Kent & Medway

Local Skills Improvement Plan

August 2023

Funded by UK Government

Kent & Medway Local Skills

This Local Skills Improvement Plan has been approved by the Secretary of State in line with the approval criteria set out in the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022, and in accordance with the LSIP statutory guidance.

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KENT INVICTA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Kent & Medway Local Skills Improvement Plan

1. Introduction

1.1 Building on the information set out in Annex A, we looked at evidence from employers of identified skills gaps and needs. It starts with a review of the trailblazer and follow on survey data, before considering qualitative insights from employers and other material submitted or collated. These qualitative insights principally relate to our focus sectors, although discussions also took place with businesses outside these sectors, in particular the transport and logistics and creative sectors. We then outline the cross-cutting themes that will impact skills and organisations across the spectrum including decarbonisation and digitalisation, SME engagement in skills.

The scale of the challenge: Employer evidence

The national picture

1.2 The **Employer Skills Survey (ESS)** is carried out nationally by the Government every two years, with the most recent survey conducted in 2019 (i.e., before the pandemic). The ESS is statistically robust and involves interviews with around 81,000 employers across the UK[1].

1.3 The 2019 survey indicated that skills gaps and shortages – as reported by employers - were quite widespread, although unevenly distributed across sectors. Nationally, the survey found that 5% of all employers had 'skill shortage vacancies' (i.e., vacancies that could not be filled due to a lack of skills, qualifications, or experience). However, skill shortage vacancies accounted for some 24% of all vacancies – rising to 36% in manufacturing and construction and 48% for skilled trades occupations. 13% of all employers also reported that they had skills gaps within their existing workforce.

1.4 The updated ESS is due later this year (2023), however the employer pulse survey carried out for the Government in 2021 [2] carried out with a much smaller sample of 5,000 employers indicates training and workforce development has reduced, the research indicates a 13% reduction nationally with the lowest recorded level since ESS records started in 2011, some of which is related to the Covid19 pandemic. The report also highlighted that employers in the South East were the least likely to provide skills training.

1.5 In addition, there are sectoral sources of information on national skills gaps and shortages that provide a sound basis for the conversation on a local level and which we will detail in the sector focused information.

Local evidence

1.6 To supplement the national research (and bearing in mind that the full ESS was carried out before the Covid-19 pandemic), we commissioned a **Kent and Medway Employer Skills Survey.** This secured around 900 responses: while smaller in scale and scope than the ESS (and delivered over a much shorter timescale), it provided an insight into local employer perceptions (including those who do not normally engage in strategic skills dialogue).

1.7 The full survey results are set out in Annex C. In relation to **employer skills needs**, the survey found that:

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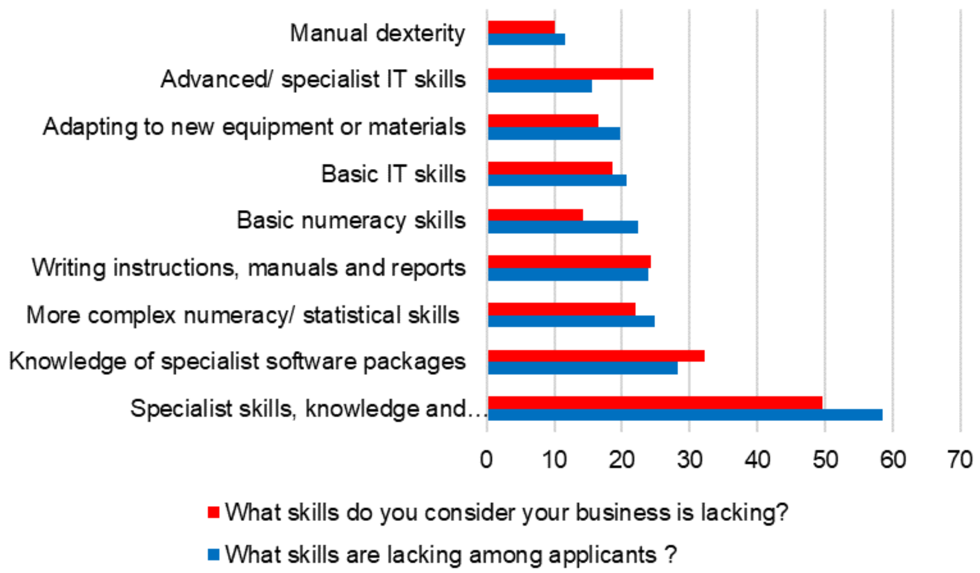
[1] Department for Education (2020), *Employer Skills Survey 2019: Skills Needs*

[2] Department for Education (2022), Employer Pulse Survey 2021

- **Almost half of all businesses said that recruitment was a problem for them**, with 28% of respondents reporting that it was 'sometimes' a problem, and 20% that it was a 'major problem. 35% of businesses also said that they had some gaps within their existing workforce capabilities.

Skills reported as lacking among existing workforce and new recruits.



Source: Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce, employer survey. What skills do you consider your business is lacking?, N=308; what skills are lacking among applicants?, N=432

- The hardest types of roles to recruit to were reported to be professional/ highly skilled technical roles, technical and skilled support roles, and skilled trades (reflecting the national picture cited in the ESS).
- While employers identified a range of skills that they had difficulty in recruiting to, or in which they felt there were gaps in their existing workforce, **'specialist skills' were the most commonly cited**. These might include a range of capabilities, from industry-specific technical knowledge through to an understanding of 'ways of working' that might be gained through experience over time. But the importance of specialist skills gaps potentially highlights the need for quite targeted, industry-specific solutions.
- In relation to **the 'work readiness' of new recruits,** 46% of respondents had recruited directly from full-time education in the past 2-3 years. Of these, 31% said new recruits were "well prepared or very well prepared" for work. But only 20% of *all* survey respondents considered that young people leaving education in general were well prepared or very well prepared. The inference is that those with direct experience of new recruits from the education system have more positive perceptions than those without.

1.8 Dialogue with employers was positive regarding their willingness to engage in reform of the skills system. In terms of the existing workforce, 90% of respondents to the employer skills survey said that they already offer workforce training of some sort (with in-house training the most common form, but with only with 28% currently working with FE colleges). Looking to the future, most employers expressed interest in a wide variety of potential forms of engagement, both for new recruits and the existing workforce:

Employer survey insight: Which of the following applies to you…

	Number	%
We would like to be able to access more short courses	507	55.8
We would consider offering short work experience	464	51.0
We would consider offering longer work experience placements	442	48.6
We would consider offering students industry projects to work on	359	39.5
We would consider hosting student visits at our company	351	38.6
We would consider helping with teaching	355	39.1
We would consider mentoring young people	531	58.4
We would consider advising on the curriculum	379	41.7
Other	19	2.1

Source: Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce, employer survey, SQW analysis. Question: "KICC and its partners are working to make local education and training more relevant. Which of the following applies to you?". N=909

1.1 Set against this, the employer survey explored some of the **barriers to employer participation**. In relation to the existing workforce, employers cited cost pressures (both direct costs and the opportunity/time cost of releasing staff) as reasons for non-engagement: it is likely that this will be especially the case for smaller businesses with more limited management capacity and ability to arrange staff cover. However, information and trust in quality was also a significant barrier: this presents another dimension to the communications issues highlighted in the agenda for action above, although in some sectors, there is a well-established commercial market for industry training.

Employer survey insight: Which of the following are a barrier in terms of training and development for your current workforce?

	Number	%
We can't afford the financial cost	284	31.2
We can't afford to release staff	297	32.7
Lack of interest from staff	154	16.9
We are unsure about the quality and suitability of what is available	273	30.0
We don't have sufficient management capacity to plan	210	23.1
Other	63	6.9
We don't experience any barriers	323	35.5

Source: Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce, employer survey, SQW analysis. Question: "Do you think that any of the following present a barrier in terms of accessing training and development for your existing workforce?". N=909

1.9 Two small scale follow-on surveys were carried out to compliment the main survey carried out as part of the trailblazer. A snapshot survey for which had 103 respondents from across the geography and sectors and one targeting the construction industry which we will detail in the Construction section below. Full results are available in Annex C.

1.10 The snapshot survey showed that:

- Employers are recruiting and planning to continue to recruit, the main recruitment barriers remained technical skills (45%) and qualifications (41%). 55% of employers listed number of applications as the main issue, which ties in with the labour shortages and the shortages of suitably skilled workers we have described.

- Employers are engaging in training (93%), with the two main methods being in-house (58%) and private provision in (35%) and out of region (28%). One of the key elements to be noted is that of all the respondents with 9 or fewer employees, none used the colleges as training providers.
- The main format for small businesses (9 or fewer) was short courses, with engagement in apprenticeship focused on larger organisations (50+ employees), and the main barriers to training especially for the smaller businesses were cost and availability, with location also a strong factor.

