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West Midlands and Warwickshire Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP)

Progress Report

June 2025

Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce

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Purpose of the Report

This progress report has been prepared in accordance with Local Skills Improvement Plans: Stage 2 Guidance (published November 2023, Last updated June 2024). It is intended to review progress against the West Midlands and Warwickshire (WMW) Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), published by Coventry and Warwickshire Chambers of Commerce in August 2023, which represents a comprehensive mapping exercise encompassing existing research, meaningful collaboration between local stakeholders and educators, and over one thousand engagements with local businesses. Based on this research, the Plan set out actionable priorities and a clear roadmap for the local area to support providers of post-16 technical education and training in aligning provision with current and future employer need.

This progress report provides an update for employers, providers and wider stakeholders across the West Midlands Combined Authority area and Warwickshire and nationally – including Skills England - on the progress made against this roadmap.

In this report, readers will find a comprehensive overview of the evolving strategic and economic context in the West Midlands and Warwickshire and a table clearly setting out the key priorities of the LSIP, actions and outcomes expected, how the actions are being monitored and progress status. Readers will also find an outline of what has been successfully delivered since the publication of the LSIP in 2023, and what still needs to be achieved to support the alignment of post-16 technical education and training with employer needs.

The West Midlands and Warwickshire LSIP has also continued to engage employers in ongoing research into local skills needs, the results of which is presented in the annexes of this report.

Summary of the LSIP

The [West Midlands and Warwickshire LSIP and the June 2024 Progress Report](#) cover the geographical areas administered by the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) – constituted of the seven local authorities of Birmingham City Council, Coventry City Council, Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, Walsall Council and the City of Wolverhampton Council – and Warwickshire County Council (WCC).

The LSIP aims to facilitate a post-16 technical education and training system that puts businesses at the start of the planning process and gives them the people and skills they need to innovate, grow and thrive. The plan focuses on the cross-cutting themes of digital and green skills (as defined in [this](#) annex) and associated leadership and management capabilities, building on existing research and meaningful collaboration to:

- develop understanding of the immediate and future skills needs of employers;
- facilitate an agile and responsive system for post-16 technical education and training; and
- help inform further skills investment aligned to employer needs, supporting meaningful employment and in-work progression opportunities for local residents.

With this in mind, and following extensive research engaging over one thousand local businesses, the Plan identified three priorities to address the provision of skills to individuals and organisations that employers have told us are most important to them.

Please note: throughout the below summary and this progress report more broadly, the term ‘FE providers’ is used for simplicity and should be taken to include FE Colleges, Sixth Form Colleges, Private Training Providers and any other organisations delivering statutory and non-statutory post-16 education and training. Further, we also acknowledge the important role of Higher Education Institutions alongside FE providers in addressing skills needs identified by employers.

The three priorities stated in the West Midlands and Warwickshire LSIP are:

- Priority One: Confirming Sector Skills Needs

This priority is based on those sectors which have the most influence on the LSIP's cross-cutting themes of digital and green skills and seeks to define the sector specific skills that are needed for the sectors to achieve their growth potential. These are: Engineering and Manufacturing (Incorporating WMCA Priority Growth Clusters of Electric Vehicles and Battery; Aerospace; Health Tech and Med Tech); Construction (Incorporating WMCA Priority Growth Clusters: Modern and Low Carbon Utility; Manufacturing of Future Housing); ICT and Digital (Incorporating the specialist digital and ICT roles that are needed in other key sectors); and Logistics and Distribution. The objective of Priority One is to ensure that providers are aware of new and emerging skills needs directly articulated by employers and support them to build the capacity, both people and facilities, to provide those. It also seeks to provide greater accessibility to information about current post-16 education and training options and carry out further research to address any gaps in provision.

- **Priority Two: Leadership and Management Skills**
Priority Two identified a lack of leadership and management skills constraining growth, opportunity maximisation or change in local businesses. Those skills include both general leadership and management skills and also specific skills in subjects including digitalisation and the transition to net zero. Priority Two of the LSIP contains actions for providers to address gaps in provision, delivery mechanisms and better promotion of current offers.
- **Priority Three: Essential Skills for Employment**
Priority Three incorporates two significant skills needs that seem to affect businesses of all types across WMW - essential or 'soft' skills, and basic digital skills. Priority Three presents actions to ensure that these skills needs can be addressed effectively whilst young people are still in full time education and also to ensure that any adults with skills needs are able to access them.

Further to these three priorities, the WMW LSIP also received feedback from employers regarding a number of broader underlying themes for wider consideration, including:

- A limited engagement with and awareness and understanding of post-16 education and training initiatives
- Challenges attracting young talent to key industries within the economy of the local area
- Difficulties attracting staff into support and delivery roles within FE provider organisations, including skilled staff needed to deliver against skills gaps.

Recognising and effectively addressing these, as well as the three priorities, is critical to maximising insights into employers' skills needs, thereby enabling local residents to access meaningful employment and in-work progression opportunities.

As stated in the LSIP, the Plan cannot provide a solution to every skills challenge in the area, however, as outlined below, it continues to help direct a positive directory for skills provision, building on the fantastic work already being undertaken by others on this agenda.

Ultimately, the LSIP and the associated £10.3 million Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF) have provided fantastic opportunities for the West Midlands and Warwickshire to put businesses at the heart of training and skills provision and collaboratively work towards addressing key barriers to local economic growth and productivity.

For reference, the LSIF projects discussed throughout this report are as follows:

- LSIF Project 1: Expanding the local electrification and engineering offer
- LSIF Project 2: Increasing capacity for skills delivery within Low Carbon/Sustainable Construction
- LSIF Project 3: Wider Green Skills
- LSIF Project 4: Essential Digital Skills
- LSIF Project 5: Advanced Digital Skills
- LSIF Project 6: Systems Approach to Employer Engagement

Strategic and economic context update

Since the production of the WMW LSIP, there have been several changes that impact upon the strategic and economic context of the area. A high-level overview of some of these key changes are outlined below, and the Chamber will continue to work with partners to determine how we can utilise these developments to collaboratively further the ambitions of the LSIP.

Skills England's Ten Priority Sectors

Skills England has identified [ten priority sectors](#) crucial for the UK's economic growth and skills development. In particular, Advanced Manufacturing, Lifesciences, Clean Energy Industries, Construction and Digital and Technologies directly relate to the priority sectors of the WMW LSIP, as stated above.

Local Economic Context

In the 12 months to March 2025, inflation has seen some upward pressures but the Consumer Prices Index including owner occupiers' housing costs (CPIH) ultimately rose by 3.4%, down from 3.8% in the 12 months to March 2024. The Bank of England base rate, as of 8th May 2025 sits at 4.25%, having decreased from 5.25% in May 2024. Nevertheless, surveying by the WMW Chambers of Commerce found that in Q1 2025, 53% of West Midlands businesses expected to increase their prices in the next 3 months.

Between January to March 2025, compared to the same period a year prior (January to March 2024), the employment rate in the West Midlands has fallen by 1.2 percentage points, unemployment has decreased by 0.6 percentage points and economic inactivity has increased by 1.6 percentage points. These figures highlight notably different labour market trends between the West Midlands and the country as a whole. Nationally, the employment rate has risen over the past year, while economic inactivity has declined.

Wage inflation persists - annual growth in employee earnings in real terms (adjusted for inflation using the CPIH), across the country was 1.8% for regular pay and 1.7% for total pay in January to March 2025. Employment costs have also been driven higher by changes to employer National Insurance Contributions announced in the Autumn Budget since April. Meanwhile, the Government's own assessment suggests that incoming Employment Rights legislation will cost businesses almost £5bn per year, and the Immigration White Paper proposes a further increase in fees for firms using the immigration system to access skilled talent from outside of the UK.

Taken together, these trends demonstrate the mounting cost pressures on local employers, and the critical importance of ensuring businesses have access to local workforces with the right skills (a lack of which can contribute further to cost pressures), which the LSIP is seeking to support.

Devolution

The West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) was one of the first regions in the country in 2015 to negotiate a devolution deal with national government and remains at the forefront of the devolution landscape. Under the proposed legislation, the WMCA will be designated as an Established Mayoral Strategic Authority, and unlock further devolved powers – additional to the Integrated Settlement from April this year across housing, regeneration, local growth, local transport, skills, retrofit and employment support. Notably, this will include joint ownership of the Local Skills Improvement Plan. The WMCA's [Employment and Skills Strategy 2024-2027](#) sets out its vision for an integrated employment and skills system to stimulate economic growth and deliver better outcomes for residents and businesses. Additionally, it is developing a [shared vision for the region](#) (see below) that will enable inclusive economic growth so that everyone can benefit from the region's economic potential, supporting employers, residents and communities to thrive

In March 2024 Warwickshire County Council became one of only four councils to secure a Level 2 Devolution Deal (the Deal). The Deal included the transfer of three key sets of functions and funds:

- responsibility of allocating Adult Skills Fund delivering 19+ further education and skills provision from August 2026 onwards;
- planning and delivery of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund from April 2025 onwards; and
- devolution of Homes England compulsory land assembly/purchase powers to be concurrently held with and exercisable by Homes England.

In 2025, Warwickshire County Council has submitted a statutory letter inviting proposals for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and submitted an interim LGR Proposal. A full LGR proposal is due to be submitted in November.

In collaboration with Education, Business and Community Groups, Warwickshire County Council has developed a new strategy to reflect its Careers, Skills and Employment ambitions for the future and the part the council will play with strategic and key partners. Leading on from this, the Employment and Skills and Education teams at Warwickshire County Council have additionally built a structure of Governance and Engagement groups to steer priorities, monitor progress and explore funding opportunities moving forward.

The Council is currently developing and shaping an Adult Skills Fund offer in partnership with further education providers, independent training providers, and local employment networks ahead of devolution to the area in 2026. Engagement has begun and an aspiration piece aligns with various strategies, plans and policies.

Warwickshire County Council will share joint ownership of the Warwickshire Local Skills Improvement Plan from Autumn 2025.

West Midlands Futures Green Paper

On 30th April the WMCA launched the West Midlands (WM) Futures Green Paper, which sets out a proposed strategy for developing and transforming the region to unlock economic growth and increase living standards for residents. It is a long-term strategy looking at the next ten years, and focuses on four significant areas of policy change on the horizon: the West Midlands Growth Plan, the Spatial Development Strategy for the region; Public Service Innovation and a second Net Zero Five Year Plan.

Amongst key strengths for the region, the Green Paper identifies that the West Midlands' population is growing more quickly than all city regions outside London and benefits from both its young and diverse populations. However, the Paper also highlights acute challenges around productivity and poverty in the region.

The WM Futures Green Paper identifies the following 6 key growth clusters as priorities for accelerating regional growth:

- Advanced engineering, light electric vehicles and batteries
- Clean Tech, focusing on smart energy systems
- Health and medical devices, diagnostics and associated digital healthcare
- Digital, tech and creative
- Modern professional and financial services

Boosting business leadership and investment, improving productivity and efficiency in the everyday economy while protecting workers, as well as tackling youth unemployment, economic inactivity and under-employment, and upskilling people with a particular focus on Level 3 qualifications are also identified in the Green Paper as key drivers to support the West Midlands' economy. The Green Paper also discusses the development of key infrastructure projects in the region, and the development of a spatial development strategy. In regard to the Skills England priority sectors, the construction sector will also be of importance to the region for delivery of these projects.

Through the Local Skills Improvement Plan, the Chambers will seek to support the WMCA in meeting the ambitions of the Green Paper, alongside its vision within the Employment and Skills Strategy.

What has been achieved so far?

Extensive work has been undertaken, and significant progress has been made against each of the priorities identified by the WMW LSIP.

As listed above, the LSIF projects discussed throughout this report are as follows:

- LSIF Project 1: Expanding the local electrification and engineering offer
- LSIF Project 2: Increasing capacity for skills delivery within Low Carbon/Sustainable Construction
- LSIF Project 3: Wider Green Skills
- LSIF Project 4: Essential Digital Skills
- LSIF Project 5: Advanced Digital Skills
- LSIF Project 6: Systems Approach to Employer Engagement

In response to LSIP Priority One, through LSIF Project 1, an extensive and co-ordinated Continued Professional Development (CPD) offer has been developed to offer training for FE providers in battery technology and electrification. These 36 programmes received 476 enrolments. The courses were chosen by delivery partners in response to identified employer needs, and colleges were able to access funding to pay backfill costs when releasing staff to undertake this training. 139 college staff participated in the training programme and a further 35 college leaders benefitted from development activity.

Whitecap Consulting, working within the employer engagement project, produced a detailed report on AEM which informed curriculum planning. The development of new provision was supported by the above CPD. In addition, six colleges which have received capital funding have joined the Metaverse AEM Consortium and have benefitted from co-creating and sharing immersive learning scenario-based learning resources covering: smart factory induction, virtual factory, Industry 4.0, Robotics, CNC Machining, 3D printing and rapid prototyping and testing environments.

15 new programmes have been approved for ongoing funding by WMCA through the devolved Adult Skills budget. These span levels 2 to 4 and include long programmes in Advanced Manufacturing as well as short upskilling courses in Electric/hybrid vehicle charging, repair and maintenance, installing electric chargers, installing and maintaining PV systems, air source heat pumps, smart home technologies and electrical storage systems.

The Capital projects associated with LSIF Project 1 have been successfully completed and as a result, to date 2,762 learners are reported to be using LSIF-enabled equipment and facilities. Specifically:

- Six colleges developed immersive learning spaces, using either turn-key or self-build solutions: Dudley College, Birmingham Metropolitan (BMet) College, Solihull College, GBSIoT, SCCB and Warwickshire College.
- GBS IoT purchased a CP-lab base unit plus other equipment and software and made these resources available to employers, students and schools.
- BMet College upgraded an area in the AMS centre and purchase of equipment for Power Electronics, Machines and Drives.
- Dudley College built a new NetZero standalone training building at Advance 2 – PV, battery storage and EV charging.
- Solihull College refurbished an area to create a PEMD lab and equipped it with kit and software.
- SCCB invested in equipment to enable the college to develop a new short course to retrain electricians to install and maintain PV panels.
- Warwickshire College refurbished an area and purchased equipment to allow the college to deliver EV and electrification courses.

WCC have shared current evidence on sector needs and are supporting to explore investment opportunities. Warwickshire Careers Hub Careers activity is promoting industries and pathways.

LSIF Project 2, focussed on increasing capacity for skills delivery within Low Carbon/Sustainable Construction included the largest amount of investment in capital projects across the WMW LSIF (£2.98m), most of which were completed in spring/summer 2025.

A deep dive into construction sector employer needs was carried out by Whitecap Consulting and this study identified skills gaps around heat pumps, solar, retrofit, electric charging and modular housing. Curriculum mapping was carried out to identify gaps and duplication in the offer, to be taken into account when developing specific courses. The research showed reasonable coverage and that the LSIF providers seem to be addressing perceived gaps with their new facilities. Further details of the findings of this deep dive are available [here](#).

Delivery partners have purchased licences and immersive learning materials heat pumps and retrofit topics from Metaverse Learning. These are in use by learners and employers and are being well received. Partners trained and upskilled 60 staff members (against a target of 40), and nine staff members have undertaken industry placements. Reports from the colleges shows that 869 construction learners are already benefitting from new equipment and facilities enabled through LSIF:

- The Warwickshire Colleges Group (WCG)'s New Centre for Sustainable Construction at Rugby College, which has opened and features new workshops for heat pumps, solar installation, rainwater and greywater harvesting.
- BMet has refurbished the Blackstone changing rooms to create a training centre for low carbon & future housing including a gas testing room with equipment for teaching retrofitting air source heat pumps, solar PV installation
- Coventry College purchased additional training/ demonstration equipment rigs for use in an existing retrofit centre.
- South and City College Birmingham used capital funding to fit-out existing training workshops and purchase IT equipment for the low carbon construction centre. A major project was the construction of two mock buildings for low carbon construction training within existing Bordesley Green construction training centre.
- Solihull College and University Centre developed a Centre for Low Carbon Construction at Stratford-upon-Avon College, mainly focusing on heat pump technology.

