber security"	2134	Digital & Creative Industries	62.01	Specialist digital occupational area with rapidly evolving skill requirements.
AI literacy	"Asked what the main skills or recruitment challenges their organisation is facing right now are, employers explicitly referenced: 'AI literacy'"	2133	Cross-cutting – Digital, Data & AI	74.9	Emerging digital capability area rather than a single formal occupation.
Digital and cyber skills	"There were also recurring concerns around low levels of digital capability, including emerging areas such as AI and cyber skills"	2133	Cross-cutting – Digital, Data & AI	71.12	Cross-sector digital skills area applicable across industries.
Logistics automation	"sector-specific training in areas such as logistics automation"	1243	Transport & Logistics	29.1	Technical logistics and automation area spanning multiple operational occupations.
Digital construction tools	"digital construction tools and green technologies are becoming essential within construction"	3120	Construction & Built Environment	77.32	Emerging digital construction capability area.
Digital marketing	"gaming, immersive media, and digital marketing clusters around Leamington Spa ('Silicon Spa')"	3554	Digital & Creative Industries	73.11	Creative and digital occupational area with overlapping role boundaries.
Care workforce roles	"Leadership capability directly affects retention, wellbeing, and culture" within care sectors	6135	Health & Social Care	87.1	Occupational titles and responsibilities may vary between providers and care settings.
Communication and employability skills	"Employers identify a significant gap in core employability skills, including communication, teamwork, reliability and professionalism"	7213	Cross-cutting – Work Readiness & Employability	94.11	Foundational employability capability area rather than a standalone occupation.
Carpentry	"construction, engineering, and manufacturing, with trades such as carpentry... proving especially hard to fill"	5316	Construction & Built Environment	43.99	Skilled trade occupation linked to construction workforce shortages.
Specialist grinders	"specialist roles like grinders proving especially hard to fill"	5221	Advanced Manufacturing & Engineering	27.51	Specialist engineering occupation area with niche workforce demand.
Technical engineering roles	"Engineering roles were also frequently identified as challenging"	3113	Advanced Manufacturing & Engineering	71.2	Broad engineering occupational grouping covering multiple technical specialisms.
Farm/business management	"Need for sector-specific leadership and management training (e.g. farm/business management, people supervision, employment skills)"	5111	Agriculture & Land-Based Industries	46.61	Agriculture and land-based occupational area with sector-specific

					operational requirements.
Hospitality supervisory roles	"Feedback shows a desire for 'particularly supervisory and leadership training,' and flexible delivery suitable for shift-based operations."	9261	Hospitality & Retail	56.21	Supervisory occupational area affected by operational and shift-based pressures.
Transport compliance and safety roles	"Leadership development needs are tied to compliance, safety and changing regulations"	3581	Transport & Logistics	28.22	Occupational area linked to operational compliance and regulatory requirements.
Advanced manufacturing processes	"A need for digital readiness to support automation, smart systems and advanced manufacturing processes."	8151	Advanced Manufacturing, Clean Tech & Defence	18.13	Broad advanced manufacturing area covering multiple technical occupations and engineering functions.
Machine interfaces	"Gaps in understanding practical digital applications on the factory floor (e.g. machine interfaces, data capture, predictive maintenance)."	9139	Advanced Manufacturing, Clean Tech & Defence	28.49	Specialist technical application area within manufacturing and engineering environments.
Security and facilities access	"Confusion around security and facilities access in defence linked environments."	9231	Advanced Manufacturing, Clean Tech & Defence	80.1	Defence-related operational area not easily mapped to a single occupation.
Team leadership skills	"The need for team leadership skills including improving the quality of client handling, communication, and effective decision-making pace."	3571	Business, Professional & Financial Services	85.59	Cross-cutting professional and leadership capability area.
Workflow automation	"Growing gaps in data analysis, CRM/ERP use, workflow automation and AI enhanced business tools."	3544	Business, Professional & Financial Services	62.01	Emerging digital operations area spanning multiple occupations and sectors.
Editing software	"Highly flexible, short modules aligned to fastmoving tools (editing software, digital marketing platforms, AI-assisted production)."	2491	Creative & Digital	59.12	Specialist digital and creative tools area applicable across creative occupations.
AI driven workflows	"A growing need for leaders who understand AI driven workflows and digital production."	2141	Creative & Digital	71.12	Rapidly evolving digital transformation and leadership capability area.
Live briefs or project-based work	"Portfolio building modules that link directly to live briefs or project-based work."	3543	Creative & Digital	26.7	Creative and project-based employment area with overlapping occupational boundaries.
Compliance, safeguarding, service quality and operational resilience	"Support for managing compliance, safeguarding, service quality and operational resilience."	2482	Health & Social Care	71.2	Broad care and operational management capability area.
Digital care tools	"Barriers to adoption of digital care tools, electronic records and basic data processes."	4152	Health & Social Care	63.11	Digital healthcare capability area applicable across

					healthcare and care settings.
Sustainability data and reporting	"understanding sustainability data and reporting"	2431	Cross-cutting – Green Skills & Sustainability	63.11	Sustainability capability area embedded across several occupations and sectors.
Energy mapping and carbon reduction planning	"energy mapping and carbon reduction planning"	2452	Cross-cutting – Green Skills & Sustainability	74.9	Emerging net zero planning and environmental management area.
Waste reduction strategies	"waste reduction strategies", "circular economy principles" and "resource efficiency"	3549	Cross-cutting – Green Skills & Sustainability	38.21	Sustainability and environmental management capability area.
Health and safety awareness	"Courses that include practical site preparation such as health and safety awareness, asbestos awareness, safe use of tools and plant, and communication skills..."	3582	Construction & Built Environment	71.12	Broad construction and workplace readiness capability area.
Communication, teamwork, reliability and professionalism	"Employers identify a significant gap in core employability skills, including communication, teamwork, reliability and professionalism."	7213	Cross-cutting – Work Readiness & Employability	94.11	Foundational employability and workforce readiness capability area.
Digital production	"A growing need for leaders who understand AI driven workflows and digital production."	2141	Creative & Digital	26.2	Rapidly evolving creative and digital occupational area.
Predictive maintenance	"Gaps in understanding practical digital applications on the factory floor (e.g. machine interfaces, data capture, predictive maintenance)."	3116	Advanced Manufacturing, Clean Tech & Defence	96.03	Specialist technical application area within manufacturing and engineering environments.
Online customer service	"Widespread gaps in basic digital skills required for routine tasks (e.g. digital payments, booking systems, delivery scheduling, online customer service)."	7219	Hospitality & Retail / Everyday Economy	82.99	Customer-facing operational capability area across multiple industries.
Safe use of tools and plant	"Courses that include practical site preparation such as health and safety awareness, asbestos awareness, safe use of tools and plant, and communication skills..."	5223	Construction & Built Environment	25.99	Site-based operational capability area linked to construction workforce preparation.
Resource efficiency	"waste reduction strategies", "circular economy principles" and "resource efficiency"	3571	Cross-cutting – Green Skills & Sustainability	74.9	Sustainability and operational efficiency capability area across industries.

SKILLS SHAPED BY BUSINESS IN WARWICKSHIRE

For further information about the contents of this report, please contact:
lsip@cw-chamber.co.uk