An agenda for change

1.2 Three issues are worth noting in this 'agenda for change':

- First, **the agenda is not simply an employer 'demand' for further education action**, although the colleges will have a central role in delivering it. Rather, employers will themselves be key to the better communication of industry opportunity and in translating 'expressed demand' for (for example) additional short course provision into 'revealed preference' – which will itself require a process of ongoing dialogue to ensure that any additional offer meets evolving need.
- Second, **understanding the barriers to meeting these needs is obviously important going forward.** These relate to funding and qualification structures and balancing employer demand with the wider range of objectives that further education colleges have to meet.
- Third (and building on this) **change can be incremental and 'marginal', as well as systemic.** Tackling specific, distinct challenges in the short term where they address the needs of a group of engaged employers can help to make the case and build confidence in the delivery of wider measures in the longer term.

Specifying sector priority needs

1.11 Building on this 'big picture' analysis and conversations with sector groups, it was evident that the main sectors that were the focus of the trailblazer LSIP, construction, manufacturing & engineering and fresh food, and food production, remain, for the reasons stated above key to Kent & Medway skills needs.

1.12 Furthermore, when considering the highest level of need and as set out in our labour and skills analysis, health and social care has a high need for a skilled workforce to allow it to replace an aging workforce with 27% over the age of 55 currently in social care[3]. As the largest sector in the region this need will have a significant impact over the coming 10 years. Therefore, for this updated LSIP, health & social care has become a focus sector.

1.13 Education: A key sector to ensure that the skills need outlined can be addressed and where there is a shortage of tutors, especially in construction and manufacturing and engineering, both key sectors for Kent & Medway,

1.14 As set out above, we would like to highlight the following sectors which have upcoming developments that will require skills considerations in the future:

- **Transport & Logistics:** a large sector in the region and one that will face challenges relating to the net-zero and decarbonisation agenda.
- **Creative Industries:** An important sector within the region with good support structures through the Creative Estuary and the Thames Estuary Production Corridor.

[3] Skills for Care ICS data for Kent & Medway, demographics age table

1.15 The trailblazer LSIP gathered data from a range of sources to assess the specific skills issues faced by employers in the **construction, land-based and manufacturing** sectors. The trailblazer took the approach to carry out one-off focus groups organised by Kent Invicta Chamber. We have not duplicated this effort and have built on this basis.

1.16 In the same approach of avoid duplication, we have worked with and through existing employer groups and forums wherever possible, ensuring that we work together towards the goal of embedding the skills need conversation.

1.17 Working with these groups is essential to the approach taken for this region which focuses on embedding the skills approach with employers and enabling training providers to access employers in a coordinated and meaningful way avoiding where possible duplication and confusion from the employer perspectives.

2. Construction

Industry overview and outlook

2.1 Kent and Medway have a large construction sector, accounting for about 48,000 employee jobs (in addition to high levels of self-employment). Employment growth has been strong in recent years, and the sector is relatively 'over-represented' in terms of its share of total employment in the county. In thinking about future skills needs, key features of the sector include:

- **Sector fragmentation:** the industry is dominated by small and micro businesses, many operating as subcontractors to larger players. This can present challenges in the ability of employers to engage in skills development (given time and cost pressures), although the industry is well 'organised' in Kent and Medway, and there has been strong engagement from the sector with the LSIP process.
- **Cyclical factors:** Industry demand responds to wider economic conditions. This can mean labour shortages in periods of rapid growth, especially if there has been workforce attrition during a previous downturn. However, a major driver of demand in Kent and Medway will be the high levels of house building and infrastructure projects (such as the Lower Thames Crossing) that will come forward in the next few years, and which are likely to be in development for several years.
- **Relatively weak productivity:** Long-term productivity growth in construction lags behind that in services and manufacturing[4] (and construction productivity in Kent is about the same as the UK average, despite the sector's relative concentration in the county[5]). Greater digital adoption is key to productivity growth, although this has been limited in parts of the industry[6].
- **Technology opportunities:** Technology drivers of skills demand include smart construction and digital design (including Building Information Modelling), low carbon and sustainable construction techniques and offsite construction. Increased regulation could also act as a driver of skills and knowledge.
- **Labour supply:** In recent years, EU migration has been an important source of labour for the construction industry (and on the whole, migrant workers were younger than the local workforce). Nationally, the number of migrant workers in the UK construction industry fell by 8.3% in 2020 with 25,000 fewer working in the sector than in 2019, following the ending of free movement and Covid restrictions[7]. This has placed increasing pressure on the existing supply, with vacancies returning to

[4] Turner and Townsend (2019), UK Market Intelligence
[5] SQW (2022), Kent and Medway Economic Review
[6] CITB (2021), Construction Skills Network: Industry Outlook 2021-25
[7] CITB (2021), Migration and UK Construction 2021

pre pandemic levels earlier than the rest of the economy and construction vacancies at the end of 2022 twice as high as pre-pandemic.[8]

- **Workforce diversity**, especially in the context of an ageing workforce, the migration issues highlighted above and the need to widen the talent pool.

2.2 Additionally, long-term trends outlined in the Workforce 2035 projections, anticipate a growth in net employment between 2020 and 2035, with nearly half in professional occupations. Added to that is an anticipated high level of replacement demand, three times as high as the workforce growth expectation. This means that the sector will need to recruit nearly 3,000 new entrants per year in the region.

Engagement

2.3 Engagement for construction has been done through various channels and organisations including:

- Kent Construction Focus Group (KCFG)
- Focused survey around construction requirements
- Discussion with trade organisations such as CITB, ECA.
- Large regional projects, Ebbsfleet Garden City, Lower Thames Crossing.
- Local economic development teams.
- Construction focused training providers, including private providers, FE Colleges and HEIs.

Skills needs in the construction sector

2.4 The construction industry is one of the most organised and active sectors in terms of highlighting the skills needs within the region, with skills leads for large projects able to showcase the needs of their contractors and subcontractors, as well as highlight to them the requirements for employer engagement in skills.

2.5 Across the board, employers highlighted the need to foster a culture of continual learning and innovation, with more CPD, short course and qualification opportunities. The main elements highlighted in discussions, both in the preparation for the trailblazer and in the check-in and follow on sessions, especially with the Kent Construction Focus Group (KCFG).

Perceptions of the industry

2.6 Employers consider that **perceptions and understanding of the construction sector should be improved.** Frequently, young people, parents and careers advisers tend to have an out-dated idea of construction and do not understand the wide range of potential careers on offer, and the increasingly important role technology plays. More needs to be done by the industry, working with education sector partners, to change perceptions and attract more people into the sector.

2.7 Linked with this, employers also felt that **schools should promote the non-university route** more. It is important to note that this is not a *skills specification* per se (i.e., it does not directly lead to a recommendation for an increase in a specific type of course offer). But it is seen by employers as important in raising entry to the sector.

Volume of the offer

2.8 Overall, employers felt that **the volume and availability of college-based construction courses should be increased**, in subjects including trades, construction, civil engineering and construction management. Employers felt that a lot of provision has been lost in recent years and some parts of the county are less

[8] CITB (2023) Construction Skills Network Outlook 2023-2027

well served than others. This is clearly linked with the 'perceptions and understanding' point above, given the need to generate learner demand to fill an increased learner supply.

Modernising the training offer

2.9 Employers considered that within the further education offer, there should be greater emphasis on:

- **Modern Methods of Construction** (MMC): the highest volume requirements could be in Categories 2 and 3, including timber-, steel- and masonry-framed buildings. New trade roles are emerging, such as offsite manufacturers, assemblers, and robotic operators.
- **Digital skills**, including digital operations throughout the lifecycle of a building, for all construction courses and roles. This includes developing an understanding of how data is put into systems and how it is then used for different purposes; and specific digital skills for individual roles (e.g., quantity surveyors need to understand how to access quantifiable information from a dataset and use modern measurement software like CostX). Additional skills specifically highlighted around digital construction/BIM and digital asset management.
- Offering more **engineering skills** programmes, including more at Level 3 and Level 4/5, reflecting current industry practice, and emerging areas, taking into account the convergence between construction and production engineering.
- **Future Built Environment:** recognising the role of the built environment in the sustainability agenda and working towards upcoming and future standards for net-zero and decarbonisation. Skills such as modern plumbing (Air/ground source heat pumps, solar for example) which has started to be addressed through the offer at MidKent Colleges' new facilities funded through SDF and looking at next challenges for the industry such as new materials, including more recycled materials[9].
- **Retrofitting:** There is an additional challenge faced within the construction industry, which although not focused on Kent & Medway will impact some of the industry. As the Net zero agenda progresses, the need for retrofitting existing buildings from private housing to social[10] housing and listed buildings[11].

2.10 Employers noted a few elements that needed to be increased:

- The Architectural Technologist programme on offer (HNC in construction and architectural technology) needs assessment tasks which better reflect industry practice and more focus on construction, rather than so much structural engineering and quantity surveying).
- The need for more Construction Management including process management and additional focus on skills around:
  - Construction Project Management
  - Building Control/Building Safety
  - CDM/Project Safety
- The lack of a suitable skills pipeline in the region for Surveying and geometrics.