LSIF Priority One is further addressed through LSIF Project 5, focussing on advanced digital skills, which has created 12 new learning facilities across the West Midlands and Warwickshire, already used by over 830 digital and ICT learners. Specifically:

- Halesowen College have completed work on two new spaces. They enhanced an existing cyber lab equipment and moved its location to Trinity Point and created a new hub for employers at Trinity Point. Staff training has been undertaken in AI and machine learning with Google Cloud AIU and AWS Educate.
Learners have access to cutting edge technology to enhance their learning. They used advanced digital (VR and AI) to upskill adult learners to obtain better jobs and used Bodyswaps to train adult learners how to excel in interviews and communication and obtain real time feedback from both tutors and AI tutors.
Employers had demonstrations to engage them with new technologies for their workforce. This new capability has improved relationships with the NHS for learners from H&SC courses. NHS endorse Bodyswaps training.
- At BMet a new space for dental training is now completed and being promoted. The digital cad cam lab and the immersive learning space is installed. The college is using the Innovate UK-funded project for the West Midlands in partnership with WMCA, to help promote the dentistry technology offer to providers in this sector.
- Dudley College have provided training for 6 staff in a range of programmes via the Knowledge Academy to support delivery of programmes in Data Analytics, Cyber Security and the Fundamentals of AI. An area has been renovated and a firewall system installed for cyber security training. This has resulted in:
 - Enhanced partnerships with local employers who can help further inform our curriculum.
 - Upskilling of the college's staff via CPD to support progression.
 - Creation of a safe place to learn and explore all things Cyber without compromising external networks for Employers.
 - Increased number of employees qualified in Cyber Security and Data Analysis.
- North Warwickshire and South Leicestershire College has commenced the creation of a level 3 AI in robotics and automation course following consultation with employers on course design which has given valuable insight into the viability of the course and its responsiveness to employer needs. Three staff members have been through CPD with Fanuc, a large key employer for automated technology in the region.
An immersive technology infrastructure has been created by way of new headsets to share across campuses, a device agnostic delivery platform to allow use of a range of resources and content, plus hardware for our e-sports teaching space. This has resulted in a new course which meets a proven need in the logistics industry, which to date has been difficult to do, especially because of emerging technologies. The college is extending this technology to other subject areas.
- Solihull College and University Centre have built an AI lab which can hold 20 learners which has state of the art equipment and is fully ready for teaching In September 2024 and which can host collaboration events with other institutions and bespoke AI Bootcamps.

They have developed an AI course, and three staff members have been externally trained to deliver the course. This means the college now has the capacity to deliver bespoke AI courses for employers and stakeholders the engagement activities have helped improve partnership working with employers and has upskilled our staff in AI and has provided us with the latest kit to work with.

- Walsall College have facilitated staff training on Artificial Intelligence. They have implemented new courses at level 2 and 3 in Cyber Security Practices and Coding practices has created capability to develop skills for local employers and improve relationships to enhance curriculum design and implementation.

33 FE staff have received specialist CPD training to enable the delivery of 18 new courses, nine of which are at Level 3, five at level 4 and four at Level 5. Over 400 starts are forecast to benefit from this provision.

A further 8 new courses have been approved by WMCA for ongoing funding through the Adult Skills budget. These are at level 3 and level 4 and cover topics such as cyber security, data analytics, AI and Big Data.

Extensive additional research has been undertaken into gaps in provision, how this compares with employer feedback through the LSIP and the specific ongoing needs of employers in each of the priority focus sectors identified by the LSIP. The results of further research carried out in the second year of Stage 2 of the LSIP are summarised in Annex 3 of this report.

In addition to delivering supplementary surveying and focus groups, the Coventry and Warwickshire Chambers and Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce supported reengagement of businesses from Stage 1 research to participate in 'deep dive' interviews led by Whitecap consulting to better understand priority focus sectors identified in Priority One of the WMW LSIP and inform LSIF projects. This research by Whitecap Consulting also produced a curriculum map database for the West Midlands and Warwickshire to create a view of the current offering from WMW FE providers to inform and support future curriculum decisions.

Additionally, the Warwickshire County Council Business Skills Support team have worked with over 918 businesses, creating and shaping skills plan. Intelligence from such plans has supported Warwickshire to understand further the sector skills needs now and for the future. The Warwickshire County Council Business Skills Support team have delivered and continue to deliver a number of sector specific round table events throughout the year, exploring challenges with skills and recruitment to gather intelligence, and are enabling local providers to participate and contribute to solution focused workshops.

LSIF Project 3 addresses actions from LSIP Priorities One and Two, focussing on wider green skills. The project delivered a Green Skills Summit in January 2024 was for over 60 businesses and providers to create a shared understanding of green skills. A significant CPD programme was rolled out and comprised training for *Green Changemakers* (change agents working in their organisations to drive change) as well as a *Train the Green Skills Trainer* programme to support embedding of Green Skills in all subjects. 40 Green Changemakers have motivated and enabled on average 3 colleagues in their organisations to get involved in changemaking – these make up 120 'Golden Unicorns.'

Overall, to date, 9,000 staff and students have been reached via training, newsletters, workshops, and student sessions. 3,000 staff have been trained directly by Fircroft College or through cascade training and over 60 governors have had training and briefing sessions.

The first round of CPD funded through the LSIF project concluded in March 2025 and culminated with a Green Skills Tutor Conference attended by over 90 people from 32 organisations. Since then, the WMCA has agreed to fund the ongoing delivery of Green Changemaker training.

A green skills roadmap for FE providers in the region has also been created and published. It points to a series of signposts for providers to follow and covers strategy, technical green skills, community empowered green skills, building a talent pipeline of young people and green skills for leaders. The signposts are now being implemented by the colleges and co-ordinated within a strand of Colleges West Midlands-led work. To date, eighteen colleges are signed up to implementing the recommendations of the green skills roadmap.

In regard to the LSIP action to consider the different needs of different target groups, the ongoing work of the LSIP and FE providers across the WMW geography is mindful of such, as well as employer requests for modular training, and a need to support young people entering the workforce. The wider, ongoing work of stakeholders such as DWP, WMCA and WCC play a significant role in this also.

In the Get Britain Working Paper the Secretary of State for the DWP outlined the long-term ambition to achieve an 80% employment rate.

One of the initial steps towards this has been a focus on employer engagement. The DWP Employer Commitment outlines the minimal level of service employers can expect from their local Jobcentre. It is about offering a consistent and standardised approach to employer engagement across the whole of the country. Ultimately, the ambition is to actively contribute to the recruitment of new employees for our employers and partners in a speedy, professional manner. DWP have committed to ensuring that they:

- Provide a fantastic professional service wherever we are in the country.
- Deliver the employer's requirements at pace and with professionalism.
- Ensure fair, inclusive, and robust recruitment processes that attract, engage, and retain top talent.

- Fill stakeholder opportunities with candidates whose values align with their organisation, while promoting diversity, equity, and equal opportunities at every stage.
- Create a recruitment experience that is transparent, respectful, and reflective of our commitment to excellence and integrity, thereby improving people's quality of life now and in the future.

To support this across Central England, DWP are piloting new ways of working, including creating a new Regional Recruitment team. This team's remit will be to focus on engaging with local employers who employ between 50-250 employees, to look to build relationships and support recruitment through Jobcentres.

The WMCA and DWP are also now in year two of the Path 2 Apprenticeship programme, stimulating apprenticeship participation via a pre-employment support offer that enables young people who are Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET) and between the ages of 19-29 to enter a range of quality apprenticeships across the region which align with the local and regional labour market to link residents with good quality jobs.

To help enable local residents to access meaningful employment opportunities, Warwickshire County Council has introduced the Destination Work Programme, which supports adults to receive employment support and training to enter local employment opportunities. This is funded by UKSPF, and the programme works with local employers to shape their roles to offer good quality and training to those who are seeking employment.

Additionally, the Warwickshire Supported Employment Service supports young people and adults with Learning disabilities and/or autism to gain paid and sustainable employment. The team work with employers to explore skills gaps and carve specific jobs to bridge such gaps. Individuals are then coached into such jobs with a package of training to support them to embed well into their role and the organisation.

The Coventry and Warwickshire WorkWell programme provides specialist support for young people and adults with Mental Health and Health Barriers.

Warwickshire Adult and Community Learning (ACL) engage adults who are often furthest away from the labour market or higher level qualifications, and deliver a range of essential skills that adults need in order to move into and progress in employment, including extensive English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision, maths and English up to level 2 and essential digital skills, as identified by LSIP Priority Three and LSIF Project 4.

In response to LSIP Priority Two: WMW Leadership and Management Skills, and the wider considerations of the WMW LSIP, LSIF Project 6 has completed development of a Leadership and Management Course consisting of six free to access, 30-minute modules for SMEs, available on SkillsWMW.com.

Throughout the Warwickshire County Council Business Skills Support Team's employer engagement, senior leaders have discussed priority training needs, and it has been reported that the focus on training in this area seems to steer more towards operational demands and retaining staff. As such, the following local investment has been aligned to digitisation and the transition to net zero:

- Skills Escalator Fund (£750 of funded training up to £3750 per business)
- 50 plus Skills Investment Fund (£1000 towards Training x 5 employees = £5000)
- Small Business Apprenticeship Levy Fund (£750,000 of levy funding shared with Warwickshire businesses) funded a number of management apprenticeships.
- Additional Levy Donorship (Supporting other large organisations to invest their Apprenticeship Levy funds with SME's wanting to employ or upskill apprentices)
- Green Skills Salary Support Programme (£2000 per person supported into post which links to green, digital or sustainable agendas).

In regard to LSIP Priority Three: WMW Essential Skills, through LSIF Project 4, aimed at addressing essential digital skills needs, 65 FE staff have received training, 17 new learning areas have been created, and 12 providers are bringing digital learning to hard-to-reach learners to provide them with essential skills for employment. At the time of writing, 1,693 learners are benefitting from new resources:

- Halesowen College has delivered basic MS Office skills to multiple learners. A new learning area was developed at Trinity Point and to address outreach, the college purchased, converted and kitted out of a bus for mobile learning – CEDRIC. CEDRIC (Creating Engaging Digital Resources In the Community) is equipped with laptops, iPads, Android Tablets and VR Headsets and can facilitate basic digital awareness, for the digitally disadvantaged, MS office training for the workplace and a variety of programmes around customer service, communications and managing difficult conversations –using Bodyswaps software and VR. The impact has been improved basic digital skills within the region for employers and for the College's own workforce to drive forward digital in the region. New employers have been engaged. 60 staff engaged in MS office upskilling at Emmiera Group and the company are now exploring options for further digital training. A number of community associations have requested basic digital awareness training and there have been requests for regular MS office sessions to NEETs under the auspices of Street League, a body which engages with the hard to reach. The college has also had requests from some local schools to deliver a combined Maths/English and Digital programme to the parents of their learners, particularly parents of those learners who need the most

support. The programme (currently in development) is intended to increase the confidence of adults so that they can support their children with homework.

- BMet College have upgraded and equipped two rooms.
- City of Wolverhampton College made significant investment in equipment to create a digital hub and delivered targeted employability focused digital provision in the community working with people from minority ethnic backgrounds, older adults (aged 50+) and people with lower skills. Investment was made in upgrading delivery rooms to ensure they are relevant and appropriate, and this included a new immersive learning space.
- Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce Training delivered additional sessions primarily to those working in hospitality and self-employed hairdressing. The topics covered AI, digital marketing, social media and Excel. In total 10 classrooms were refurbished with new IT equipment. An immersive learning space was created and after exploring various solutions a VR environment was identified as the most cost-effective route, to enable the greatest possible number of learners to benefit. Mobile devices, which will facilitate outreach activity, were also purchased.
- Coventry College refurbished two areas, purchased equipment and set up a digital advertising campaign to promote essential digital skills and additional employer engagement delivered.
- Dudley College developed a new IT for Work programme with input from the Good Things Foundation and also a bitesize curriculum for face-to-face learning. This provides the digital skills needed to obtain and sustain employment as well as upskill current employees supporting promotion and careers. The course team have received relevant upskilling. Additional laptops and trolleys to support additional delivery have been purchased.
- Fircroft College renewed membership of the National Digital Inclusion Network and created a link to their essential digital skills courses on the homepage of the PCs This learning can be self-directed at any time or facilitated by a tutor who they are training up through LSIF. The college also created a new digital hub behind our Reception which enables individual work or class sessions and in year two purchased kit for mobile outreach learning.
- Primary Goal delivered basic digital skills to over 100 learners, including to the parents in a primary school.
- Solihull College and University Centre invested in two mobile classrooms, one for each year.
- South and City College Birmingham developed 3 new office digital skills courses. They have conducted employer research to understand exactly what is meant by essential digital skills and purchased laptops to enable outreach and community engagement.
- Walsall College purchased two mobile classrooms for outreach, one each year of the project.

Three new level 3 courses have also been developed, and a further 8 new courses have been approved for funding by WMCA.

As referenced above, Warwickshire Adult and Community Learning also deliver essential digital skills qualifications (as part of a wider range of support) at E3 and L1 to adults across Warwickshire who are often furthest away from the labour market or higher level qualifications – with a particular focus on over 50s. Taster courses and short training sessions are offered as an introduction to EDSQ.

In response to the LSIP's findings concerning engagement with and awareness and understanding of post-16 education and training initiatives among employers, LSIF Project 6 has developed a new, systems approach to employer engagement. A new brand and brand identity – Skills West Midlands and Warwickshire (Skills WM+W) - has been developed to support collaborative employer engagement across the LSIP geography and providers and stakeholders, including WMCA, the ERB and Birmingham Ladder have supported delivery of the Skills WM+W service offer. The Skillswmw.com website was launched in March 2024 and three employer events in mid-March 2024 launched the Whitecap reports and the Skills WM+W proposition. Since then, the Skills West Midlands and Warwickshire (Skills WM+W) brand has been adopted by providers and gained traction with the business community. A key asset is the website, which is a go-to place for businesses. The arrangements for governance of the Skills WM+W have been agreed, a membership model is being developed, and the ongoing sustainability of the brand is planned for.

Significant progress has been made with bringing together and training business-facing colleagues across all members of the project to ensure that engagement with businesses is consistent and all opportunities to support businesses are taken. Most providers are already using the new Skills WM+W branding, and a multi-channel campaign has been run to drive awareness using the slogan 'Your Business is Our Business'. Away days and a training programme for business development colleagues and sales teams have taken place.

Further events were hosted by Skills WM+W over the past year, including an event for businesses providing supported internships and a high-profile anniversary event of Skills WM+W in May 2025, attended by the Minister for Skills and the Mayor of West Midlands. At both events employers received awards in recognition of their contribution to skills. In addition, Skills WM+W was represented at a number of priority sector events including the WM Digital Skills Consortium, the Construction Conference and Birmingham Tech Week.

Additionally, in response to the findings of the LSIP, the Business Skills Support team at Warwickshire County Council has engaged with businesses across Warwickshire to support business leaders to understand the multiple opportunities to onboard young people from education (post 16) and shape appropriate job opportunities for those seeking employment. The team offer 1:1 and group support, advice and

guidance on the multiple opportunities and can support the employers to understand which route might be the best fit for the business and their skills needs.

The LSIP also identified challenges attracting young talent to key industries within the economy of the local area. To address this, Warwickshire County Council has established the Future Destination Hub; a NEET hub which supports young people to return to education, employment or training. Funded by UKSPF The Hub works with all education partners to support the young person to explore multiple sectors and carve a route to a positive destination.

Alongside this, the Warwickshire Careers Hub has delivered locally led Careers Fairs, delivered in each district and borough across Warwickshire, where students were invited to meet local employers and explore the future careers available. Employers were encouraged to engage with students and highlight their onboarding approaches, the skills they look for and what career progression looks like.