2.11 One of the important elements to note, which was highlighted by the CITB[12] and reflected at a local level is that although most employers will seek traditional skills and competencies, technology and the use of

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[9] CBRE, January 2023, Future Homes Standard 2025
[10] Energy Saving Trust, Retrofitting the UK's housing stock to reach net zero
[11] Grosvenor, Heritage & Carbon, Addressing the Skills Gap
[12] CITB – Future Priority Needs March 2023

technology and its importance in construction is coming forward, so the technical elements as well as the basic skills must be addressed within the courses proposed to new entrants. In this however it is important to acknowledge that not all small businesses will be using these technologies yet so may become an issue for complying with apprenticeship requirements.

Transferrable skills and progression

2.12 Employers highlighted more general **'transferrable' skills**, in relation to the skills, attitudes and behaviours which will enable them to progress and change role during their career and be open to change and embrace new opportunities. More generally, employers highlighted the need to improve the **general employability, work readiness, work ethic, and STEM skills** of new entrants. This is a general, 'cross-sectoral' observation, and reflects the employer survey results, the snapshot survey and employer discussions.

2.13 **Developing further construction sector learning progression pathways** was highlighted, with demand for foundation elements and shorter units for specialisation, up to Higher and Degree levels, for people looking to be employed in the sector or already employed in the sector.

Upskilling and re-skilling

2.14 Working with the established workforce, employers highlighted the need to **create an inspiring and engaging set of professional development opportunities** to enable career progression and re-skilling for existing staff, including construction industry-related digital skills, QS, leadership and management and sustainability.

> *"We need options to fire up and develop the 'frozen middle' – people with 10-15 years' experience, usually qualified but unwilling to engage with rapid change".*
>
> LSIP Construction focus group

2.15 Linked with this, employers cited more opportunities for those in work to progress into supervisory and management roles with accredited programmes that reflect how construction companies manage their operations in practice in areas like contract management, operations management and industry paperwork, Building Management Systems.

2.16 The delivery models for upskilling and reskilling for small businesses is essential as these should fit with the business capacity. Ensuring a delivery model that works for businesses is essential.

2.17 The need for **short courses** for on-site entry level roles were seen as important. However, these cannot generally be funded through existing mechanisms, although it may be valuable to look at other sectors for mechanisms including the pilot DWP SWAP in food production (see food production below).

2.18 Construction Management was highlighted as an area where there is a need, in particular in light of the replacement demand expected in the sector, with employers highlighting elements around Construction Project Management, Building Control/Building Safety, CDM/Project Safety[13].

Engagement

2.19 Finally, the LSIP has been working on the point raised within the trailblazer to find mechanisms to **make it easier for employers to work with colleges and providers**.

2.20 In addition, ensuring that the understanding of the sector and the way it is portrayed to new entrants and young people (and their parents) is an essential point raised by the sector, in particular in relation to the digital developments and the diversity of opportunities, this makes it essential to ensure that the skills conversation includes the career stakeholders (the Careers Hub and the National Career Service)

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[13] Kent Construction Focus Group, 7th March 2023

2.21 Linked with the perceptions point above and the need to upskill the existing workforce, there is a need to ensure training provision, including in colleges, are not just focused on young people but also are a place for professional skills development and adult learning, through further employer engagement.

Next steps

2.22 The actions identified are:

Challenge	Perception of the industry and engagement	Modernising the training offer	Upskilling & reskilling
Objective	Improve perceptions and understanding of the construction sector, raise understanding and promote the wide range of potential careers on offer, the important role technology plays.	Increase the offer for the future of construction, building on the SDF1 project in the region.	Enhance the offer for the existing workforce by creating an inspiring and engaging set of professional development opportunities to enable career progression and re-skilling for existing staff.
Proposed activity	Bring together industry representatives, career advisory bodies (Career Hub and National Careers Service) and education providers (FE, HE and ITPs) to work on ways of promoting the sector in Kent & Medway.	Bring together industry representatives and education providers (FE, HE and ITPs) to work on ensuring current courses include new and upcoming developments and increase the offer in the areas and formats highlighted by employers.	Bring together industry representatives and education providers (FE, HE and ITPs) to work on up-skilling and reskilling pathways for existing staff, considering elements such as construction industry-related digital skills, QS, leadership and management and sustainability.
Expected output	• Increase collaboration between the career advisory bodies and the construction sector. • Enhanced and up to date materials for the career advisory bodies, schools, and other education providers to promote the sector. • Enhanced and up to date materials for the career advisory bodies, schools and other education providers targeting underrepresented groups (ethnic minorities and women).	• Increased offer in highlighted skills area. • Enhanced digital skills elements within existing courses where relevant. • Consider and enhance the offer for construction engineering skills programmes at level 3 and 4/5. • Increase the offer for future built environment courses (short and long)	• Materials to showcase a construction sector learning progression pathway. • Increased visibility and understanding of career development pathways including apprenticeships. • Collaboration with industry on the creation of courses to support career development.
Monitoring	Monitoring of materials progress to production.	Monitoring of increase in offer related to employer demand.	• Monitoring of materials progress to production. • Monitoring of short course creation.

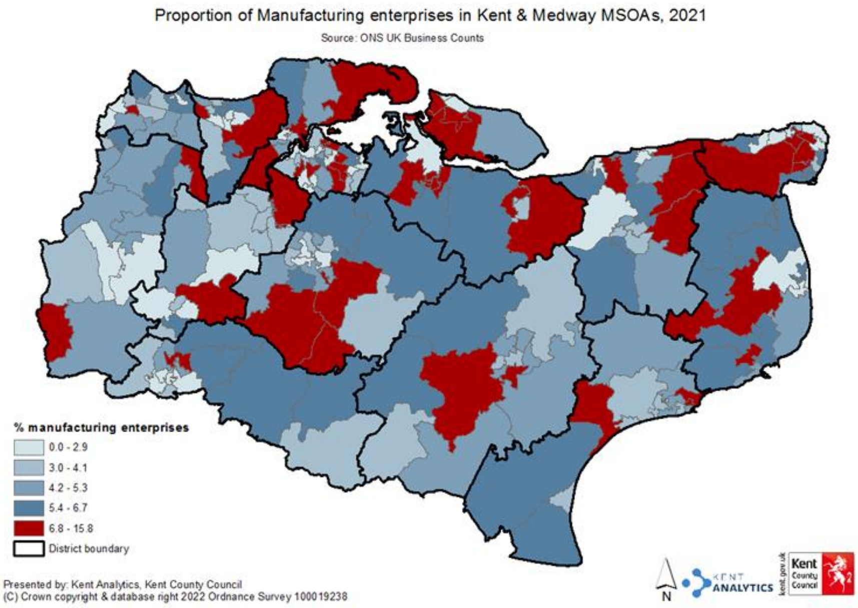
3. Manufacturing and engineering

Industry overview and outlook

3.1 There are nearly 3,600 businesses[14] and around 52,000 people employed in manufacturing[15] across Kent and Medway. There are pockets of high concentrations as demonstrated on the map below, with Swale

[14] Kent Analytics, 2022, Manufacturing in Kent Report
[15] Gov.uk, March 2023, Labour market and skills projections: 2020 to 2035

and Maidstone leading on advanced engineering businesses, although manufacturing employment is quite widely distributed across the county.



3.2 In recent years, employment in the sector has been resilient, growing by about 4% between 2015 and 2020. Longer-term trends, according to the Workforce 2035 projections, a fall in net employment is anticipated between 2020 and 2035, however with a proportionately high level of replacement demand means that the sector needs to recruit 1,000 new entrants per year in the region. The data also shows that a majority of the replacement demand (80%) will be at level 4 and[16] above, which will mean that existing staff will most likely need upskilling to cover replacement demand as well as the sector needing new entrants.

3.3 In Kent and Medway, the manufacturing industry is quite diverse: the two largest sub-sectors are in fabricated metal and metal products and computer-related equipment, but there is no single dominant branch of industry. As in other sectors, SMEs dominate the business stock (accounting for 82% of businesses[17]), but about half of all staff work in companies with more than 50 employees.

3.4 Key features of the sector that are relevant to future skills demand include:

- **High productivity and capital intensity:** Manufacturing in Kent and Medway generates around £78,000 in GVA per filled job, substantially above the all-industries average. The sector has also experienced productivity gain over time: employment numbers have fallen over the long-term (despite stabilisation recently), even as output has grown. This reflects the increasingly 'high value' nature of manufacturing activity and the higher technical skills that this is likely to require.

- **Industry 4.0 and technology convergence:** The impact of digitalisation is quite profound in parts of the manufacturing sector, as the use of greater volumes of data drive greater opportunities for robotisation, product individualisation, dispersed production (for example by using 3D printing), and the development of new business models based around servicing equipment by using the data that can be gathered from connected devices. Advanced digital skills are likely to be increasingly important.

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[16] Extrapolation of the replacement demand by occupation and qualification for Manufacturing, tables RD T1 and Basic T1, Labour market and skills projections: 2020 to 2035.
[17] ONS, 2021, UK business Count

With digital skills also comes the need for cybersecurity awareness as cybercrime increases in the sector[18].

- **The ageing of the workforce:** As in the construction sector, the manufacturing workforce is ageing, with skilled staff approaching retirement, and a rise in retirements and reduced hours post pandemic[19] and a lack of new entrants, in part due to outdated perceptions of the industry which may also still drive under-representation, for example among women in the manufacturing workforce which although in line with national averages remains low.
- **Labour shortages:** there is a higher-than-average rate of vacancies in manufacturing, currently at 36% nationally (vs 24% on average)[20] which is a 20 year high for the sector. Although there are no specific sectoral figures for this within Kent & Medway, it is reflected in the discussions held within the sector although not in a homogeneous way.

Engagement

3.5 Unlike the Construction or Food sectors, there is no existing sector group or forum that covers the region in a meaningful way, therefore through this LSIP we have started to establish this sector focus group, Kent & Medway Manufacturing Focus Group (KMFG), including education providers, to enable the skills conversation and to bring together this sector to learn and share best practice around skills.

3.6 Engagement for Manufacturing has been done through various channels and organisations including:

- Kent& Medway Manufacturing Focus Group (KMFG)
- Surveys
- Discussion with trade organisations such as Make UK.
- Local economic development teams.
- Training providers, including private providers, FE Colleges and HEIs.

Skills needs in manufacturing and engineering.

3.7 This section builds on available workforce data, the work carried out in the trailblazer, including the survey and round table discussions and the information gathered through the snapshot survey.

3.8 We have added to that the wider conversations within the sector, directly and through KMFG, by taking the areas identified in the trailblazer and highlighted by national sector bodies such as Make UK and having the forum check that these are in line with the expectation. The way we have approached this in the region is to work on embedding the skills conversation so that the impact of the LSIP process can be meaningful for years to come.

Image and perceptions

3.9 In common with the construction sector, employers considered that **career opportunities within the industry are not always well understood** despite the high productivity and technological intensity of the sector. This is borne out in national evidence: the 2020 *Annual Manufacturing Report* commented on the perception of the UK as a 'post-industrial' economy and the (erroneous) view that engineering activity is physically demanding or repetitive[21]. Businesses highlighted the need to support clearer communications

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[18] Make UK, 2022, Blackberry Cyber Security report
[19] Make UK, 2022, Manufacturing Monitor
[20] Make UK, March 2023, The Labour shortage challenge for UK Manufacturers
[21] The Manufacturer/PwC, 2020, Annual Manufacturing Report

of the opportunities in the industry and the forum is the first step in employers engaging in this through KMFG.

3.10 Additionally, there is a recognised nationwide skills shortage[22] in manufacturing and engineering, new entrants to the sector are essential, as is upskilling and retraining the existing workforce. These pressures also increase the need for increased productivity, through automation and digitalisation and ensuring that current courses reflect this in the curriculum.

3.11 While these are national challenges, discussions within the manufacturing & engineering forum have shown that this is especially acute in Kent and Medway, given the relative fragmentation of the manufacturing sector in the county: there are few very large manufacturers able to take a 'lead'.

Modernising the training offer

3.12 Employers considered that within the further education offer, there should be greater emphasis on:

- **Automation**: with automation an essential part of the development of the sector, the training offer should reflect these requirements and the new roles emerging such as robotic operators and programmers.
- **Digital skills**, with data an increasing element in production and manufacturing, digital skills and how data can be used as part of the optimisation of production and manufacturing, in particular relating to automation and the processes linked to that.
- Offering more **engineering skills** programmes, including more at Level 3 and Level 4/5, reflecting current industry practice, and emerging areas.

Intermediate level provision

3.13 The industry is faced with **technology change** pressures (the shift from 'automation' to enhanced digitalisation and the need to manage complex data and systems) and **workforce lifecycle** pressures as existing workers retire. In responding to the former, there is an increasing demand for higher/ graduate level technical skills, especially for upskilling the existing workforce. However, businesses also noted a need for more **intermediate-level engineering skills**, especially to accommodate replacement demand as outlined above.

Short course provision

3.14 Businesses reported **likely demand for short courses**, especially related to technology adoption and deployment and in subjects like computer-aided design, digital automation and (more generically) digital skills across the board. Currently, employers' access these through private provision, but commented on the extent to which they involve travel (and associated costs to business) and the fact that courses linked with specific equipment suppliers can be too limited in scope.

Understanding the skills landscape

3.15 Businesses and SMEs in particular highlight their lack of understanding of the current skills landscape, there are fewer private providers covering this sector than for the construction sector, and the FE provision has changed greatly in the last few years, including the introduction of T-levels.

3.16 More broadly, and as illustrated in one of the key manufacturing areas of the region, Greater North Kent, businesses highlighted a need to **understand better the provider specialisms that are available** within the further education offer[23]. This is not a 'skills specification', but it does illustrate the extent to which

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[22] Make UK/PwC, 2023, Executive Survey
[23] GNK, December 2021, Greater North Kent Workforce Skills Evidence Base

demand, and supply are inter-connected: understanding the supply landscape is key to influencing and informing it. Businesses wanted to understand the direct relevance of the offer to business need, as well as the way in which it might work for them in practical administrative terms.

3.17 This point confirms the need to ensure that a forum like the KMFG exists to ensure that the businesses in the sector and the education providers can discuss the issues at hand and take forward, in practical ways, how the sector can support and influence the training provision on a local level. This process is a long term one and will take time to embed and prove fruitful. Kent & Medway is committed to a longer-term approach to engagement with industry and as the LSIP process demonstrates, the journey is key and forms the basis of what will be developed in the future.

3.18 It is important to note as well that driving learner demand is likely to be important, given the relatively high cost of course provision, therefore the perception of the sector will be a key piece of work to ensure that the take-up of available courses is maintained. Work on this with career stakeholders will, like in construction, be essential.

Next steps

3.19 The actions identified are:

Challenge	Image and perceptions	Modernising the training offer	Understanding the skills landscape
Objective	Improve perceptions and understanding of the manufacturing & engineering sector. Raise understanding and promote the wide range of potential careers on offer, the important role technology plays.	Increase the offer for the future of manufacturing, building on the SDF1 project in the region.	Support the sector in gaining a better understanding of the skills landscape and opportunities in the region.
Proposed activity	Through the new KMFG Skills group, bring together industry representatives, career advisory bodies (Career Hub and National Careers Service) and education providers (FE, HE and ITPs) to work on ways of promoting the sector in Kent & Medway.	Through the new KMFG Skills group, bring together industry representatives and education providers (FE, HE and ITPs) to work on ensuring current courses include new and upcoming developments and increase the offer in the areas and formats highlighted by employers.	Through KMFG and the KMFG skills group, offer opportunities for employers to understand the skills landscape and input into materials that will help the sector understand the skills offer for new entrants and existing workforce in the sector.

Expected output	• Increased collaboration between the career advisory bodies and the manufacturing & engineering sector. • Enhanced and up to date materials for the career advisory bodies, schools, and other education providers to promote the sector. • Enhanced and up to date materials for the career advisory bodies, schools and other education providers targeting underrepresented groups (ethnic minorities and women).	• Increased offer incorporating automation. • Enhanced digital skills elements within existing courses where relevant. • Considered and enhanced the offer for skills programmes at level 3 and 4/5 and above in particular for up-skilling the existing workforce. • Increased short course offer around automation and digital skills, both generic and industry specific such as CAD.	• Increased understanding by businesses of the skills offer for the sector. • New materials to showcase and increase visibility of the offer and career development pathways.
Monitoring	Monitoring of materials progress to production	Monitoring of increase in offer related to employer demand.	• Monitoring of materials progress to production. • Sector surveys on skills offer.

4. Fresh food and food production

Industry overview and outlook

4.1 The sector is composed of Fresh food producers (horticulture, agriculture, and viticulture), processors and manufacturers. It is a sector that is hard to identify under industrial classifications, the 'agriculture and horticulture' with some food production classified under manufacturing, there are specificities to it that warrant joining it to the fresh food sector as it is part of the same agri-food supply chain, the importance of which was highlighted by the formation of the Food and Drink Sector Council[24].