Further, the County Council has delivered *Educate the Educator*, a programme for Warwickshire Career leaders in secondary schools, colleges and 6th forms, offering industry led workshops upskilling career leaders on sector specific skills needs ensuring they build adequate skills knowledge to offer good quality careers advice and guidance to the young people of Warwickshire. Warwickshire County Council's Teacher Encounters programme has also been bringing curriculum teachers away from the classroom to work with employers and gain a good understanding of industry skills needs. Teachers are targeted to blend industry knowledge into the curriculum, and this is quality measured through the Gatsby Benchmarks.

Regarding attracting staff into support and delivery roles within FE provider organisations, several LSIF projects have delivered extensive, specialised training to staff and enabled staff undertaking industry placements. Additionally, Warwickshire County Council has established a Sector Skills Share Pilot, working with FE with a £50,000 pilot budget to assist the integration of industry supporting technical delivery due to the absence of a supply of adequately experienced tutors with current industry knowledge.

To further the ambitions of the LSIP, and in support of the wider work being undertaken across the West Midlands and Warwickshire to address the priorities of the Plan, the ERB has collaborated with LSIF project leads and FE providers across the region (including ITPs, as stated at the outset of this report), to amplify key messaging and engage employers in the local skills system. In Stage 2 the Chamber has, through combined efforts with Providers and Stakeholders, engaged in events with over 260 employers in the local area. The ERB has encouraged employers to take up apprentices, offer work placements (e.g., T Level Industry Placements, Path2Apprenticeships), promote learning and training programmes for upskilling and reskilling existing employees (e.g., Skills Bootcamps, Job Rotation, Institute of Leadership & Management (ILM) training), use apprenticeship levy transfers, access the leadership modules on SkillsWMW.com and build closer, innovative relationships with FE providers to address mutual challenges.

What has yet to be achieved?

The work of the WMW LSIP will continue through various means, whilst the next round of LSIP development is due to commence in Autumn 2025.

In regard to Priority One of the LSIP, despite difficulties with releasing staff to undertake training and additional curriculum development activity, new provision is in place. To date, 12 new courses at level 3 and 4 at level 4 are up and running, with further new courses planned for delivery.

The large collective employer events were cancelled due to poor uptake on the part of employers. Instead, employers are being engaged through an online 'Adopting Electrification' webinar produced by MTG which allows employers to access information about electrification when and where they wish and there have been over 400 visits to the site already. Engagement of employers in the updated offer is through normal college business engagement activity, through the Innovate Hub offer (funded through Innovate UK) and through participation in events under the Skills WM+W banner.

LSIF Project 2, focussed on Increasing capacity for skills delivery within Low Carbon/Sustainable Construction is on track. However, course development, learner starts, and employer engagement are behind target as these are dependent on new facilities being in place, so full impact will not be seen for some months to come.

The collaborative project to develop and trial a serious game aimed at installers rather than retrofit assessors was carried out in 2024. It drew on technical development expertise at WCG and subject matter experts across the partnership. The game scenario was a bungalow, and players evaluated and suggested a variety of internal and external retrofit and other energy saving solutions. The player was scored based on cost, time and energy saving. This resource was not completed within the available timeframe and budget and is on hold pending further investment to bring it to completion.

New course development and learner starts have not yet fully materialised due to capital project dependencies, but some good progress is clear. As of February 2025, 14 new courses in sustainable construction at level 3 have been developed and further new courses are in the planning stage, along with four courses at level 4. These are short courses in subjects such as solar and PV, heat pumps, rainwater harvesting,

retrofit, energy assessor and EV charging. These are aimed mainly at existing tradespeople looking to upgrade their skills in a new sector. Over time, the colleges will use learner feedback and test and modify courses. They will also introduce low carbon construction subjects into 16-19 courses and apprenticeships progressively over the subsequent years. Current research shows that there is currently little demand for these as standalone qualifications, although it is expected that this will change significantly within the next three years.

Regarding provision for the logistics & distribution sector, it has been noted by WCC that both Warwickshire Colleges Group and North Warwickshire and South Leicestershire College (NWSLC) have previously built provision in this sector. WCC's closed as employers did not engage. It is hoped that an approach led by employers could make a difference. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many employers in this sector opt for inhouse training, and that activities such as Wheels to Work and specific unemployment programmes have been more effective than FE driven activity. This may need to be explored further in the future.

The next step for LSIF Project 3, in response to LSIP Priorities One and Two, will involve launching the new Green Skills Tutor Hub in early June. This was developed by Fircroft colleagues and the Changemakers working with Metaverse Learning and will be a key place for the community of practitioners to come together to discuss and access resources. Funding to support the hub for three years has been secured.

Additionally, the contractor has been appointed, a site found, and construction is underway for an Eco Classroom at Fircroft College. Construction has been hampered due to delay in receiving planning consent from the local authority.

Regarding delivery against Priority Two of the LSIP, WMW Leadership and Management Skills, *Green Skills Leadership Training* modules have not yet been developed, and the providers leading LSIF Project 3 will be focussing on these from 2025.

In response to the LSIP's findings concerning engagement with and awareness and understanding of post-16 education and training initiatives among employers, LSIF Project 6 will continue to develop the Skills WM+W brand, including the website, which is undergoing ongoing development and will be maintained by Skills WM+W membership contributions moving forward. Skills WM+W will also be looking to engage in further events, including the Construction B2B event in June 2025.

The providers working in the three West Midlands Innovate UK consortia with WMCA are also preparing to present the innovation hub offer through the Skills WM+W offer, website and branding. Further, a piece of work is underway to explore how the providers, under the collective might of Skills WM+W can contribute to local priorities around youth unemployment and the West Midland Mayor's Youth Plan.

The ERB aspired to launch an 'WMW LSIP App' in September 2024, convening a group of senior employer representatives engaged in the skills and training agenda in the West Midlands and Warwickshire to participate in short, regular snap polling via a mobile application. This application was intended to be used to further develop LSIP research and identify aggregate demand to support the work of FE providers across the WMW geography. Unfortunately, development of this application has faced a series of technical issues and due to resource constraints, this has been delayed until the recruitment of a dedicated WMW LSIP engagement officer in the coming months.

The ERB also recognizes the importance of ongoing employer engagement in the success of LSIF projects and, beyond March 2025, continuing to achieve the wider ambitions of the LSIP. As such, the ERB will continue collaborating with LSIF project leads and FE providers across the region (including ITPs), to amplify key messaging through our networks and ensure employers fully utilize available provisions and support to navigate the local skills system.

Employers and other stakeholders interested in finding out more and getting involved with actions that are still underway are encouraged to contact: [RAJ TO PROVIDE DETAILS]

Annex A – Priorities and actions (Roadmap)

The below tables present the indicative actions and considerations, partners involved in delivery of these actions and progress to date for each of the key LSIP priorities.

Timescales

Unless stated otherwise, LSIF projects began in November 2023 on confirmation of funding and were structured into two main phases, aligned to the DfE financial year:

- Phase 1 – December 2023 to end March 2024, was year one of the projects in which both capital and revenue funding was available.
- Phase 2 – April 2024 to end March 2025, was year two of the projects in which only capital funding was available.

It should be noted that the inability to extend revenue funded activities beyond the end of March 2024 has had a limiting impact on what could be achieved within these projects. The imperative to ensure sustainability and create an impactful legacy beyond spring 2025 remains a key concern for all LSIF projects.

Monitoring Arrangements

The governance and monitoring of delivery by the ERB against the key LSIP priorities includes quarterly LSIP Operational Group meetings and continual oversight by an LSIP project manager (see governance structure in Annex 1).

Delivery by the LSIF consortium against the key LSIP priorities also included:

- 6 weekly LSIF Stakeholder Steering Group meetings with representation of project leads, the WMCA and CW Chamber of Commerce
- 6 weekly LSIF Steering Group meetings with the LSIF Lead Provider and LSIF project leads.

Additionally, each LSIF Project Lead scheduled and chaired regular project meetings to track progress and identify issues, used a variety of methods to gather feedback from delivery partners and used the standard DfE LSIF Monitoring tools which are KPIs which are set initially and reported against approximately two-monthly.

An LSIF project manager also supported the Lead LSIF Provider by keeping oversight of all projects, attending all LSIF project meetings, meeting with project leads, tracking KPIs and gathering information on KPIs and other successes. This activity enabled the connectivity between projects to be maximized and ensured that the communications teams consistently had up-to-date information.

Priority One: WMW Sector Skills

Action /Activity / Milestone	Partners involved	Method of implementation and outcomes expected	Progress status and timescales
High Level Sector: Engineering and Manufacturing			
Further investment in facilities to enable provision of specialist skills or increase capacity to enable growth of new entrants.	LSIF Project 5 – <i>advanced digital skills</i> Specific activity within the project by Birmingham Metropolitan College	To address the Health and Med Tech needs, a new facility for Dentistry is being developed at Birmingham Metropolitan College under LSIF Project 5 – <i>advanced digital skills</i> . LSIF Project 1 - <i>Expanding the local electrification and engineering offer</i>	The project lead provider on LSIF Project 1 judges the project to be on track relating to development of new courses, the number of forecast learners on these courses and learning in new or refurbished facilities. They are confident that the KPIs relating to staff training and development and the use of new or upgraded facilities will be met.

<p>Health Tech and Med Tech Sector is an area to consider specific expansion of facilities and introduction of new courses in consultation with employers.</p>	<p>LSIF Project 1 - <i>Expanding the local electrification and engineering offer</i></p> <p>Project lead: Dudley College of Technology, plus eight Delivery Partners -</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. BMet 2. Coventry College 3. Greater Birmingham and Solihull Institute of Technology (GBSIoT) 4. Halesowen College 5. Solihull College and University Centre 6. South and City College Birmingham (SCCB) 7. Walsall College 8. Warwickshire College <p>WMCA / WCC supporting as appropriate</p>	<p>Large scale Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme planned to build capacity and capability in engineering and electrification:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A programme of upskilling courses developed and delivered to staff in all institutions. Programmes are to be designed and delivered by Warwick Manufacturing Group (WMG) and the Manufacturing Technology Centre (MTC). • To include production of teaching materials and train the trainer content plus writing the courses and delivery of the training workshops. • Funding will cover development of min 25 days of training for teaching staff plus all materials. Training programmes to include, battery production and storage, electrical systems upskilling, smart factories, EV equipment install and repair and transport technologies • Remission for teaching staff who attend training – this was offered to all CWM colleges and covered backfill costs <p>Development of new provision in engineering and electrification</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design and planning of new provision and expansion of capacity. Funding was available for remission. • BMET College, Dudley College, Halesowen College, Solihull College, GBS IoT, South & City College, Walsall College and Coventry College and also others • Purchase of Metaverse Learning licences to join the AEM consortium and feed into/benefit from the development of resources. <p>Employer engagement plans</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least two employer engagement events aimed at expanding understanding of opportunities linked to electrification, broadening understanding of training offer and opportunity to influence provider programmes. WMG and MTC offered to support. • Two events for employers to inform and engage them in the opportunities provided by battery technology. Colleges will have funding to engage with their employer partners and promote these events. <p>Advertising, communications and marketing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All colleges received funding to support their own employer engagement. • Promotion of employer engagement events and subsequent promotion of the new training offer. Includes social media. <p>Capital funded activities included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purchase licences for immersive learning materials in battery technology provided by Metaverse for all six delivery partners which will be distributed in year 2. 	<p>An extensive and co-ordinated CPD offer was developed to offer training for FE providers in battery technology and electrification provided by WMG/<u>MTC</u> – 36 programmes for 476 enrolments. These courses were chosen by delivery partners in response to identified needs, and took place online and face-to-face over between 90 minutes to 5 days in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engineering Essentials (Electrical) • Additive Manufacturing • Automation and Robotics • Digital Manufacturing • Future Mobility • Manufacturing <p>Colleges were able to access funding to pay backfill costs when releasing staff to undertake this training. 139 college staff participated in the training programme and a further 35 college leaders benefitted from development activity.</p> <p>Whitecap Consulting, working within the employer engagement project, produced a detailed report on AEM which informed curriculum planning. The development of new provision was supported by the above CPD and in addition six colleges which have received capital funding have joined the Metaverse AEM Consortium have benefitted from co-creating and sharing immersive learning scenario-based learning resources (detailed above).</p> <p>Despite difficulties with releasing staff to undertake training and additional curriculum development activity, new provision is in place. To date, 12 new courses at level 3 and 4 at level 4 are up and running, with further new courses planned.</p> <p>15 new programmes have been approved for ongoing funding by WMCA through the devolved Adult Skills budget. These span levels 2 to 4 and include long programmes in Advanced Manufacturing as well as short upskilling courses in Electric/hybrid vehicle charging, repair and maintenance, installing electric chargers, installing and maintaining PV systems, air source heat pumps, smart home technologies and electrical storage systems.</p> <p>The large collective employer events were cancelled due to poor uptake on the part of employers. Instead employers are being engaged through an online 'Adopting Electrification' webinar produced by MTG which allows employers to access information about electrification when and where they wish and there have been over 400 visits to the site already. Engagement of employers in the updated offer is through normal college business engagement activity, through the Innovate Hub offer (funded through Innovate UK) and through participation in events under the Skills WM+W banner.</p> <p>Employer engagement is continuing at provider level. Employers engaged include large names such as Network Rail (BMet) and EON (Dudley) to the Trade Centre (Walsall) and new partnerships such as SCCB's work with FanUK and MX Reality on immersive learning. At the last count 12 employers had released their staff to work with colleges on the development and delivery of new provision. Over 30 employers have fed back that the training is already giving learners the skills they need and 35 have been introduced to new technology through this project.</p> <p>Capital projects have been successfully completed and to date 2,762 learners are reported to be using LSIF-enabled equipment and facilities.</p>
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High Level Sector: Construction			
Further investment in facilities to enable provision of specialist skills or increase capacity to enable growth of new entrants.	<p>LSIF Project 2 - Increasing <i>capacity for skills delivery within Low Carbon/Sustainable Construction</i></p> <p>Project lead: WMG, plus 6 delivery partners-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. BMet College 2. Coventry College 3. Dudley College of Technology 4. Solihull College and University Centre 5. South and City College Birmingham 6. Walsall College 	<p>LSIF Project 2 - Increasing <i>capacity for skills delivery within Low Carbon/Sustainable Construction</i></p> <p>Project elements and intended outcomes:</p> <p>To gain market insight:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sector research for understanding of sector needs and dynamics A curriculum mapping exercise to look at current provision against demand. <p>To build programme capacity and teacher capability:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborative development of an e-learning solution to engage employers and learners Trial of 'off-the-shelf' eLearning solutions in areas such as Heat Pumps, Solar PV, Solar Thermal and Retrofit CPD for staff to upskills, facilitated by covering the course costs and the backfill costs. <p>To engage employers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investment in an employer engagement pilot to support skills into FE and host an employer focused training launch event. Freeing up delivery partner staff for employer engagement <p>To build capacity (capital):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> WCG - development of a Centre for Low Carbon Construction at Rugby College over two years SCCB - equipment to upgrade existing facilities for training in domestic and commercial heat decarbonisation. Creation of two residential houses – one traditional for retrofit training and one in MMC. Coventry College - additional equipment purchases to extend teaching capability in Retrofit Training Academy Solihull - purchase of training rigs to enable delivery of heat pump technology training and build of a new sustainable construction centre at Stratford. BMet - additional equipment to enhance existing low carbon construction training facilities <p>IT equipment and software –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Centralised purchase of equipment and software to support and enable the collaborative development and piloting of sector specific eLearning and immersive scenarios aimed at supporting SMEs to transition to low carbon technologies 	<p>The project lead provider for LSIF Project 2, Warwickshire College, reports that the project is on track. This project included the largest amount of investment in capital projects (£2.98m), most of which were completed in spring/summer 2025. All capital spend projects were fully completed and there was good KPI performance with CPD. Other KPIs around course development, learner starts, and employer engagement are behind target as these are dependent on new facilities being in place, so full impact will not be seen for some months to come.</p> <p>A deep dive into construction sector employer needs was carried out by Whitecap Consulting within project 6 and this study identified skills gaps around heat pumps, solar, retrofit, electric charging and modular housing. Curriculum mapping was carried out to identify gaps and duplication in the offer to be taken into account when developing specific courses. The research showed reasonable coverage and that we seem to be addressing perceived gaps with our new facilities. The public facing report is available here.</p> <p>The collaborative project to develop and trial a serious game aimed at installers rather than retrofit assessors was carried out in 2024. It drew on technical development expertise at WCG and subject matter experts across the partnership. The game scenario was a bungalow, and players evaluated and suggested a variety of internal and external retrofit and other energy saving solutions. The player was scored based on cost, time and energy saving. This resource was not completed within the available timeframe and budget and is on hold pending further investment to bring it to completion.</p> <p>Delivery partners have purchased licences and immersive learning materials heat pumps and retrofit topics from Metaverse Learning. These are in use by learners and employers and are being well received.</p> <p>The full budget for CPD was not spent, but partners trained and upskilled 60 staff members (against a target of 40). Nine staff members have undertaken industry placements.</p> <p>New course development and learner starts have not yet fully materialised due to capital project dependencies, but some good progress is clear. As of February 2025 14 new courses in sustainable construction at level 3 have been developed and further new courses are in the planning stage, along with four courses at level 4. These are short courses in subject such as solar and PV, heat pumps, rainwater harvesting, retrofit, energy assessor and EV charging. These are aimed mainly at existing tradespeople looking to upgrade their skills in a new sector. Over time colleges will use learner feedback and test and modify courses and will also introduce low carbon construction subjects into 16-19 courses and apprenticeships progressively over the subsequent years. Current research shows that there is little demand currently for these as standalone qualifications although we expect this to change significantly within three years.</p> <p>A conservative estimate is that 350 learners are already forecast to use new LSIF enabled facilities/equipment against a target of 385. The ILR reports from the colleges shows that already 869 construction learners are benefitting from new equipment and facilities enabled through LSIF.</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WCG - PCs and screen for IT classroom within new Centre for Low Carbon Construction • BMet - Using Modern techniques and technology to train operatives with a controlled simulated environment to enhance the learning experience, upskill existing staff to enable them to train and assess as required, whilst also meeting the AO requirements • Solihull - IT equipment and software for analysis of efficiency data, for example, linked to Big Data • SCCB - Costs associated with the provision and installation of cabling, monitoring curriculum delivery and electronic control systems related to the zero-carbon economy. 	<p>Employer engagement started with three events in March 2024. Delivery partners then worked with an agency to develop resources and assets they can use in their marketing and employer engagement to drive awareness of sustainable construction.</p> <p>Colleges are engaging with employers through their own business development teams and through their innovation advisers (funded through Innovate UK). Collective business engagement is through the Skills West Midlands and Warwickshire brand (project 6). Full details of employers engaged will emerge over the next few months.</p>
High Level Sector: ICT and Digital			
<p>Further investment in facilities to enable provision of specialist skills or increase capacity to enable growth of new entrants</p> <p>ICT and digital roles widely in demand in most sectors, no longer confined to those defining themselves as an IT business. For example, machine learning and AI. Consider how best to support non-IT specialist businesses with defining and accessing skills for IT roles</p> <p>AI and machine learning is a potential area for introduction of new courses/facilities</p>	<p>LSIF Project 5 – <i>Advanced Digital Skills</i></p> <p>Project Lead: Halesowen College</p> <p>plus 7 delivery partners -</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. BMet 2. Coventry College 3. Dudley College 4. North Warwickshire and South Leicestershire College 5. Solihull College and University Centre 6. South and City College Birmingham 7. Walsall College 	<p>LSIF Project 5 – <i>Advanced Digital Skills</i></p> <p>Each delivery partner delivered a discrete project in response to complement their existing provision to meet the needs of local businesses and individuals.</p>	<p>The project lead provider for LSIF Project 5 judges the project to be well on track.</p> <p>Key milestones:</p> <p>Capacity and Capability:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme of specialist CPD – 33 staff trained • Investment in new teaching resources • Capital investment. 12 new learning facilities have been created and are in use. Already over 830 digital and ICT learners recorded as using new facilities and equipment. • Coventry college is creating a hi-tech advanced digital training academy. • Dudley College is adding a dedicated server system with intrusion protection, firewall, etc to allow enhanced cybersecurity and ethical hacking programmes to be delivered. • Halesowen College is developing a ML and AI space at Trinity Point for employers • NWSLC has developed an immersive technology infrastructure by way of new VR7 headsets to share across campuses, a device agnostic delivery platform. • SCCB is creating an immersive learning space using some of the latest AI and ML technologies. <p>Implementation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18 new courses: 9 @ level 3, 5 @ level 4, 4 @ level 5 and over 400 starts forecast • 8 new courses have been approved by WMCA for ongoing funding through the Adult Skills budget. These are at level 3 and level 4 and these cover topics such as cyber security, data analytics, AI and Big Data • Roll out through the Innovate Hub offer <p>Impact:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 334 learners benefitting from new facilities already • 45 employers saying that provision is meeting their needs • 30 employers have been introduced to new equipment • The number of employers being introduced to new equipment is likely to be much higher as the innovation advisers are engaging with businesses to support them with using new advanced digital skills and equipment enabled through LSIF investment. <p>Details of the activities undertaken by each of the delivery partners are available above.</p>
High Level Sector: Logistics and Distribution			