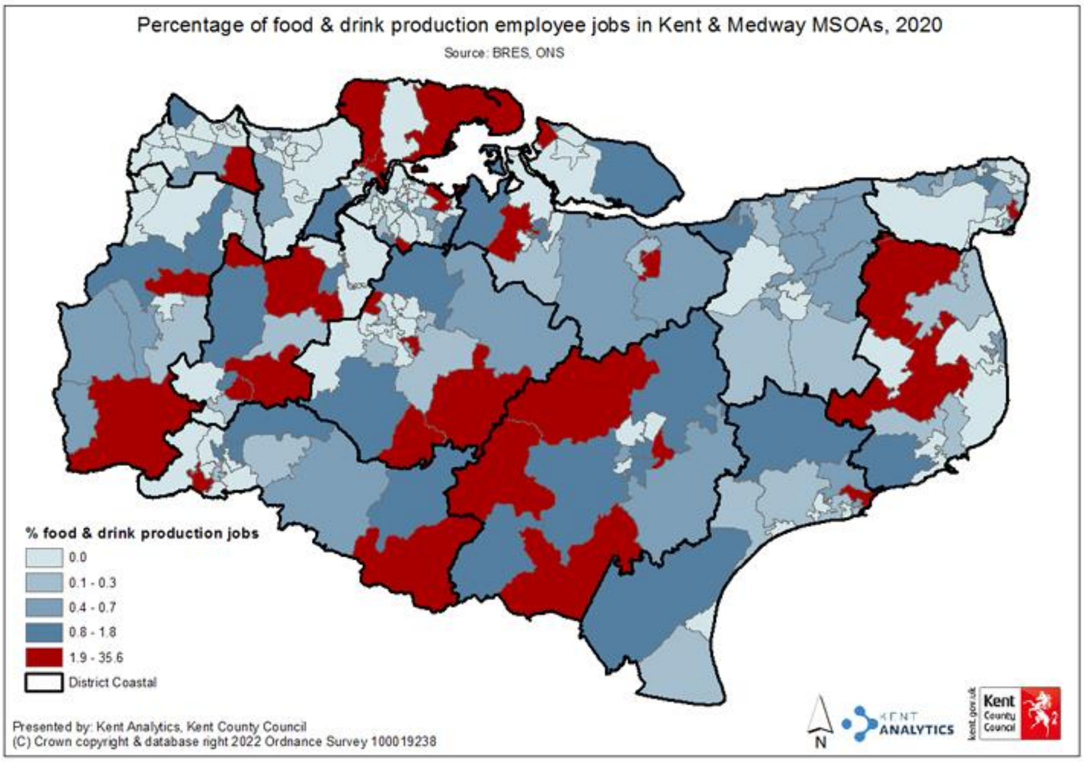
4.2 The sector is relatively small in employment terms, accounting for 18,000 employee jobs across Kent and Medway. However, there are specific sub-sectoral specialisms in Kent and Medway in relation to fresh food (especially soft fruit and top fruit) and the wider 'land-based' economy extends to food processing (overlapping with the manufacturing sector) and some important research and development activities (for example at NIAB EMR at East Malling).

4.3 The majority of food and drink production jobs in Kent (68.8%) are within crop and animal production, hunting and related service activities. This is considerably higher than is seen nationally where crop and animal production account for a far smaller proportion of jobs (31.1%). This reflects the importance of the agricultural industry to food and drink production within Kent.

4.4 The number of organisations in this sector has contracted over the last few years, in part due to consolidation in the sector and Kent & Medway, although still dominated by very small businesses (89.4%) has a higher-than-average number of medium and large businesses in the sector[25]. The businesses are disseminated across the region, in particular across mid and east Kent and is increasing in Medway (+5% over 5 years to 2021).

[24] Food and Drink Sector Council
[25] Kent Analytics, 2022, Food & Drink Production Industries in Kent

4.5 The sector is supported by a number of very active organisations in the region, including Produced in Kent [26], a grower's group and working together with industry and research and education partners in the Growing Kent & Medway consortium[27].



4.6 Over the last 15-years there has been a significant increase in vineyard area in the UK of more than 300% to over 700 vineyards covering circa 3500 hectares (ha). Now there are 36 vineyards in the Kent Downs AONB (or in the setting).[28] This is a growing industry and compliments the existing soft and top fruit in the region.

4.7 Staff recruitment has been a major challenge for the industry over the past couple of years, especially in the context of the sectors use of European migrant labour and the impacts of Brexit and the Covid pandemic on this. To establish a collective approach to addressing some of the labour issues affecting the sector, a **Fresh Food Task Force** was established in 2021.

4.8 Through the UKRI's Strength in Places, the **Growing Kent & Medway** (GKM) initiative has brought together horticultural, and plant-based, food and drink businesses based in Kent and Medway. Through this project, the group has produced a Workforce 2030 Strategy[29], and we have been working with them to understand these issues and take forward the actions together.

Skills landscape

4.9 Kent hosts a large specialist land-based provider at Hadlow College, part of the North Kent College group. With courses spanning agriculture, horticulture, (including fruit vegetables and viticulture), agricultural engineering and animal management. Hadlow has a concept orchard and vineyard focused on decarbonisations and modern approaches to growing funded through SDF.

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26 Produced in Kent
27 Growing Kent & Medway
28 Kent Downs AONB, 2021, Viticulture report
29 Growing Kent & Medway, 2022, Workforce 2030 full report

4.10 EKC group has a land-based provision at its canterbury sites focusing on animal, conservation, horticulture, and land-based subjects, with a mature orchard on site.

Skills needs in fresh food and food production.

4.11 As part of the trailblazer, we identified the following key skills and labour issues facing the land-based sector, these have not changed and include:

- **'Structural' change in the labour market driving automation and new solutions:** Businesses noted that the relative ease of labour supply which applied historically is unlikely to return. The situation has also deteriorated over the course of 2021 as general demand returned in the economy and has been exacerbated by labour shortages in related industries, such as transport and logistics. This has prompted a focus on increased use of technology.
- **Widespread shortages of 'skilled operative'** roles such as tractor drivers and farm workers with specific skills such as irrigation. These roles tend to be developed with experience and 'on the job' training but are proving difficult to fill as the supply of new entrants dries up. This is also having an impact on recruitment to supervisory and management roles, which are typically nurtured through experience.
- **Impact of new technology on the nature of agricultural production**. For example, in Kent, this includes the increase in indoor fruit growing, with increasing technology content.
- **Wider changes in the land-based sector**, linked with post-Brexit reform of agricultural policy and new approaches to food security and land management. The Government's *National Food Strategy* emphasises the role of the food sector in restoring nature, mitigating climate change, and supporting resilience to global food supply shocks: the specific skills implications of this may not yet be entirely clear, but point to an emphasis on technology to reduce resource consumption and the need for wider environmental management skills.

4.12 There is substantial work that has been carried out in this sector to explore workforce skills issues in great depth through the GKM workforce 2030 project, and as outlined previously our aim has been to work with and build on this work rather than duplicate. Therefore, the information and next steps outlined below reflect the work carried out by the skills workstream of GKM, led by Locate in Kent.

4.13 The LSIP team has been involved in taking forward these themes with the GKM team and will continue to work in collaboration to take this agenda forward.

4.14 We have outlined below the key skills needs for this sector combining the information received for our trailblazer, which is still accurate, and the findings of the workforce 2030 project. They include:

Better understanding of the sector – Recruitment and retention challenge

4.15 As with manufacturing and construction, businesses highlighted **perceptions** as a major challenge. Employers noted that part of the issue is that work in agriculture is often seen as temporary, casual, or low-skilled, even though the knowledge and technology component of many jobs has increased, and career prospects are stronger.

4.16 In part, the perceptions challenge is associated with the 'structural' shift in the industry's approach to labour highlighted earlier, but businesses noted that schools and teachers are often unfamiliar with the sector as a career path and the variety of pathways available in the sector.

Offer design and suitability.

4.17 Much work in the land-based sector is seasonal and irregular. Businesses noted that this makes it difficult to make Apprenticeships (for example) work, given that employees may initially only be employed for six to nine months, but could then go on to work full time in a related occupation. Linked with this, employers noted that some horticulture Apprentices are employed in occupations such as green keeping, which is perhaps easier to manage in terms of predictability and conventional working patterns, but which does not meet the needs of the food-growing sector. Overall, businesses considered that there is a 'mismatch' between the needs of the industry and the education and skills offer, partly driven by administrative complexity: consultees as part of skills research in North Kent noted that degrees offering a year in industry had previously been attractive to the sector but had become less common.

> *"A key take-away action is for FE to look at the sector as it is from the inside – not 9-5 and including a lot of seasonal work – across the whole supply chain, and reflect this reality in what is on offer".*
>
> LSIP Land-based focus group

4.18 While there is horticulture provision in Kent and Medway, it tends not to be focused on food growing. Similarly, the provision for viticulture locally is only emerging and not yet able to support the rapid growth of this sub-sector. In food processing, beyond more generic engineering programmes, there is nothing for companies whose requirement is increasingly for production technicians, rather than production operatives. More generally, given the rapid growth of automation, robotics, digital technology and data in the food sector, people in a wide range of roles need much stronger technology 'user' skills, even if they are not technical specialists themselves.

'Getting the basics right'.

4.19 A challenge facing the industry is the need to adapt to technology and structural change, while ensuring that new entrants "know the job from the bottom up", given the premium placed by employers on farm-specific experience and the development of knowledge over time. In this context, businesses felt that **some land-based college courses are too focused on specific areas of activity**[30], with perhaps a need for a greater focus on general and transferable skills. The issue for employers is that 'multi-tasking' is often key, especially given the pressures within the sector to diversify into a range of activities.