Invest in facilities related to logistics and distribution sector to enable delivery	North Warwickshire and South Leicestershire College	This sector need was not covered by a distinct project within the LSIF. However, within the Advanced Digital project, North Warwickshire and South Leicestershire College have invested in AI software which will enable them to develop provision aimed at the logistics and distribution sector. This will be rolled out in 2024.	It has been noted by WCC that both Warwickshire Colleges Group (WCG) and North Warwickshire and South Leicestershire College (NWSLC) have previously built provision in this sector. WCG's closed as employers did not engage. It is hoped that an approach led by employers could make a difference. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many employers in this sector opt for inhouse training, and that activities such as Wheels to Work and specific unemployment programmes have been more effective than FE driven activity.
Consider piloting co-created approached with employers, is there potential for co-located provision given volume of transportation hubs, warehousing sites, etc across the area			
Use of Skills Bootcamp approach to developing technicians and mechanics alongside their job role as recommended in the employer focus groups			
General Actions to be incorporated into all sector solutions			
Further research into gaps in provision vs employer feedback <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Deeper dive into occupation areas identified in Priority One• Ensure clarity on true gaps vs lack of employer knowledge/understanding of option	Employer Representative Body (ERB) to drive forward	Further employer surveying delivered by Coventry and Warwickshire and Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce Support by CWCC and GBCC reengaging Stage 1 research contributors for participation in ‘deep dive’ interviews in occupation areas identified in Priority One, conducted by Whitecap Consulting. Curriculum mapping conducted by Whitecap Consulting.	<p>The Coventry and Warwickshire Chambers and Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce supported reengagement of businesses from Stage 1 research to participate in ‘deep dive’ interviews to better understand priority focus sectors identified in Priority One of the WMW LSIP and inform LSIF projects. These deep dives (also referenced above) are summarised in the previous progress report.</p> <p>The Chambers have delivered further employer surveying in each year of the LSIP, as well as additional focus groups in this year of Stage 2, with the priority sectors identified in the plan. The latter were supported by the Ladder Foundation. The results of further research carried out in the second half of Stage 2 of the LSIP are summarised in Annex 3 of this report.</p> <p>As referenced above, the same research by Whitecap Consulting also produced a curriculum map database for the West Midlands and Warwickshire to create a view of the current offering from WMW FE providers to inform and support future curriculum decisions. This was not created for public use but facilitates providers distinguishing between gaps in provision and gaps in employer knowledge/understanding.</p> <p>Additionally, the Warwickshire County Council Business Skills Support team have worked with over 918 businesses, creating and shaping skills plan. Intelligence from such plans has supported Warwickshire to understand further the sector skills needs now and for the future.</p> <p>The Warwickshire County Council Business Skills Support team have also delivered a number of sector specific round table events throughout the year with sectors such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Digital and creative• Construction• Manufacturing (OEM, Design and tier 2)• Logistics <p>With further sector workshops planned throughout the year. These roundtable events explored sector skills challenges within skills and recruitment to gather intelligence, then introduced local providers to participate and contribute to solution focused workshops.</p>
	LSIF Project 3 – <i>Wider Green Skills</i>	LSIF Project 3 – <i>Wider Green Skills</i>	LSIF Project 3 – <i>Wider Green Skills</i>

	<p>Project lead: Fircroft College, plus 10 delivery partners -</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. BMet 2. Coventry College 3. Dudley College of Technology 4. Halesowen College 5. NWSLC 6. Queen Alexandra College 7. Solihull College and University Centre 8. South and City College Birmingham 9. Walsall College 10. Warwickshire College 	<p>Initially a data-led review of current participation in Green Skills was planned to form a clear picture of actual Green Skills provision across the patch, including provision delivered by FE colleges and training providers.</p> <p>A methodology and research project to support colleges in assessing their capacity, capability, and intent in meeting the region's future 'green skills' needs was intended to form an accurate view of the current position in colleges in terms of their ability to meet the forecasted Green Skills needs of the region in the short and medium term to inform the Green Skills Roadmap.</p> <p>Key to the success of the project would be the engagement of stakeholders in the initiative. The project launched with a conference for stakeholders in January 2024.</p> <p>The development of a Green Skills Roadmap would serve as a key structure to give focus and sustainability to the change needed.</p> <p>The core of the project was CPD for colleagues across the patch, both green champions (changemakers) and colleagues teaching all subjects. A virtual tutor hub was to be created which would complement face-to-face and other learning community building activities.</p> <p>An eco classroom was planned which would serve as a teaching resource during its completion as local employers were invited to learn sustainable construction by working alongside the installation company.</p>	<p>The lead provider for LSIF project 3 is very confident that the KPIs relating to staff training will be achieved and judges the project will be very effective in its delivery.</p> <p>Key milestones:</p> <p>Capability and Capacity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Green Skills Summit in January 2024 was held for over 60 businesses and providers to create shared understanding of green skills. • A significant CPD programme was rolled out and comprised training for Green Changemakers (40 change agents working in their organisations to drive change) as well as a Train the Green Skills trainer programme to support embedding of Green Skills in all subjects. 3,000 staff have been trained directly by Fircroft College or through cascade training. • The first round of CPD funded through the LSIF project concluded in March 2025 and culminated with a Green Skills Tutor Conference attended by over 90 people from 32 organisations. Since then, WMCA agreed to fund the ongoing delivery of Green Changemaker training. • A green skills roadmap for FE providers in the region has been created and published. It points to a series of signposts for providers to follow and covers strategy, technical green skills, community empowered green skills, building a talent pipeline of young people and green skills for leaders. The signposts are now being implemented by the colleges and co-ordinated within a strand of Colleges West Midlands-led work. • A virtual Green Skills Tutor Hub is completed and will be launched in early June. This is for learning professionals in the region and will be the key resource for materials relating to wider green skills. Funding to support the hub for three years has been secured. • An eco classroom is in development on site at Fircroft College. <p>Impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 40 Green Changemakers have motivated and enabled on average 3 colleagues in their organisations to get involved in changemaking – these make up 120 'Golden Unicorns' • The changemakers are feeding back on the climate conversations they have had across their organisation. • 9,000 staff and students have been reached via training, newsletters, workshops, and student session. • 45 events were run by in providers by 2024 – varying in size from individual curriculum groups to whole college groups. • Green Changemakers have written for 14 publications – a book chapter, FE news, FE week, AoC's Think Further blog. • 3,000 staff have received training and over 60 governors have had training and briefing sessions. • Green skills data dashboards are informing curriculum planning • Eighteen colleges are signed up to implementing the recommendations of the green skills roadmap • Governing bodies of all colleges have had discussions about green skills. <p>Detail</p> <p>The data-led review of current participation was completed in March 2024 and since been updated in 2025, with funding from colleges. RCU Ltd are the partner undertaking the data analysis and desk research into current levels of provision in 'green skills'. RCU accessed the WMCA data cube (or ILR standard file) for this analysis. The analysis was based on learners living in the West Midlands. RCU classified provision according to how technically 'green' the learning was, using a similar approach to that of the Institute of Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) in their occupational maps ('dark green' and 'mid green') – noting that the functions of IfATE have now been transferred to Skills England.</p>
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<p>FE provider task group convened to consider collaborative response to gaps in provision.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative approaches and shared resources to be encouraged • Geography and reasonable travel to learn distances taken into account to avoid duplication 	<p>LSIF Project 3 – <i>Wider Green Skills</i></p> <p>Project lead: Fircroft College, plus 10 delivery partners-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. BMet 2. Coventry College 3. Dudley College of Technology 4. Halesowen College 5. NWSLC 6. Queen Alexandra College 7. Solihull College and University Centre 8. South and City College Birmingham 9. Walsall College 	<p>LSIF Project 3 – <i>Wider Green Skills</i></p> <p>A Green Skills Summit would bring together people from a range of organisations who have an interest in Green Skills and want to work together to respond to climate change and create a sustainable future for the region.</p> <p>A Green Skills Roadmap for FE Colleges will signpost colleges to information and actions.</p> <p>A Green Skills Teacher Development Programme was planned to provide participants from any position in a college with the knowledge, skills and confidence to become advanced practitioners in Green Skills and lead CPD in their college. Green Changemakers will develop both an impact-focused green skills strategy and the</p>	<p>LSIF Project 3 – <i>Wider Green Skills</i></p> <p>A Green Skills Summit was hosted on 24 January 2024 at the Rep Theatre Conference Centre in Birmingham. The event engaged 80 people in the West Midlands and Warwickshire in discussion about Green Skills to inform the LSIF West Midlands and Warwickshire Green Skills Roadmap to 2030. This covered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are Green Skills? - the scope is up for debate as they can be very sector or even job specific, relate to all types of employment or community life. • Which Green Skills are needed? - this will inform the gap analysis when looking at current green skills provision. • How can education and business work together to shape talent for now and the future? <p>The outcomes shaped the content and structure of the Green Skills Roadmap:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A growing and collective understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing the region in respect of 'green skills'. • Shared wider definition of the phrase 'green skills'.

	<p>10. Warwickshire College</p>	<p>influencing skills to co-deliver it, alongside other changemakers in the organisation whom they will identify and support. The programme was intended to amplify the organisations' green skills work on the national stage.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train the Green Skills Trainers: A one-day programme for teachers in any discipline to learn how to embed Green Skills education in their practice. Supported by the Green Changemakers, it created a virtual hub of Green Skills Teachers, to sustainably inform up-to-date practice. • Green Skills Tutor Conference: to raise the profile of Green Skills and provide an opportunity for the growing body of Green Skills teachers to come together to consolidate the current position and plan the way forward for ongoing engagement, collaboration and support. <p>A Green Skills Tutor Hub will be delivered and completed in 2024-25. It will be an engaging and interactive virtual environment in which teachers can come together so they are inspired and enabled to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find relevant content easily, structured according to subjects or themes. These need to be decided but may follow the structure of the roadmap – skills for sectors, skills for leaders and managers in SMEs, skills for young citizens (16-19 climate justice), skills for communities. • Access teaching resources which are developed iteratively by the supplier working in collaboration with the community of practitioners. • Add content to certain areas • Keep up to date with news and new developments in the fast-moving topic; meet peers to chat and share best practice • Select and complete learning and development activities which are constantly evolving and updated. <p>Intrinsic to the Tutor Hub is the creation and launch under licence of access to immersive learning scenarios that support teachers to embed the 15 Wider Green Skills which have been developed by AimHiEarth:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Critical, systems & nature-centric thinking 2. Scientific understanding 3. Nature connectivity 4. Practical & technical "hard skills" 5. Long-term thinking 6. Dynamic operations & crisis management 7. Historical & cultural understanding 8. Monitoring skills 9. Baseline fallback skills 10. Pioneer & entrepreneurial skills 11. Interpersonal skills & kindness 12. Informational skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of lines of enquiry for future research into the region's 'green skills' needs. • In addition there was relationship building and engagement of partners for the development of the 'green skills' roadmap. <p>A green skills roadmap for FE Colleges was launched and provides a series of signposts (opportunities) for colleges to consider relating to the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green skills strategy • Community empowerment through Green Skills • Green Skills for employers • Green custodianship skills for young people • Technical Green Skills for adults and young people on adult provision, apprenticeships and study programmes with data by sector: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Automotive ○ Construction and Building Services ○ Electrical Installation ○ Energy and Utilities ○ Environmental Services ○ Manufacturing <p>The roadmap is now shaping a programme of work, led by the colleges, which will be combined as the implementation stage evolves:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1-Governor engagement 2 - Staff development 3 - Peer assessment 4 - Adult technical green skills offer 5 - Green skills apprenticeships 6 - Setting and monitoring participation targets 7 - Community based provision: 8 - Study programme resources 9 - Green skills careers programme 10 - Celebrating regional green skills 11 - Towards Net Zero <p>The roadmap is also gaining recognition nationally and the Principal of the Project Lead College, Mel Lenehan, has been invited to speak at AoC and EAUC events.</p> <p>Green Skills Teacher Development Programme</p> <p>Currently there are 40 Green Changemakers active in 20 organisations and making an impact.</p> <p>On 18th March 2024 at Solihull College Conference Centre over 90 attendees from 32 organisations who were involved in multiple areas of teaching and learning attended the Green Skills Tutor Conference. Feedback from the event was very positive. The rating for overall satisfaction was 4.85/5. The aspect that delegates found most useful was the opportunity to network – 4.83/5</p> <p>A Green Skills Tutor Hub is on the point of launch. This was developed by Fircroft colleagues and the Changemakers working with Metaverse Learning. The hub will be the key place that the community of practitioners can come together to discuss and access resources.</p>
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<p>Considerations of different needs of different target groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training of new entrants through 16-19 provision • Upskilling for adults in the workforce • Reskilling for adults considering a career change • Pre-employment support for unemployed adults and NEETs <p>Key employer request across all sectors - modular, short course training to fit in around business need and timescales.</p> <p>Maximise existing approaches to training by diversifying into new subjects and geographies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apprenticeship levy transfer opportunities • Skills Bootcamp models • Adult Skills Fund funded short courses • DWP in work programmes • Employer financing • Sector Work-based Academy Programmes (SWAPs) • Prince's Trust programmes <p>Support for young people to access sector roles - increased employer engagement to promote work experience such as T Level Placements as an opportunity for employers to begin training early and create a pipeline of new entrants</p> <p>Link to the wider considerations of targeting additional lecturing/instructor staffing into FE providers in this sector</p>	<p>ERB and all LSIF Project delivery partners, with wider stakeholders supporting as appropriate</p>	<p>In delivery of LSIF research and various LSIF projects consideration has been made of different target group needs.</p> <p>More broadly, this is at the forefront of ongoing work by stakeholders such as WMCA, WCC and DWP</p>	<p>This is an ongoing part of delivery against each of the LSIF priorities and broader stakeholder activity, and as such referred to in the relevant sections of this report.</p> <p>LSIF Project 6 – <i>Systems Approach to Employer Engagement</i> have developed six free to access, 30-minute Leadership and Management modules. These are offered to employers via the Skills West Midlands and Warwickshire employer-facing for all FE providers. Courses are hosted on https://skillswmw.com/leadership-management-courses/</p> <p>Participants register with contact details to access the courses and follow up activity is carried out by one of the providers' business development team. The intention is to follow up the initial access to free, self-serve taster courses with the offer to employers of more bespoke and in-depth support with the specific skills development needs of their workforce.</p> <p>LSIF Projects 1 to 5 have also developed training in new subjects and geographies and integrated this with existing approaches to training, including community based learning and consideration of Technical Green Skills for adults and young people on adult provision, apprenticeships and study programmes in the Green Skills Roadmap for FE Colleges.</p> <p>In collaboration with Education, Business and Community Groups, Warwickshire County Council have developed a new strategy to reflect its Careers, Skills and Employment ambitions for the future and the part the council will play with strategic and key partners, Leading on from this, the employment and skills team and Education team have built a structure of Governance and Engagement groups to steer priorities, monitor progress and explore funding opportunities.</p> <p>In regards to considering the needs of different target groups, Warwickshire County Council has established the Future Destination Hub, to support young people who are NEET to return education, employment and training. Additionally, the Warwickshire Supported Employment Service supports young people and adults with learning disabilities and/or autism to gain paid and sustainable employment. Further, the Coventry and Warwickshire WorkWell programme supports young people and adults with Mental Health and Health Barriers. Further details of these programs are available above.</p>

Priority Two: WMW Leadership and Management Skills

Action /Activity / Milestone	Partners involved	Method of implementation and outcomes expected	Progress status and timescales
Creation of a new, flexible programme of Leadership and Management training, focusing on employers' request for short, modular training and/or a microcredit approach	<p>LSIF Project 6 – <i>Systems Approach to Employer Engagement</i> Project lead – BMet plus 11 delivery partners -</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. City of Wolverhampton College 2. Coventry College 	<p>LSIF Project 6 – <i>Systems Approach to Employer Engagement</i></p> <p>Development of a leadership and management course was planned, specialising within the leadership</p>	<p>LSIF Project 6 – <i>Systems Approach to Employer Engagement</i></p> <p>This project has developed six free to access, 30-minute Leadership and Management modules. These are offered to employers via the Skills West Midlands and Warwickshire employer-facing for all FE providers. Courses are hosted on https://skillswmw.com/leadership-management-courses/</p>

	3. Coventry & Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce Training 4. Dudley College of Technology 5. Halesowen College 6. Primary Goal Ltd 7. Queen Alexandra College 8. Solihull College and University Centre 9. South and City College Birmingham 10. Walsall College 11. Warwickshire College	and management skills focus, the intention being to develop a pilot short, modular based training facility for SMEs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategy development • Performance management • Project management • Change management 	
Creation of new, flexible programmes of Leadership and Management training focused on specialist areas of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digitisation • Advancement of new technologies • Transition to Net Zero focusing on employers' request for short, modular training and/or a microcredit approach 	LSIF Project 3: <i>Wider Green Skills</i> Project lead: Fircroft College, plus 10 delivery partners: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. BMet 2. Coventry College 3. Dudley College of Technology 4. Halesowen College 5. NWSLC 6. Queen Alexandra College 7. Solihull College and University Centre 8. South and City College Birmingham 9. Walsall College 10. Warwickshire College WCC via AEB funding	LSIF Project 3: <i>Wider Green Skills</i> Green skills leadership training to be offered to businesses across the region, working with WMCA/WCC to align provision with regional employer needs.	LSIF Project 3: <i>Wider Green Skills</i> Green Skills Leadership Training modules have not yet been developed and will be a focus from 2025. WCC have indicated support for this approach, suggesting that where appropriate future AEB contracts could be offered more broadly. Throughout the Warwickshire County Council Business Skills Support Team's engagement, senior leaders have discussed priority training needs and it has been reported that the focus on training seems to steer more towards operational demands and retaining staff. As such, the following local investment has been aligned to digitisation and the transition to net zero: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills Escalator Fund (£750 of funded training up to £3750 per business) • 50 plus Skills Investment Fund (£1000 towards Training x 5 employees = £5000) • Small Business Apprenticeship Levy Fund (£750,000 of levy funding shared with Warwickshire businesses) funded a number of management apprenticeships. • Additional Levy Donorship (Supporting other large organisations to invest their Apprenticeship Levy funds with SME's wanting to employ or upskill apprentices) • Green Skills Salary Support Programme (£2000 per person supported into post which links to green, digital or sustainable agendas).
Consider whether the Skills Bootcamp model for both general and specialist Leadership and Management training is a good model to take forward to cater for those looking for a larger programme of training from the outset Skills Bootcamps are available in similar subjects so could be funded as such: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100% funded by DfE/ WMCA for eligible individuals seeking employment/career change • 10% (SME)/30% (Large employer) of cost to be funded by employers for existing workforce 			

Priority Three: WMW Essential Skills

Action /Activity / Milestone	Partners involved	Method of implementation and outcomes expected	Progress status and timescales
Creation of a new, flexible, short course programme of essential employability skills Further promote existing training available through Multiply for increasing adult numeracy skills Pilot use of Skills Builder scheme for employability skills already being used by some providers and supported by Government	LSIF Project 4 – <i>Essential Digital Skills</i> Project lead: Halesowen College, plus 10 delivery partners - <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. BMet 2. City of Wolverhampton College 3. Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce Training 	LSIF Project 4 – <i>Essential Digital Skills</i> This project aimed to support businesses and residents by providing the essential digital skills needed for employment. The focus was on engaging hard-to-reach learners. Each delivery partner delivered a discrete project in response to complement their existing provision: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Halesowen College planned investment in resources to teach four additional groups, new 	The project lead provider for LSIF Project 4 judges the project to be on track relating to the implementation of new equipment and software, the number of learners engaged, and employers satisfied with the impact of essential digital skills provision. 12 providers are bringing digital learning to hard-to-reach learners and provide them with essential skills for employment Capability and capacity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most investment has been in kit and software including investment in upgrading of static and mobile facilities; 17 new learning areas created including a bus • Four immersive learning spaces have been created

Pilot use of work experience programmes to support students to translate classroom knowledge into workplace skills - specifically designed to tackle essential skill areas	4. Coventry College 5. Dudley College 6. Fircroft College 7. Primary Goal 8. Solihull College and University Centre	IT kit, a bus to use for mobile outreach, a full IT suite at Trinity Point.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 65 staff trained – at last count
Pilot use of a mentoring or coaching programme for employers to help them to support new entrants to their business to develop essential skills	9. South and City College Birmingham 10. Walsall College	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BMet planned to upgrade and kit out two rooms with desktops, monitors, TV and mobile connectivity, one in each year of the project. City of Wolverhampton College planned additional marketing and employer activity, plus a range of new equipment. CW Chamber Training planned to fund staff to deliver additional sessions and to train staff. Capital would include upgrade of four rooms with desktops and printers, meeting boards, licences and laptops and iPads for outreach work and further mobile devices in year 2. 	<p>Implementation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some additional delivery to new learners e.g. Chamber Training targeted those in hospitality and self-employed hairdressing – 236 learners in 114 organisations. 3 new level 3 courses developed (not planned) 8 new courses have been approved for funding by WMCA and a further 11 may be approved subject to a business case.
Creation of short course provision in digital to fill any existing gaps in essential digital skill areas, for example through AEB community learning and National Careers Service Skills Toolkit	WCC via broader funding (e.g. UKSPF)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coventry College funded staffing to deliver digital training academy sessions in the college and community, plus the required CPD and the associated marketing activity. A digital training academy was planned along with refurbishment and kit-out of two rooms and devices for mobile learning. 	<p>Impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1,693 learners are benefitting from new resources 52 employers say the training is meeting their needs <p>Details of activities undertaken by each of the partners on the project are available above.</p>
<p>Considerations of different needs of different target groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training of new entrants through 16-19 provision Upskilling for adults in the workforce Reskilling for adults considering a career change Pre-employment support for unemployed adults and NEETs <p>Key employer request across all sectors - modular, short course training to fit in around business need and timescales.</p> <p>Maximise existing approaches to training by diversifying into new subjects and geographies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Skills Bootcamp models Adult Skills Fund funded short courses DWP in work programmes Sector Work-based Academy Programmes (SWAPs) Prince's Trust programmes 	WMCA supporting as appropriate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dudley College requested to support upskilling of some staff, remission for curriculum development and some marketing materials/activity. They planned to extend the Skills Shop at Merry Hill into neighbouring unit and for that to offer essential digital skills in the community. Fircroft College planned additional resource for curriculum planning, delivery and training, the creation of a hub with PCs and cabling and purchase of a trolley and laptops for outreach work. Solihull College and University Centre planned the creation of two Transportable Digital Classrooms one each year South and City College Birmingham planned to upskill two staff members in digital skills, devote more time and resource for marketing and engagement to understand needs and develop a TNA/skills scan for businesses and individuals. Equipment would be additional laptops, iPads and a portable laptop trolley. Walsall College planned the set up of two mobile digital classrooms to use across the borough in community locations, one each year. 	<p>WCC have suggested that there is an opportunity to blend broader funding into pilots such as UKSPF, to support some of these indicative actions.</p> <p>Warwickshire Adult and Community Learning also deliver essential digital skills qualifications (as part of a wider range of support) at E3 and L1 to adults across Warwickshire who are often furthest away from the labour market or higher level qualifications – with a particular focus on over 50s. Taster courses and short training sessions are offered as an introduction to EDSQ.</p>

Wider Considerations

Action /Activity / Milestone	Partners involved	Method of implementation and outcomes expected	Progress status and timescales
Collaborative Engagement			
<p>Establish a WMW Skills Quality Mark to create a consistent and trusted brand for provision across WMW Concept: Shared identity for collaborative employer engagement across WMW using the existing mechanisms already in place at FE providers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding sought to develop and pilot, and to increase employer engagement capacity of each provider Network of local signposting services according to what works best for the location Shared brand gives consistency across the local area Network ensures service can act across the WMW geography as a whole but is accessed locally 	<p>LSIF Project 6 – <i>Systems Approach to Employer Engagement</i></p> <p>Project lead – BMet, plus 11 delivery partners -</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> City of Wolverhampton College Coventry College Coventry & Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce Training Dudley College of Technology Halesowen College Primary Goal Ltd Queen Alexandra College Solihull College and University Centre South and City College Birmingham Walsall College Warwickshire College 	<p>LSIF Project 6 – <i>Systems Approach to Employer Engagement</i></p> <p>The insights element involved, as referenced above, investment in two pieces of deep-dive research to build on the data collection and research from the LSIP and Combined Authority by interrogating data through qualitative led research within each priority sector and pulling together Further Education and training provider operating models.</p> <p>Branding exercise planned for the creation of a shared brand in similar ethos to Midlands Innovation and GBSIoT, enabling providers to retain their own brands while providing a shared value-led brand and asset pack to support employer engagement across the WMW</p> <p>The intention is to create a network of providers across the local area where a consistent approach to, for example, training needs analysis is offered to employers. This will be developed through the ERB and WMCA/WCC to ensure coverage across the local area using the results of the deep dive research as a baseline.</p> <p>Building on the work started in the LSIP to further the develop the website and App utilising the data from research stage and providing a platform for shared access by both employers and providers including provider information, data driven information on product and programme availability, best practice resources and ROI led video case studies.</p> <p>Events, Advertising and Communication Campaigns:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A communication and awareness campaign to the local employer and business community including traditional PR, social media, shared advertising campaigns and employer events and conference in partnership with the ERB and WMCA. Marketing and awareness raising to local employers and business community through a developed tactical campaign including traditional PR, social media, shared 	<p>The project lead provider for LSIF Project 6 judges the project to be completely on track, they are very confident that the KPIs relating to staff training and development will be met.</p> <p>Headlines:</p> <p>The industry insights reports are available to the public and three priority sector reports are being used by providers to plan provision to meet needs.</p> <p>The Skills West Midlands and Warwickshire (Skills WM+W) brand has been developed, adopted by providers and is gaining traction with the business community. A key asset is the website, which is a go-to place for businesses.</p> <p>The arrangements for governance of the Skills WM+W have been agreed, a membership model is being developed and the ongoing sustainability of the brand is planned for.</p> <p>A multi-channel campaign has been run to drive awareness using the slogan 'Your Business is Our Business'</p> <p>The providers are presenting to stakeholders under this umbrella brand at a number of high-profile sector events (see below)</p> <p>Significant progress has been made with bringing together and training business-facing colleagues across all members to ensure that engagement with businesses is consistent and all opportunities to support businesses are taken.</p> <p>Insights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whitecap Consulting have carried out an extensive Insights activity (as outlined above). CWM Consulting has carried out a review of current employer engagement team models and approaches across colleges and training providers. The report feeds into the discussions around the standardised approach under Skills WM+W. This means that providers have strong evidence to enable their employer engagement and up-to-date market data for the projects working on priority sectors. <p>Brand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are Liquid was contracted to develop a new brand and brand identity with involvement of all partners. This is called Skills West Midlands and Warwickshire (Skills WM+W) and was successfully rolled out in mid-March. All providers have had the brand assets and guidelines and are currently using the new logo on their website and co-branding employer facing collateral. Most providers already using the new Skills WM+ W branding. Going forward, the brand will be further developed as the business engagement teams unify their service approach. <p>Business engagement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providers and Stakeholders (WMCA, Chamber, Birmingham Ladder) have worked together via workshops to develop the new Skills WM+W service offer. Working groups looked at marketing and comms (brand rollout) and models of working for employer engagement teams including the use of a common ONA tool.
<p>Skills Quality Mark criteria and tracking of signposting and outcomes ensures independence of service</p> <p>Retaining local access points reduces perception of competition, replaces with collaboration</p> <p>Where FE providers are already including training needs analyses or similar in their engagement with businesses, consider whether creating consistency between providers would be beneficial</p> <p>Increased</p> <p>Employer Engagement and Facilitation resource is needed by post-16 providers - not possible with current funding constraints and recruitment difficulties</p>			
<p>Delivery of awareness raising and employer engagement campaigns using WMW Skills Quality Mark to promote post-16 education and training across WMW including Apprenticeships, T Levels, Supported Internships, Workforce Development training, Skills Bootcamps, SWAPs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistent branding Centrally produced materials to support local campaigns Social media campaigns - consistent and complementary Centrally tracked to avoid duplication but encourage complementarity Activity doesn't need to be additional or replace any existing individual provider activities. 			
<p>Create a central repository for skills data from employers including information from training needs analyses and informal feedback on future skills needs.</p> <p>Expansion of WMW LSIP website currently being developed</p> <p>https://www.insight-unlocked.co.uk/westmidlands-region/home.html</p>			