> *"Emerging skills needs – where the industry is heading – do matter, but the industry hasn't quite caught up yet, and people still need to do the basics, the nuts and bolts".*
>
> LSIP Land-based focus group

More Engineering

4.20 The growth of automation and robotics, as with manufacturing and engineering more generally, and the increasing importance of data science, means that engineering and technical skills will grow in importance in two ways:

- Entry-level staff will need to be more digitally and technically literate, able to work with technology adaptively as users, becoming more technicians than operatives.
- Mechanical engineering, electrical engineering, software engineering and data science will become more important at intermediate levels, especially Level 3 apprentices, but also with requirements to progression at Levels 4, 5, Degree and post-graduate, whether through apprenticeships, higher

[30] Plumpton College's orientation towards arable and its emphasis on crop quality control was cited in this context.

technical education (HNC/HND) or taught Higher Education programmes. The larger and more sophisticated the company, the greater the need.

Sector-specific leadership and management skills

4.21 The various drivers of company behaviour are also increasing the need for leadership and management skills focused on a growing or food production environment. Generic leadership and management programmes do not address the complexity and peculiarities of the sector, which tends, for example, to have a diverse and multi-lingual workforce and is subject to quite specific quality regimes, standards, and regulation. Because companies tend to 'promote from within', the requirement is for people already in work, who will progress through lower-level supervisory roles and then into middle and more senior management potentially. Short, 'bite-sized' units could be more attractive to many companies than full qualifications.

Next steps

4.22 The GKM consortium has identified this work and is proactively addressing this with the sector and training providers (see Workforce 2030 action plan), some of these fall within the scope of actions of the LSIP and we are working together to take these forward and will support other actions such as the development of the Skills Hub as part of the UKRI's Strength in Places project.

4.23 The actions identified are:

Challenge	Objective & expected output	Monitoring	Lead (see GKM in workforce 2030)
Recruitment and retention challenge	1.1 By December 2025, develop and deliver **a programme of experiential sector careers and jobs activities** for children and young people, teachers, and careers and educational information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) practitioners, to include activities on site with employers, in educational establishments and online.		Growing Kent & Medway
	1.2 By May 2023, make new careers and jobs **resources** specific to Kent and Medway employers available to young people and adults through the Skills Hub. Update these annually. Promote to schools, colleges, universities and DWP. 100 schools engaged by December 2023.		
	1.3 Co-develop (KFE, employers and DWP) and start delivery of one or more new pre-employment training programmes for the fresh food and food production sector *in progress*	Monitoring of pilots and rollouts.	Growing Kent and Medway, Skills Champion transitioning to Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce (LSIP).
Regional sector-specific offer (Level 2 & 3)	Establish and run a 'solutions panel' process with employers to include identifying and progressing opportunities for curriculum improvement and new curriculum co-development at Levels 2 and 3, building on the specific needs identified in GKM Workforce 2023 [1]	Monitoring of increase in offer related to employer demand.	Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce (LSIP) as convenor of the solutions panel.

Increased engineering skills and provision	Establish and to run fresh food and food production sector engineering 'solutions panel' process with employers to include identifying and progressing opportunities for engineering curriculum development.	Employer survey to monitor evolution.	
Sector-specific leadership and management skills	Establish and to run a fresh food and food production sector leadership 'solutions panel' process with employers to include identifying and progressing opportunities for leadership and management curriculum development.	Employer survey to monitor evolution	

Growing Kent and Medway, Workforce 2030, KICC

5. Health & Social Care

Industry overview and outlook

5.1 Health and social care is a **complex and disparate sector** with many different types of organisations. For ease we will split the approach between Health and Social Care.

5.2 The main organisation for health and social care is the **Integrated Care Systems** (ICSs), 42 across the county, established on a statutory basis[31] on the 1st July 2022. ICSs are a partnership of organisations that come together to **plan and deliver joined up health and care services**, and to improve the lives of people who live and work in their area.

5.3 In the region the ICS brings together NHS Kent and Medway, Kent County Council and Medway Council. This represent a workforce of 80,000, and currently the demand for staff is outstripping supply and, along with an ageing workforce, it is putting pressure on the sector[32].

5.4 There are 45,000 people employed in the adult social care sector, with nearly 5,000 vacancies. These posts are mainly in the independent sector (81%) with the remainder employed by local authorities. This is a low paid sector with a high proportion (25%) of zero-hour contracts within the independent sector, although this has been slowly declining[33].

5.5 In a recent survey by the Homecare Association, the main reason cited by providers in Social Care for not being able to meet the demand for care was recruitment of care workers (91%).[34]

5.6 **Budgetary constraints** are also impacting the sector, although they affect both for Health and Social Care. The Care Quality Commission (CQC) stated that financial pressures on social care are high and raised **concerns over the long-term impact on social care.**[35] This is also felt by the NHS with a majority of NHS leaders (94%) worried about whether sufficient national investment is being made in social care in their local area and when asked about the top three biggest challenges facing their ICS(s), trust leaders cited: **workforce shortages, social care capacity and insufficient revenue funding.**[36]

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31 Health and Care Act 2022
32 Kent and Medway ICS, 2022, Kent & Medway Integrated Care Strategy
33 Skills for Care, Adult Social Care Workforce Data visualisation, employment, recruitment & pay sections
34 Homecare Association at the KiCA Conference May 2023.
35 NHS Providers, 2022, NHS Providers, State of the Provider Sector 2022 Key Findings
36 NHS Providers, 2022, NHS Providers, State of the Provider Sector 2022 Key Findings

5.7 The **volume of replacement workforce** required over the coming years will impact the sector, the adult social care workforce data for Kent & Medway[37] and labour market and skills projections 2020- 2035 show that the main issues are:

- **Vacancy rates**, which for 2021/22 were at 10.5% for roles in adult social care, and 12% for direct care, this rate has been increasing year on year[38].
- **Mobile workforce**, with 60% of recruitment from within the sector and a turnover rate of 31%, nearly 35% in direct care, in 2021/22.
- **Aging workforce**, 27% of the adult social care workforce is currently over 55, the workforce projections for 2035 show a requirement for approx. 5,500 new workers per annum in health and social care, of which 2,700 are needed in the caring personal service occupations, a majority of which are expected to be at level 3 and above.

5.8 There is a focus following the People at the Heart of Care white paper[39] to **invest in digital innovation** which improves the quality and safety of care. Expected developments include access to digital infrastructure, increase use of digital social care records and use of care technology[40].

Skills landscape

5.9 The Kent and Medway Health and Care Academy brings together the Kent FE colleges and the NHS through the ICS. The newly launched academy works in partnership with local employers, schools, careers services and education partners and aims to create a robust pipeline of local workforce for future years, developing new roles such as apprenticeships, new ways of working such as cross organisational portfolio roles with the skills and digital capability to be ready for the modern workplace. As part of the SDF2 project, The Academy received funding to develop facilities to support sector specific digital skills.

5.10 Skills for Care provides resources, support, and funding for training for the social care sector and supports organisations working in social care meet training requirements set by the Care Quality Commission as provider contracts, that drive the skills need for the existing workforce.

5.11 There is provision for Health and Social Care across the colleges in the region, although, with provision from levels 1 to 3 and for MidKent, T level in Health from September 23. EKC provide online courses for specialisms in the sector as well as an introductory course for the sector. Apprenticeship provision is low within the colleges at present.

5.12 The apprenticeships in adult social care differ from the norm by incorporating two qualifications that are regulatory requirements, the Care Certificate and the diplomas at the different levels (1-5).Provision for apprenticeships has reduced within the region, with only one local independent training provider, down from four, and three national providers leaving the sector in the last quarter[41] as well as two organisations pulling out of End Point Assessment (EPA) for this standard [42].

5.13 There are a few issues highlighted by ITPs for the adult social care apprenticeships, the key one for the LSIP is the relatively low completion rates[43]. Employers seem to be focused on the mandatory qualifications not the completion of the apprenticeship, despite levy funding.

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[37] Skills for Care, 2022 – 2023, Demographic and recruitment sections
[38] With the exception of 2020/21 during the Covid19 pandemic.
[39] Department of Health and Social Care, 2021, People at the Heart of Care white paper
[40] NHS England Transformation Directorate, 2021, Using technology to put people at the heart of care
[41] Skills network, Quest and Cube
[42] City & Guilds and TQ UK
[43] Skills for Care, March 2023, Adult Social Care Apprenticeships 20/21 Key Findings

5.14 As highlighted above, the issue for social care is less about the skills within the provision, although elements such as digital skills can be increased, it is about volume and destination of learners when social care competes with other sectors that may be perceived as more attractive.

Engagement

5.15 Engagement for health and social care has been done through various channels and organisations including:

- Skills for care, which is the strategic workforce development and planning body for adult social care in England.
- Kent Integrated Care Alliance, KiCA, a social enterprise formed as an independent body to support Local Care Providers in Kent
- Local authorities
- Integrated Care System, NHS Kent & Medway

Skills and workforce need in the health and social care sector

5.16 The complication for this LSIP has been the fact that the ICS in Kent & Medway is currently working on its workforce planning, and this will be published in autumn 2023. In line with our efforts to avoid duplication therefore, our approach has been to continue to liaise and to ensure that when this is published, we bring together the key actors in the sectors and facilitate the next stages. A number are involved in the Kent and Medway Health and Care Academy, which provides a good forum to take these needs forwards and will when data becomes available ensure that we consider the elements raised by the ICS workforce analysis and strategy.