		<p>advertising campaigns. Social media campaigns - consistent and complementary, employer engagement events</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Away days and a training programme for business development colleagues and sales teams have taken place. • The providers working in the three West Midlands Innovate UK consortia with WMCA are preparing to present the innovation hub offer through the Skills WM+W offer, website and branding. <p>Website and App</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are Liquid were commissioned to develop the Skillswmw.com site which launched in March 2024. • This is undergoing ongoing development and will be maintained by Skills WM+W membership contributions going forward. <p>Events, Advertising and Communication Campaigns:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three employer events were hosted in mid-March, in the Black Country, Birmingham and Warwick. At the events the Whitecap reports were launched along with the Skills WM+W proposition. They were attended by employers. The events were run by East Village. • A PR campaign was run by a local company focusing on skills in the four priority sectors and using the tagline: "Your business is our business" • Ad campaign was developed with input from the providers and which leans heavily on the new brand and focuses on the four priority sectors. The strapline was "your business is our business" • Further events were hosted by Skills WM+W – An event for businesses providing supported internships and a high-profile anniversary event of Skills WM+W in May attended by the Minister for Skills and the Mayor of West Midlands. At both events employers received awards in recognition of their contribution to skills. • In addition Skills WM+W was represented at a number of priority sector events including the WM Digital Skills Consortium, the Construction Conference, Birmingham Tech Week and a key focus is on the Construction B2B event in June 2025. <p>Collaboration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A piece of work is underway to explore how the providers, under the collective might of Skills WM+W can contribute to local priorities around youth unemployment and the Mayor's Youth Plan. <p>To address challenges in attracting young people to local industries, Warwickshire County Council has established the Future Destination Hub, to support young people who are NEET to return education, employment and training. Funded by UKSPF The Hub works with al education partners to support the young person to explore multiple sectors and carve a route to a positive destination.</p> <p>Additionally, the Warwickshire Supported Employment Service supports young people and adults with learning disabilities and/or autism to gain paid and sustainable employment. The WSES team work with employers to explore skills gaps and carve specific jobs to bridge such gaps. Individuals are then coached into such jobs with a package of training to support them to embed well into their role and the organisation.</p> <p>Further, the Coventry and Warwickshire WorkWell Programme supports young people and adults with Mental Health and Health Barriers.</p> <p>The Warwickshire County Council Business Skills Support team engage with businesses across Warwickshire to support business leaders to understand the multiple opportunities to onboard young people from education (post 16) and shape appropriate</p>
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			<p>job opportunities for those seeking employment. The team offer 1:1 and group support, offering advice and guidance on the multiple opportunities and supporting the employer to understand which route might be the best fit for the business and their skills needs.</p> <p>In addition to this, the Warwickshire Careers Hub delivers locally led Careers Fairs - delivered in each district and borough across Warwickshire, students were invited to meet local employers and explore the future careers available. Employers were encouraged to engage with students and highlight their onboarding approaches, the skills they look for and what career progression looks like.</p> <p>To further the ambitions of the LSIP, and in support of the wider work being undertaken across the West Midlands and Warwickshire to address the priorities of the Plan, the ERB has collaborated with LSIF project leads and FE providers across the region (including ITPs, as stated at the outset of this report), to amplify key messaging and engage employers in the local skills system. In Stage 2 the Chamber has, through combined efforts with Providers and Stakeholders, engaged in events with over 260 employers in the local area. The ERB has encouraged employers to take up apprentices, offer work placements (e.g., T Level Industry Placements, Path2Apprenticeships), promote learning and training programmes for upskilling and reskilling existing employees (e.g., Skills Bootcamps, Job Rotation, ILM training), use apprenticeship levy transfers, access the leadership modules on SkillsWMW.com and build closer, innovative relationships with FE providers to address mutual challenges.</p>
Pathways into employment			
<p>Determine how providers can add value to existing services, initiatives and aspirations stated in current regional plans.</p> <p>FE providers to support increased employer engagement with the aim of involving employers in defining pathways into employment and promoting those opportunities.</p> <p>Ensuring employers are aware of the opportunities to use T Level Industry Placements, other work experience, Supported Internships and Apprenticeships as tools to create their own workforce pipeline. To include piloting of initiatives that test the best ways to achieve positive outcomes.</p>	<p>LSIF Project 6 FE Providers</p> <p>WMCA and WCC</p>	<p>WMCA Employment and Skills Strategy sets out a clear vision for enabling an integrated employment and skills system that will stimulate economic growth, deliver better outcomes for employers and residents and support strong and inclusive communities, this is in conjunction with the WMCA Plan for Growth, BGWM and West Midlands Growth Company.</p> <p>Warwickshire Skills Hub and Careers Hub offer a range of support from business skills reviews to wider support using a network of employers and training providers.</p> <p>LSIF Project 6 (as above) seeks to improve employer understanding and engagement with existing initiatives.</p>	<p>In the Get Britain Working Paper the Secretary of State for the DWP outlined the long-term ambition to achieve an 80% employment rate. One of the initial steps towards this has been a focus on employer engagement. The DWP Employer Commitment outlines the minimal level of service employers can expect from their local Jobcentre. It is about offering a consistent and standardised approach to employer engagement across the whole of the country. Ultimately, the ambition is to actively contribute to the recruitment of new employees for our employers and partners in a speedy, professional manner. DWP have committed to ensuring that they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a fantastic professional service wherever we are in the country. • Deliver the employer's requirements at pace and with professionalism. • Ensure fair, inclusive, and robust recruitment processes that attract, engage, and retain top talent. • Fill stakeholder opportunities with candidates whose values align with their organisation, while promoting diversity, equity, and equal opportunities at every stage. • Create a recruitment experience that is transparent, respectful, and reflective of our commitment to excellence and integrity, thereby improving people's quality of life now and in the future. <p>To support this across Central England, DWP are piloting new ways of working, including creating a new Regional Recruitment team. This team's remit will be to focus on engaging with local employers who employ between 50-250 employees, to look to build relationships and support recruitment through Jobcentres.</p> <p>The WMCA and DWP are also now in year two of the Path 2 Apprenticeship programme, stimulating apprenticeship participation via a pre-employment support offer that enables</p>

			<p>young people who are Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET) and between the ages of 19-29 to enter a range of quality apprenticeships across the region which align with the local and regional labour market to link residents with good quality jobs.</p> <p>Creating and enabling pathways into good jobs is a key priority of the West Midlands Mayor through his Jobs for Everyone and Growth for Everyone priorities. This means, in addition to the examples funded and supported by the WMCA throughout this progress report, WMCA has continued to utilise its full levers, investments and relationships to champion, convene and fund initiatives that will bring about inclusive economic growth. For example, in February, the WMCA launched a new programme – Youth Path – in partnership with Movement to Work (MtW), an employer-focussed charity that supports marginalised/NEET young people benefit from work placement experience with employers as part of the Mayor's Youth Plan and target to help 20,000 young people with work experience, placements and training opportunities.</p> <p>The impact to date of LSIF Project 6 in this area is summarised above.</p> <p>Warwickshire County Council's Destination Work Programme has been set up to support adults to receive employment support and training to enter local employment opportunities. Funded by UKSPF the programme works with local employers to shape their roles to offer good quality and training to those who are seeking employment.</p> <p>Additionally, Warwickshire Adult and Community Learning (ACL) engage adults who are often furthest away from the labour market or higher level qualifications. They deliver a range of essential skills that adults need in order to move into and progress in employment, including extensive English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision, maths and English up to level 2 and essential digital skills, as identified by LSIF Priority Three and LSIF Project 4. Warwickshire ACL offer Essential Digital Skills Qualifications (EDSQ) E3 and L1 courses to communities across Warwickshire, with a special focus on over 50s. Taster courses and short training sessions are offered as an introduction to EDSQ.</p>
Expertise into Education			
WMW localised awareness raising campaign for careers in FE, designed in support of Government's 'Teach in FE' campaign	WCC/WMCA and FE partners	New provision has recently been created with FE via UKSPF and Skills Bootcamp funds, to embrace new technology.	WMCA are funding a new pilot programme with Dudley College to grow the FE teacher workforce. This pilot will inform its future work and discussions with the Department for Education to help address skilled subject shortages.
Pilot a number of innovative solutions to bring skills into FE from industry.	LSIF Project 2 Providers (as above)	WCC are working on a Skills Share pilot which funds industry to deliver sessions and upskill existing staff and are keen to move this forward on a larger scale.	As a result of LSIF project 2 (as above), partners trained and upskilled 60 staff members (against a target of 40). Nine staff members have undertaken industry placements.
Targeted employer engagement programme to directly support employers who want to provide expertise into FE.		As referenced above, other LSIF projects, including project 2, are also seeking to utilise industry placements.	<p>The Warwickshire County Council Sector Skills Share Pilot is now working with FE and a £50,000 pilot budget to assist the integration of industry supporting technical delivery due to the absence of a supply of adequately experienced tutors with current industry knowledge.</p> <p>Further, the Warwickshire Careers Hub is delivering:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educate the educator is a programme delivered to Warwickshire Career leaders in secondary schools, colleges and 6th forms. The programme offers industry led workshops upskilling career leaders on sector specific skills needs ensuring they build adequate skills knowledge to offer good quality careers advice and guidance to the young people of Warwickshire.

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher Encounters is a programme which brings curriculum teachers away from the classroom to work with employers and gain a good understanding of industry skills needs. Teachers are targeted to blend industry knowledge into the curriculum, and this is quality measured through the Gadsby Benchmarks.
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Annexes – other

Annex 2: WMW LSIP Governance Structure

The Chamber has continued to coordinate meetings of the WMW LSIP Operational Board to ensure the LSIP is effectively integrated into local strategies in a mutually reinforcing manner. This ongoing effort includes close collaboration with organizations focused on increasing learners' demand for new skills.

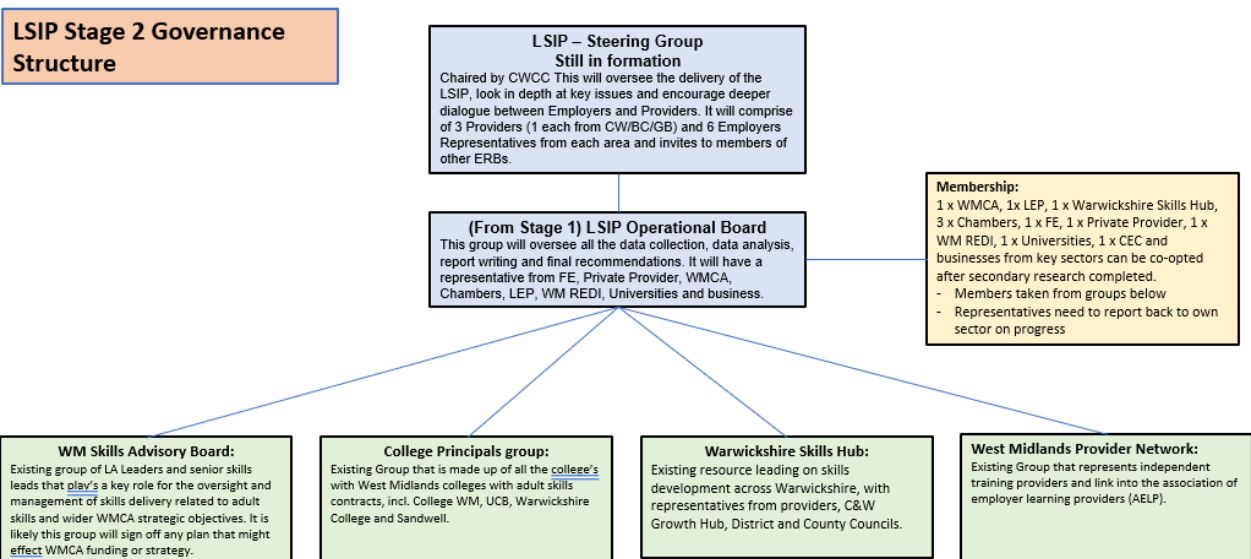
The board has been proactive in gathering feedback on the effectiveness of changes implemented in response to each of the WMW LSIP priorities and broader considerations.

In organizing these meetings, the Chamber persistently seeks to identify and engage new stakeholders, where relevant, who were not involved in Stage 1 of the LSIP.

The Operational Board comprises the following members:

Name	Organisation
Corin Crane	C&W Chamber
Raj Kandola	Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce
Emily Stubbs	Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce
Gemma Edwards	Black Country Chamber
Aleks Subic	Aston University
Mahfia Watkinson	WMCA
Delma Dwight	Black Country Consortium
Spencer Wilson	Birmingham City Council
David Ayton	Warwickshire Skills Hub
Derrin Kent	West Midlands Provider Network
Lowell Williams	WM Colleges Network
Anne Green	WM REDI
Angela Tellyn	Careers & Enterprise Company
Stephen Mitchell	Make UK
Peter Husband	Warwickshire Colleges Group
Richard Smith	DWP JCP

The following organogram provides an overview of the WMW LSIP Governance Structure.



Annex 3: Ongoing Business Engagement – Survey and Focus Group Analysis

Survey Analysis

Through surveying, the West Midlands and Warwickshire LSIP has gathered further, primarily quantitative insights on the strategic priorities and green and digital skills needs of employers across the local area.

The West Midlands and Warwickshire Local Skills Improvement Plan gathered both quantitative and qualitative insights into the strategic priorities and digital and green skills needs of the local business community. The Plan presents data that is statistically relevant and broadly representative of the business demography as a whole, in regard to both size and broad industry sector from over 1000 engagements with employers operating across the West Midlands and Warwickshire between 10th January and 31st March 2023.

Following this, Stage 2 of the LSIP conducted further surveying between 1st September 2023 and 29th February 2024. This was intended to act as a ‘pulse check’ to support identification of changes in business sentiment regarding post-16 technical education and training over time. Details of this are available in the 2024 Progress Report to the LSIP, available [here](#).

Additional surveying was conducted between 1st February - 31st March 2025. The questions included were largely a repetition of those asked in Stage 1 surveying between 1st February to 3rd March 2023, however, the length of the survey was significantly reduced in an attempt to combat ‘survey fatigue’ reported amongst businesses.

The below insights are intended to be a ‘pulse check’ to support identification of changes in business sentiment regarding post-16 technical education and training over time.

46 employers completed the survey, which was distributed by the Chambers of Commerce through engagement at in-person events, social media promotion and email marketing.

The tables below reflect the distribution of responses by size and industry sector (as self-reported):

Business Size	Percentage of survey respondents
1-9	43%
10-49	39%
50-249	15%
250+	2%

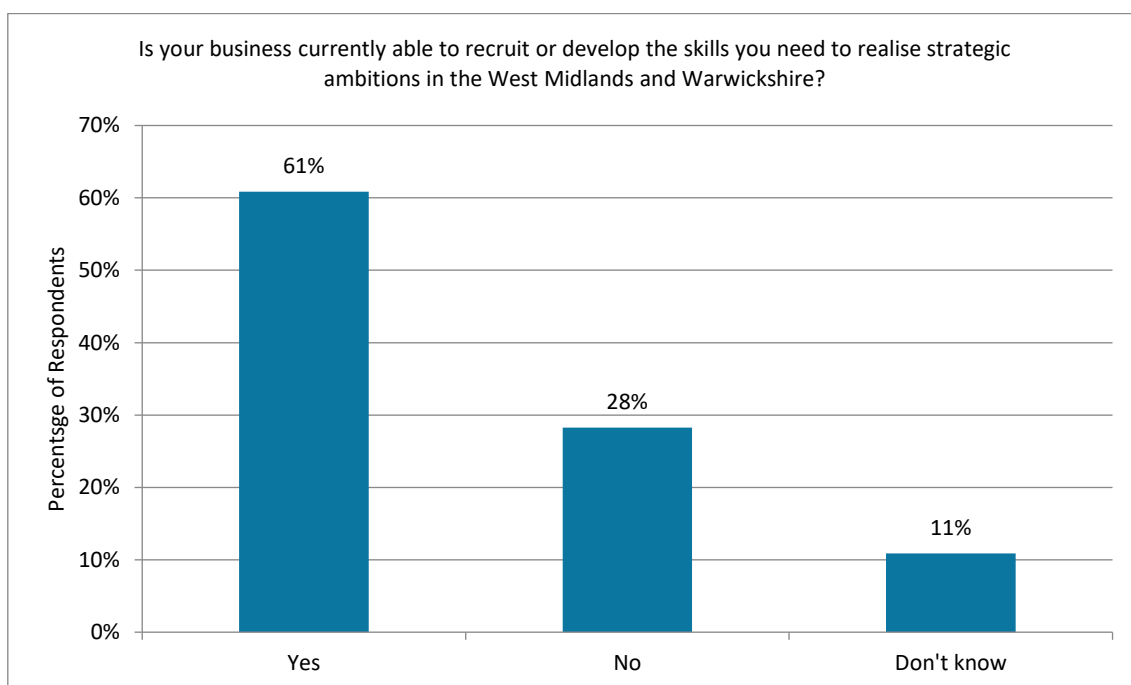
Business Sector	Percentage of survey respondents
Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing	2 %
Mining, Quarrying & Utilities	0%
Manufacturing	7%
Construction	7%
Motor Trades	0 %
Wholesale	4%
Retail	7%
Transport & Storage (inc Postal)	2%
Accommodation & Food Services	7%
Information & Communication	11%
Finance & Insurance	2%
Property	4%
Professional, Scientific & Technical	7%

Business Administration & Support Services	15%
Education	11%
Health	4%
Public Administration	2%
Other (please specify)	20%

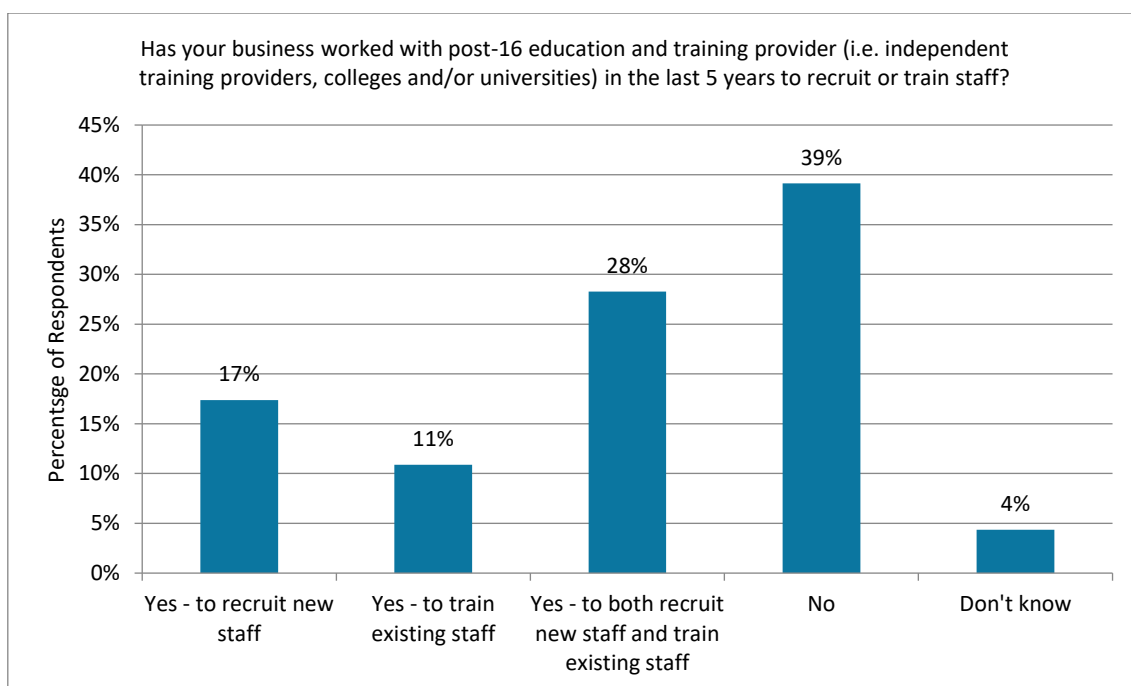
Unless stated otherwise, analyses of the quantitative survey findings in this report are based on all respondents less those who chose not to answer specific questions. Where figures do not sum to 100%, it is due either to rounding and/ or participants being able to select multiple answers. The following graphs show results from the total number of participants involved.

Please note that due to the limited sample size and the reduced length of the survey, the below analysis does not provide a direct comparison of Stage 1 and Stage 2 survey results. Caution should be exercised accordingly in regards to the below insights. Any differences from previous LSIP findings are only indicative of areas which may require further investigation, which will be taken into consideration in ongoing LSIP Stage 2 research activities.

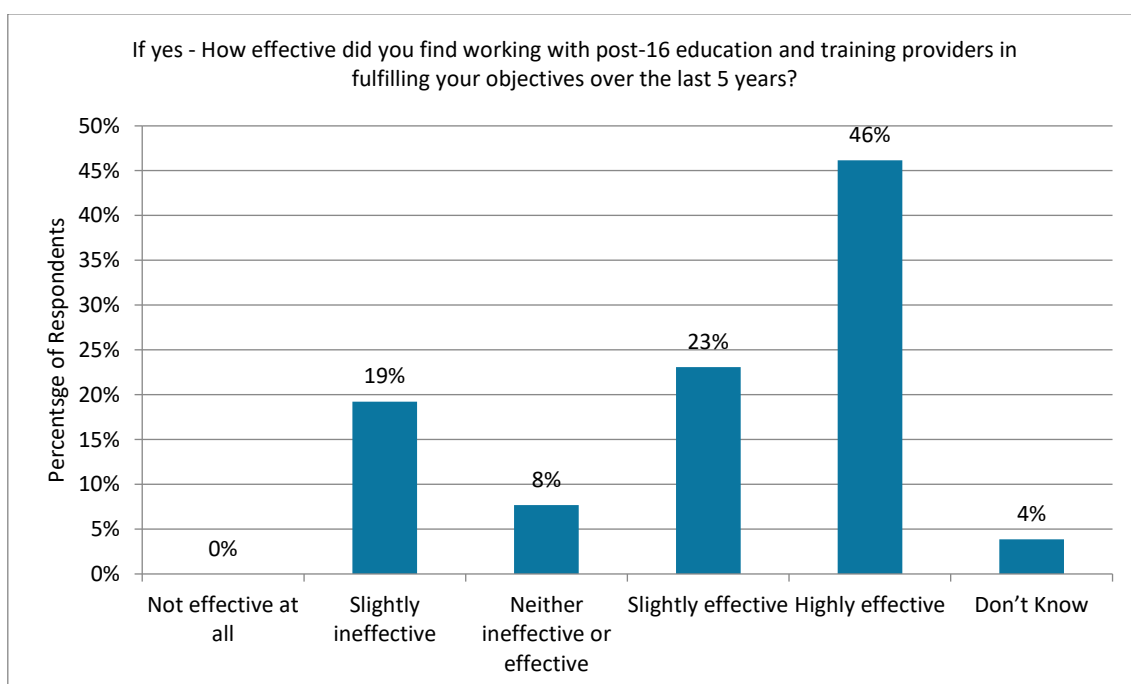
Analysis



Almost two thirds (61%) of the respondents to the survey reported that their business is currently able to recruit or develop the skills they need to realise strategic ambitions in the West Midlands and Warwickshire, however, more than a quarter (28%) stated otherwise.



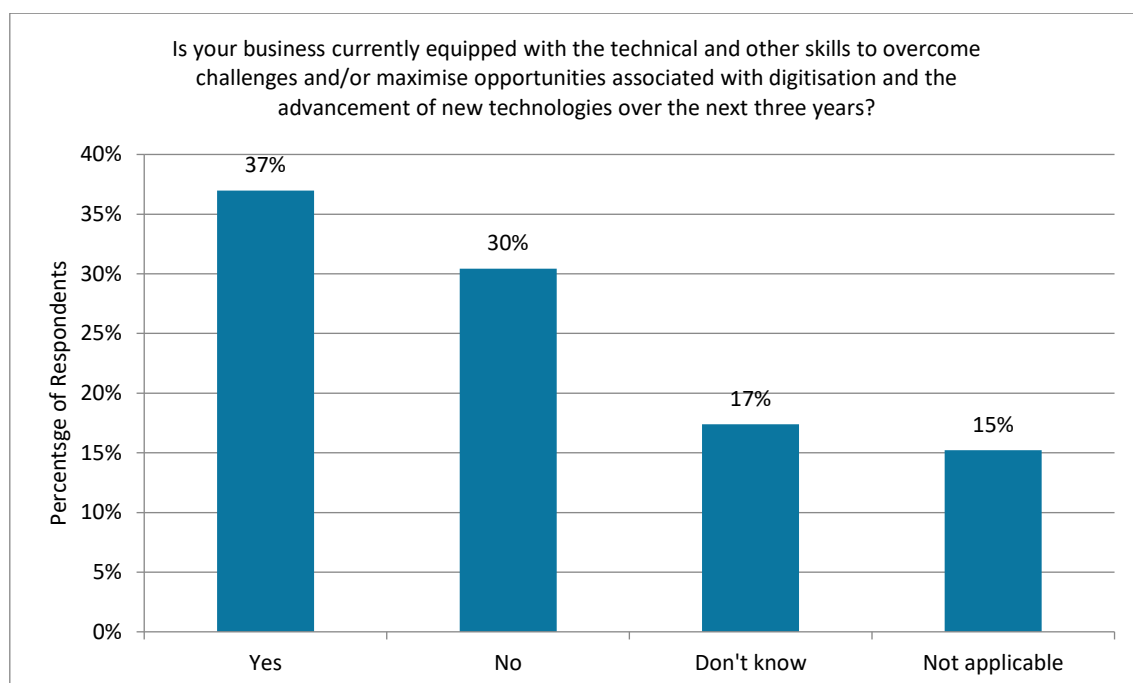
39% of respondent businesses indicated that they had not worked with post-16 education and training provider (i.e. independent training providers, colleges and/or universities) in the last 5 years to recruit or train staff. Those that had, had most frequently done so to both recruit new staff and train existing staff (28%). 17% had done so only to recruit new staff, while a further 11% had exclusively done so to train existing staff.



A majority of survey respondents who had worked with post-16 education and training provider (i.e. independent training providers, colleges and/or universities) in the last 5 years to recruit and/or train staff found the experience effective in fulfilling their objectives (69%). Notably, 46% stated that the experience was highly effective. Just 19% reported that working post-16 education and training providers in the last 5 years had been slightly ineffective in fulfilling their objectives, and no respondents stated that doing so had not been effective at all.

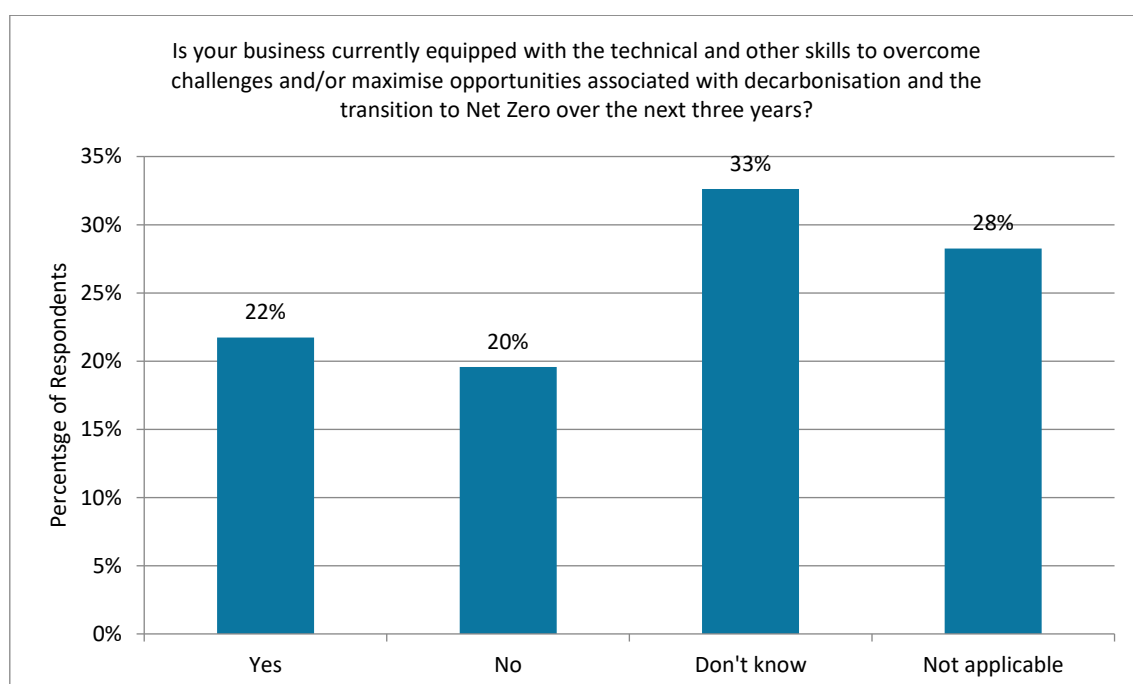
Survey respondents who had not worked with post-16 education and training provider (i.e. independent training providers, colleges and/or universities) in the last 5 years to recruit and/or train staff provided a range of reasons for this. Most frequently, they stated that such engagement was not applicable to their business or not needed. Some employers

reported that this was due to budget constraints and/or not knowing what provision was available. One respondent cited a lack of interest from staff.