5.17 Therefore, we have focused on the needs of the social care providers and the information available in particular the impact of the aging workforce.

Recruitment and retention challenge

5.18 The sector faces mounting recruitment challenges, as outlined in the figures above, KiCA which represents 400 providers in the region, highlighted that the need is so acute, KiCA are supporting members with overseas recruitment and have secured funding for and developed[44] a career information and recruitment portal[45].

5.19 This emphasizes an issue with the supply of new entrants to the sector, in direct care where the vacancy rate is the highest. Although this is in part linked to the current perceptions of the role, it is essential for the region to maintain a strong supply of new entrants to this sector.

5.20 When considering the skills challenge for social care, the main issue is about volume of staff needed over the coming years at a time when recruiting for current levels is proving difficult. This is compounded by the fact that courses to attract new entrants also lead to other professions such as healthcare and childcare so perception of the sector in terms of opportunities for career and pay levels play a role in creating the volume of new entrants from the courses provided.

5.21 However, two skills related factors have been highlighted by the sector, firstly that apprenticeships, by requiring release time are not attractive to employers especially when dealing with chronic staff shortages, this may explain, in part, the fact that there is a less than 2% ratio of apprenticeship starters to

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[44] KiCA, Hundreds of Healthcare Providers join to launch Recruitment Service
[45] Kent Care Professionals, Becoming a professional carer

filled posts in the region[46]. Secondly, the fact that the qualifications are not solely social care but more generically health, is seen as a barrier to attracting to the sector.[47]

Digital skills

5.22 As outlined in the adult social care technology innovation and digital skills review[48] there is a gap in digital skills in frontline staff, predominantly basic digital skills and familiarity with digital technology which was echoed by providers in Kent and Medway who highlighted this as a need when considering electronic care planning and electronic medical administration records (MAR) charts[49].

5.23 The development of the digital skills framework as part of the Digitising social care programme will help support the embedding of sector appropriate digital skills, however providers will need support in doing so and new entrants to the sector will need appropriate digital skills and understanding of its use in the sector.

Next steps

5.24 The actions identified are:

Challenge	Recruitment and retention in social care	Digital skills in social care	Health
Objective	Improve perceptions and understanding of the social care sector, raise understanding and promote the wide range of potential careers on offer, the variety of careers and the growing digital care agenda.	To support the sector in ensuring the new and existing workforce has the skills to implement the use of digital care.	To identify from the ICS' workforce planning exercise, elements that the LSIP work can support.
Proposed activity	• Work with KiCA, Skills for Care, career advisory bodies (Career Hub and National Careers Service) and education providers (FE, HE and ITPs) to work on ways of promoting the sector in Kent & Medway. • Work with KiCA, social care providers and training providers towards increasing take-up of apprenticeships in the sector, including looking at delivery models and employer and learner support.	Work with KiCA, Skills for Care, career advisory bodies (Career Hub and National Careers Service) and education providers (FE, HE and ITPs) to work on ways of promoting the sector in Kent & Medway.	To be confirmed when the workforce planning exercise is completed (expected Autumn 2023)
Expected output	• Increased visibility of the existing tools to promote the sector in the region. • Enhanced and up to date materials for the career advisory bodies, schools, and other education providers to promote the sector. • Increased Social Care offer and take up in the region	• Enhance the digital skills elements within existing courses to support the digital agenda in social care. • New provision to support the digitalisation of social care particularly for existing workforce.	**TBA**
Monitoring	• Monitoring of materials progress to production. • Monitoring of social Care offer and take-up. • Monitoring of workforce in social care for trends and positive changes.	Monitoring of change in offer related to digital skills.	**TBA**

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46 Skills for Care, March 2023, Adult Social Care Apprenticeships 21/22 Key Findings
47 Skills for Care Kent & Medway Learning & Development Network, May 2023.
48 NHS England, December 2021, Adult Social Care Technology, Innovation and Digital Skills Reviews
49 Skills for Care Kent & Medway Learning & Development Network, May 2023.

6. Education:

6.1 Further Education and Independent Training providers, a key sector described earlier in this document, and upon which we rely to ensure that the skills need outlined can be addressed. The shortage of tutors, which has been highlighted by education providers and employers in the sectors affected especially in construction and manufacturing and engineering, both key sectors for Kent & Medway, as outlined above.

6.2 The work has been carried out and is led by the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP), as this is an issue that affects not only our region but neighbouring areas of Essex and Sussex.

Tutor shortages - context and rationale

6.3 SELEP has a number of established forums through which partners debate, share practice, innovate and take action to drive economic growth, focused on coastal development, housing, clean growth, rural affairs, creative and cultural, as well as our Universities, Major Projects Group (MPG), Skills Advisory Panel and Skills Working Group.

6.4 The MPG, formed in 2020, represents senior leaders of major proposed infrastructure in the pipeline over the next 5-15 years and highlighted, through early discussions, that skills and employment was the highest risk and an area where collaboration could be very beneficial.

6.5 In 2021, SELEP, in partnership with the MPG, commissioned MACE to produce a report on the skills and employment requirements of major projects. This report cited that this £30bn of potential investment would create demand for over 117,000 roles between 2025-2028 and over 67,000 between 2029-2038.

6.6 These roles were wide ranging, but the main outcome was to show, as outlined above in the sector sections, that the scale of demand in major infrastructure development is vast and requires labour and skill sets in areas where there are already significant shortages. The action plan, based on the six recommendations in the report, identified that the issue that was considered most critical, as its the 'bottle neck', and that impacted on the ability to achieve other aims was that of tutor shortages.

6.7 Alongside the three Chambers of Commerce, as all three LSIPs have highlighted this issue, a variety of local and national conversations have taken place and it was agreed that some further collaborative work was needed to develop solutions that could be taken forward to piloting.

Skills and workforce need in the Education sector

6.8 Significant challenges in tutor recruitment and retention already exist within Further Education and these additional demands only present pressure on an already struggling sector, by creating a higher demand for skilled construction and engineering labour within the south, where those industries are already facing acute skills shortage and wage inflation.

6.9 To understand the problem locally in more detail, we surveyed FE organisations. Main findings were:

- 130 vacancies in construction in past 12 months. Average of 13 per organisation.
- 57 vacancies in engineering. Average of almost 6 per organisation.
- Electrical, engineering, carpentry and plumbing are cited as the hardest to recruit to.
- Level 3 is the most common level of qualification sought, but some seek up to Masters.
- Salary is clearly the biggest barrier to recruitment – others include perception, lack of candidates, inadequate skill sets, workload, and industry demand.
- Many of these barriers are mirrored in retention issues – salary, workload, industry poaching and culture.

- Many organisations hadn't tried alternative models. Of those who had, more had tried collaborating across orgs with some success and some with HE re graduate recruitment but considered it less successful.
- Fewer had attempted employees being loaned from industry or sharing staff across campuses/ organisations using virtual teaching.

6.10 We recognise this is not just important for the south east, it is a national challenge, which not only presents a threat to the delivery of key infrastructure, but to the Government's ambitious and necessary reforms to technical education across England.

6.11 The challenge has been widely reported - a survey by Unison showed that over half of the 800 responses state shortages of lecturers and an AoC survey stated, *'There is now estimated to be more than 6,000 job vacancies in England's college*[50] *– the most there has been in over two decades – with high levels of persistent vacancies in priority areas such as construction, engineering, health and social care and science and maths'*.

> "FE vacancy levels were 32% higher in 2021 than they were in 2020 "
>
> Morgan Hunt recruitment agency

6.12 Much research on what is already available nationally is captured in the recent Developing Industry-Expert Teaching for Higher Skills report[51] by the Lifelong Education Commission in Partnership with the Chartered Institution for Further Education. Whilst this is aimed more at the challenges for delivering higher levels of education (post-18 L4&5), it collates findings from various sources about the challenge, what is currently taking place and how effective it might be and offers recommendations for Government.

Next steps

6.13 SELEP and the three LSIPs of Essex, Kent and Sussex will work together to develop sustainable solutions that can be piloted and could then be embedded into the system.

Challenge	**Tutor Shortages in construction and manufacturing & engineering**
Objective	Through the SELEP, work with education and industry partners in the sectors selected to identify solutions to pilot and if successful consider rolling out.
Proposed activity	• Consider ways to alleviate skill shortage areas through increased use of technology, division of roles and staff deployment. • Consider ways to improve recruitment and retention by looking at the role of employers/employees and graduates, local collaborative recruitment models and mechanisms to aid retention (such as ITT, and technical CPD)
Expected output	Workshops to: • Consider ways to alleviate skill shortage areas through increased use of technology, division of roles and staff deployment. • Consider ways to improve recruitment and retention by looking at the role of employers/employees and graduates, local collaborative recruitment models and mechanisms to aid retention (such as ITT, and technical CPD) Pilots to take forward the options identified in the workshops and increase in tutor retention and recruitment.
Monitoring	• Monitoring impact of pilots. • Progression of some pilots to rollouts.