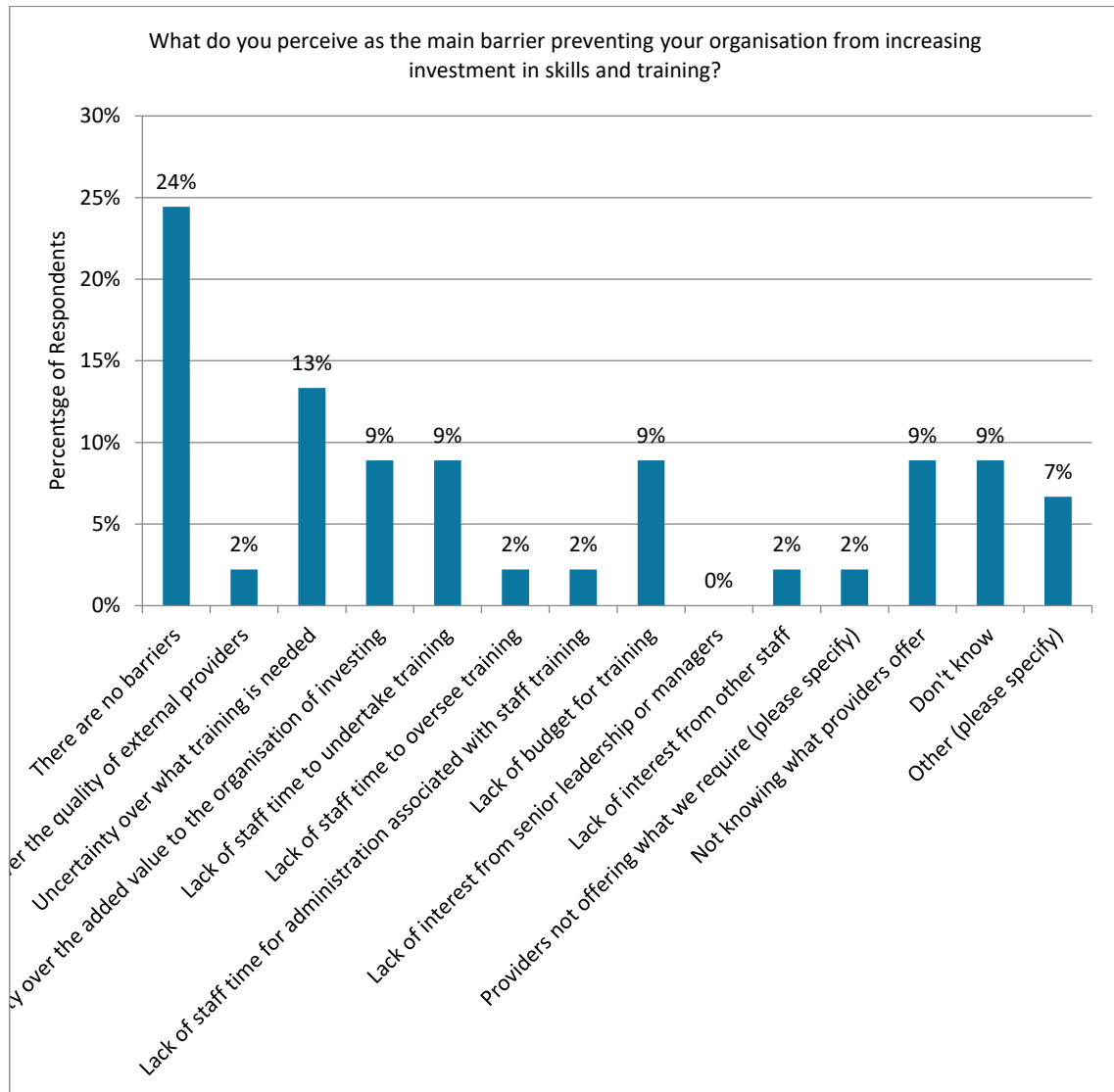
Just over a third (37%) of survey respondents indicated that their business is currently equipped with the technical and other skills to overcome challenges and/or maximise opportunities associated with digitisation and the advancement of new technologies over the next three years. However, 30% stated that this was not the case, and a further 17% were unsure.

Among those who reported not having such skills, many had no plans to address this. One discussed utilising student internship projects and potentially a Knowledge Transfer Partnership. Several expressed that they were not sure where to start – two of which referenced concerns about if and how they should be using artificial intelligence tools. Some cited recruitment and internal training.



Respondents were most frequently unsure as to whether their businesses were equipped with the technical and other skills to overcome challenges and/or maximise opportunities associated with decarbonisation and the transition to Net Zero over the next three years (33%). A further 28% reported that this was not applicable to their organisation. The remainder of the respondents were almost equally split between those equipped with such skills (22%) and those not equipped with such skills (20%).

Most of those who stated their business did not have these skills either had no plans to address this or were unsure of plans to address this. Some stated that they plan to collaborate with others to address the issue.



24% of respondents indicated that they do not perceive there to be any barriers preventing their organisation from increasing investment in skills and training. Among those that did perceive barriers, these were most frequently uncertainty over what training is needed (13%), uncertainty over the added value to the organisation (9%), lack of staff time to undertake training (9%), lack of budget for training (9%), and not knowing what providers offer (9%).

Focus Group Analysis

Through a series of focus groups, in the last year, the West Midlands LSIP has gathered further, qualitative insights into the priority sectors identified by the LSIP as based on those sectors which have the most influence on the LSIP's cross-cutting themes of digital and green skills and facing acute skills gaps.

Focus groups coordinated jointly by the Chambers and the Ladder Foundation between December 2024 and February 2025 sought to develop the LSIP's ongoing understanding of the skills challenges faced by local employers in these sectors, and how these are evolving.

These focus groups each followed a script based on that used by the original LSIP research in 2022/23, designed by the Chambers, with the support of the WMW LSIP Operational Board.

Focus Group Script

5 minutes: Welcome and introductions, Chair

- Chair to set out the background to the research and confirm informed consent for participation
- Chair to clarify recording arrangements and inform participants on the structure of the session

20 minutes: Introductions from participants and summary of business activity and general overview of business performance & looking ahead to challenges and opportunities

- Each participant to share a short update on their role, nature of the work their organisation specialises in and the area the business is based in and/or operates in, within the West Midlands region. Types of questions to be asked:
 - What are your plans for the next 12 months?
 - Are you looking at new markets?
 - Do you expect to grow or scale back operations?
 - Are you fully staffed?
 - What challenges are they seeing in the workforce to support growth/maintain productivity?
 - What do they see as the skills implications of these challenges and opportunities.

30 minutes: Objective One: gather feedback from businesses on their current and future skills needs

- Are you facing challenges as a result of the labour market?
- Are you facing skills challenges in your business?
- At what level in the business do they see skills challenges? (entry level, clerical, technical, management and senior management)
- In terms of job roles, where do you see the most demand both for now and in the future in your organisation and wider sector? (starting to think about the key skills required in the sector and gaps/future skills needs)
- Have you started to think about how your working practices in the business will need to change to reduce carbon emissions as we move to net zero and industry 4.0? What skills challenges will this present both for your current and future workforce?
- Are there particular skills you struggle to source within the local labour market or further afield (nationally or globally perhaps)? How will you plug those gaps moving forward?
- Have your skills needs been changed in any way by the impacts of Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic, legislative changes – e.g. employer national insurance contributions being increased? Which skills requirements will become even more pressing for your business in light of these developments?
- What are you currently doing or planning to do to meet any respective skills gaps? (e.g. investing in new technologies, emphasis on internally training or perhaps outsourcing activity)

30 minutes: Objective Two: gather feedback from participants on how existing post-16 technical education and training provision can be more agile and responsive to the needs of local businesses

- Are you aware of organisations that currently help businesses meet their skills needs?
- What links does your business currently have and what would you like to do more of, with training providers, colleges and/or universities?
- Do you currently work with schools, training providers, colleges and/or universities in regard to meeting the skills needs within your business? (Either through recruitment of new staff or up-skilling existing staff)?
 - Where yes:
 - What specific skills and skill levels has this been in regard to?
 - What model of training did you utilise? (e.g., apprenticeships, sector based work academy programmes, T levels)
 - Do you use short or long term courses?
 - Has this approach been successful in meeting the needs of the business?
 - Where no:
 - Have you considered doing so previously?
 - Would you consider doing so in the future?
 - What are the reasons why/why not?
- (Whether or not participating businesses currently engage with education and training) – Have you experienced any barriers in engaging with post-16 technical education and training (with schools, training providers, colleges, or universities)?
- How could existing post-16 technical education and training provision better suit the needs of your business? For example, would different models, locations, or length of training better support your organisation?
- What additional support from stakeholders (e.g., WMCA, Local Authorities, Government, Universities) would help organisations in your sector to make the most of post-16 education and training to develop the skills required for your business? (e.g. changes to funding mechanisms, business mentoring, support with skills needs analyses, support identifying appropriate training providers)

5 minutes: Summary and closing remarks

- Chair to summarise the main points discussed
- Chair to ask the participants their key ask of local skills provision in regard to skills requirements
- Chair to ensure respondents understand how information will be used and ensure consent for re-contact if needed
- Thank you and close

Observations and recommendations from these focus groups are presented below.

Focus Group 1: Construction

4th December 2024

Participants:

- 1 local/regional stakeholder representative
- 1 large social housing business
- 2 large construction firms
- 1 medium sized specialist contractor
- 1 small to medium sized architecture business
- 1 sector-specific employer representative organisation

Observations:

- The combination of theoretical learning and practical experience offered by apprenticeships is considered critical for talent development within the construction sector.
- A number of participants expressed disappointment about gaps in architecture provision and difficulties recruiting architects in the region. One referenced actively working with universities to try and address this.
- Participants also highlighted an increasing focus on digital skills, with increasing use of VR in design in particular, and use of drones for surveying.
- One participant referenced disappointment in a reduction in building and quantity surveyor provision in the region.
- Participants were critical of the decision that Level 7 apprenticeships would no longer be funded by the Growth and Skills levy (formerly known as the apprenticeship levy). One business present was currently using L7 apprenticeships for architecture training and had found this highly effective.
- Participants discussed seeing public sector investment shift away from roads and more towards rail and water, highlighting that water projects require very different skillsets and upskilling to facilitate these will be a challenge.
- It was noted that there is not a lot of civil apprenticeships provision but that this has got much better in the WMCA area in the last few years, as a result of trade bodies working with WMCA on civil apprenticeships, groundworks and planned works.
- One large firm stated that they're struggling with skills gaps for solar installation and ground source heat pumps in new builds.
- Some present were engaged in T Levels, and they felt that these provided good introductions to the sector for young people.
- Participants agreed that they did not believe careers advice from schools, FE providers, universities or DWP was adequately representing the opportunities in the sector. It was discussed that people frequently still don't understand 'construction' as an industry and the job prospects available.

Recommendations:

- Stakeholders should review the provision of architecture provision, as well as that for building and quantity surveying, solar installation and ground source heat pumps (some of which are being addressed through the LSIF)
- Government should review announcements concerning Level 7 apprenticeship provision, and the impact this will have on the construction sector
- It was agreed that a modular approach to training would be beneficial to meet evolving needs across the sector, including for water, energy and nuclear projects. It was suggested that a modular approach could make training logistically easier to align with fixed-term projects.
- Careers advisors should receive sector-specific training to improve the quality of information available to young people. One participant also suggested that the sector should do more to inspire young people with the innovative ways in which it is adopting use of new technologies, such as digitally operated cranes and drones.
- Participants expressed interest in development of a regular sector-specific forum for discussions like those had at the focus group, sharing best practice among peer groups.

Focus Group 2: Manufacturing and Engineering

7th February

Participants:

- 1 small to medium sized manufacturer
- 3 large engineering businesses

Observations:

- The SME manufacturing business highlighted challenges recruiting experienced management. To tackle this, they most often tried to develop more junior staff into managers through director-level mentoring, and since receiving guidance from the Chambers, some external training.
- All organisations present were investing in technology to improve process efficiency – and to adapt to new public-sector requirements - but all highlighted challenges with digital literacy, with many staff lacking basic excel skills and struggling to do basic things like use cloud-based file sharing and understand how to access digital calendars in Outlook.
- Participants also raised concerns about communication skills post-pandemic. One larger business referenced having built resilience, communication and basic digital skills into their early careers programmes.
- One larger organisation stated that the removal of Level 7 provision from the Growth and Skills Levy (previously the apprenticeship levy) will have a detrimental impact across their business as a whole – they highlighted that this impact wouldn't just be on senior staff, but also, for example, graduates, who they use apprenticeships to develop as future leaders. The same business said they also presently use their levy funds for Level 7 tax, accountancy and engineering provision.
- One of the large engineering businesses also stated that they have transferred over £1 million of levy funds to their supply chain, including many organisations which, without this funding, would not have been able to afford training.
- The SME manufacturer present stated that they are not sure they currently have the necessary structure, however they would consider taking on apprentices and interns in the future. They feel that better signposting and guidance on what is available is needed, as well as information about funding and how to access this.
- Large employers concurred that the process to access funded training is complex and likely off-putting for SMEs, particularly when it comes to the associated contracts.
- One large employer referenced currently working with DfE on how they can develop provision for future roles, particularly in green energy and nuclear power.
- Two of the large employers had positive feedback about T Levels, saying they were very resource intensive for their businesses to manage but reported that they had recruited some of their first T Level cohorts as apprentices (on permanent contracts), and found that T Levels had prepared candidates well to meet the needs of their businesses.
- One large employer shared that they were trying to support parts of their supply chain which didn't have structured graduate schemes to develop and run these, as well as providing access to their learning platform. Similarly, another large employer discussed trying to better enable their supply chain to offer supported internships.

Recommendations:

- It was suggested that FE providers taking on responsibility for contracting with funders could streamline the process of accessing funded training for SMEs.
- Participants collectively discussed concerns that there remains a misperception of engineering outside of the industry. One large employer discussed working with their supply chain to try and help increase their capacity to engage with education to improve this – there could be potential to build on such best practice regionally.
- Larger business participants discussed that increasing opportunities for them to directly 'train the trainers' could help ensure vocational training and careers education is meeting the needs of industry

Focus Group 3: Digital and ICT

7th February

Participants:

- 1 small software development organisation
- 1 medium-sized IT services business

Observations:

- The software development organisation stated that they can recruit software developers but find it very difficult to find developers who can appreciate the client and end user needs. Similarly, the IT services business estimated that 50% of their workforce was technically good but struggled with a lack of 'business acumen.'
- The importance of lifelong learning in software development in particular was emphasized by the smaller organisation, who stated that they find it difficult to find developers who are or can become good managers, particularly post-covid. As such, they are currently subcontracting project management to American organisations, and have concerns about how they will fill team leader and Chief Technology Officer roles in the future.
- The software development organisation suggested that due to staff having fairly insular roles and wanting to work from home since covid, it has been difficult for the business to build cohesive teams. They stated that this has been a significant issue, restricting productivity and increasing project timescales and costs.
- Both employers highlighted challenges they are currently facing in regards to essential skills such as communication, but also essential digital skills such as use of Microsoft Word, Excel and Outlook.
- The software development organisation raised concerns about over-reliance on AI, citing examples of software engineers producing inadequate reports using AI and submitting them without review.
- The IT services business stated that they have built a skills and competencies profile for all their roles, covering interpersonal skills, tech skills and business skills. They find that staff are keen to develop their tech skills but less interested in training to develop their interpersonal or business skills.
- The IT services business currently employ a high number of apprentices (relative to the size of the organisation) but find that there are no relevant skills bootcamps they can utilise, stating that there seems to be a disproportionate focus on training for coding, when not that many coders are needed in their industry.

Recommendations:

- The IT services company suggested that they would like education providers to be more flexible in releasing students and learners for work experience placements – they stated that despite the productivity cost to the business, they would take on significantly more placements if they could do so year-round and group them into cohorts for efficiency purposes.
- Both organisations expressed interest in rapid, agile, modular training to support rapidly evolving skills requirements, determined by client needs.