50 FE News - job search
51 Lifelong Education Commission/Chartered Institution for Further Education, 2023, Developing Industry-Expert Teaching for Higher Skills report

7. Additional skills need to note

7.1 As part of the process, we have come across other skills needs, which although not the headlines of this LSIP, merit note.

Transport & Logistics:

7.2 A sector that will face challenges relating to the net-zero and decarbonisation agenda. With two major transport links to the continent within the region, Port of Dover, and Eurotunnel and potentially the development of a freight focused airport at Manston[52] (pending judicial review), the needs of the sector are evolving and should remain under review for developments.

Creative Industries:

7.3 An important but fragmented sector within the region with good support structures through the Creative Estuary and the Thames Estuary Production Corridor, the creative industry has upcoming developments such as the Newtown works in Ashford that will impact the sector skills needs in the region. Maintaining a watching brief will be essential to ensure that skills needs are met.

The wider economy:

Visitor and experience economy

7.4 As described in the trailblazer, Kent & Medway has a vibrant 'visitor and experience economy' encompassing a wide range of activities, including parts of the retail sector, niche food production activities, some creative and cultural activities, and some activities related to the management of the natural and built environment, all of which add to Kent and Medway's diverse and distinctive visitor offer. The sector also benefits from a well-established industry body, Visit Kent. This sector described some labour shortages and generic digital skills needs and we will continue to work alongside Visit Kent to action any significant skills needs that arise.

Generic skills

7.5 Across the conversations held for this LSIP, employers identified needs that are largely 'generic', reflected in the snapshot survey, and should be noted as elements that training providers will need to better address for the future workforce:

- **General business digital skills**, such as use of MS Office, MS Teams and SharePoint used by teams and often remotely since the Covid-19 pandemic.
- **Soft skills**, including interpersonal communication, emotional intelligence, team working, collaboration, flexibility, creativity, and openness to change.
- **Meaningful work experience** to prepare young people for the world of work.
- Helping people to appreciate what **transferable skills** they are developing in college and the workplace, as this will help them adapt to change and develop their career.

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[52] River Oak, Reopening Manston Airport

8. Cross cutting themes: Decarbonisation, Digitalisation and SME engagement

8.1 The skills need identified above are principally focused on employers' short-to-medium term requirements. However, social, technological and policy change will drive demand for new skills across the economy. We have identified two main transformational changes: **decarbonisation, digitalisation.**

8.2 Additionally, we have identified that SME engagement is a key issue for the future skills agenda, with an economy largely based on very small (0-4) and small (5-9) businesses, one of the common factors in discussing skills is the difficulty in engaging with the agenda.

8.3 The themes have been outlined in each of the sections above, however in the following paragraphs we summarise what these are likely to mean for future skills demand, especially in relation to the three main sectors on which we are focused.

Decarbonisation

8.4 The UK's commitment to net zero carbon emissions by 2050 is a key driver of investment in low carbon technologies. This will impact the whole economy: ultimately, all businesses will need to become low carbon businesses. Economic opportunities that are likely to be relevant to Kent and Medway include:

- **Construction decarbonisation**, through requirements for higher environmental standards and the use of modern methods of construction.
- **Energy efficiency retrofit** within the existing building stock.
- **Decarbonisation of the energy generation and supply system**, as the UK switches from gas-based heating systems to renewable energy, including that generated from local sources. In Kent and Medway, this includes offshore renewables, the development of district heating networks, opportunities for micro-generation and the proposed new hydrogen developments at Herne Bay and Grain.
- **More resource efficient methods of production:** Kent and Medway's 'carbon intensity' is relatively low, reflecting the absence of large-scale, energy-intensive industry in the county. But as regulatory pressures rise and financial incentives change, there will be an increasing demand to increase the sustainability of production across the economy.
- **Transport decarbonisation**, through provision of infrastructure for electric vehicles and zero carbon/ active travel options.
- Investment in **natural carbon storage**, through the management and protection of grasslands, saltmarshes and so on, which will make an important contribution to the county's decarbonisation targets.

8.5 In the light of these opportunities, research highlights three categories of 'green jobs' which are likely to see growing demand:

- **New and emerging jobs relating directly to the transition to net zero** (e.g., hydrogen cell technicians, carbon monitoring technicians)
- **Jobs affected by the transition to net zero** that will need enhanced competencies and capabilities (e.g., architects, environmental consultants)
- **Existing jobs that will be needed in greater numbers** (e.g., insulation installers, energy assessors, etc.).

8.6 However, these are likely to be at the centre of a much wider range of developing skills associated with the decarbonisation of every element of the economy. Importantly, the decarbonisation imperative is running in parallel with the rapid advances in digital technology and advanced digital capabilities will be central to a successful low carbon transition.

8.7 Translating this into potential skills demand, dialogue with business and the wider literature highlights several issues that providers may wish to consider:

Sector	Skills issues
Construction	• Demand for low carbon and sustainable construction is likely to increase, linked with a strong regulatory push. • This will increase demand for specialist skills – but over time, the whole industry will become 'low carbon': the challenge is to embed sustainability across the industry and across the construction curriculum. • There ought to be opportunities through decarbonisation to change perceptions of the industry, given wider interest in the low carbon agenda and the technologies associated with it.
Manufacturing and engineering	• Specialist opportunities likely to be quite diverse within Kent and Medway, given the nature of the sector. Skills availability may also help drive demand: awareness of opportunities and the ability to adapt could encourage firms to adopt new technologies/ enter new markets.
Land-based and food	• Emergence of more resource-efficient and less environmentally impactful forms of production. Likely to drive skills related to environmental management and new fuel systems.
Wider economy	• Introduction of new vehicles and machinery. • Competitive pressures on firms to reduce environmental footprint, driven by financial considerations and regulation. Early movers may benefit from competitive advantage, including in the ability to attract staff.

Source: SQW, SMRC, KICC

8.1 The skills provision to address these in the key sectors was the focus of the SDF1 project by the regions colleges and will be the basis for continued focus on employer led skills development through these sectors. The projects have raised the provision with employer input, and growing this will continue to be a focus going forward.

Digitalisation

8.2 There are a number of digital skills needs that have been highlighted in the specific sectors above, these will be a priority, and are summarised below.

Sector	Skills issues
Construction	• Use of digital design (including virtual and augmented reality) and the adoption of Building Information Modelling. • General digital literacy to a standard to engage in computer aided design. • Smaller firms might be slower to respond, but demand for digital skills likely to be driven by major contractors.
Manufacturing and engineering	• Accelerated use of robotics and data in the manufacturing process. Higher level technical skills likely to be important. • Ability to adopt and adapt to new technology – ensuring flexibility to remove workforce barriers to adoption.
Land-based and food	• Key focus on 'digital user skills'. • Greater use of technology can help to change perceptions/ encourage entry.

Sector	Skills issues
Health & social Care	• Basic digital skills and familiarity with digital technology within workforce to support the digitalisation of the sector.
Education	• Use of digital technologies in delivery of education.

Source: SQW, SMRC, KICC

8.3 In addition to these, there are elements that we would add in support of the overarching digitalisation agenda:

- **The need to ensure digital skills are embedded across the board,** in school, further and higher education and upskilling/reskilling courses, with digital technology embedded across subjects, (not just within the definition of 'ICT').
- **The need to improve digital skills within the existing workforce**, through opportunities for ongoing retraining and adaptability to rapidly changing technologies, in particular through short courses, as employers raised, and we highlighted earlier. This will support organisations, especially SMEs, in the adoption of digital tools, as highlighted for Social Care but applicable across sectors.

8.4 Since the Covid19 pandemic, there has been a growing focus on supporting the digitalisation agenda more broadly within the region through initiatives such as Digital Kent[53]. To ensure that we maximise impact of digitalisation initiatives it will be key to work with these organisations and build on these initiatives to support businesses with the adoption of digital and the growth of digital skills.

SME engagement

8.5 As outlined above, Kent & Medway is, along with the rest of the UK dominated by SME's, however our economy has a larger proportion of very small (0-4) businesses, making the engagement with the skills agenda more complex.

8.6 The shaping of the skills agenda, through engagement with programmes such as ours or employer groups for skills organisations such as the Careers cornerstone employer group, involves larger organisations within the region, who will help shape the agenda.

8.7 The elements that have come up in conversations with SME's, mainly through discussion and networking within the forums, are three factors:

- understanding the education landscape, which evolves fast whether through changes in definitions (levels for example) or qualification (T-Levels).
- Time required to identify and then release staff for training.
- Format of apprenticeships for certain professions, both in terms of timings and relating to the requirements of the standards being harder to meet for very small businesses.

8.8 Overarchingly, in order to ensure that the impact of any skills change meet business requirements, it is essential that we address the engagement of SME's in the process. Unlike the other cross cutting themes which are driven by external factors, this is more driven by local engagement.

8.9 Although we understand that this is not something that will be resolved easily, we propose to take forward a working group to look at the ways in which the education landscape is presented to SME's and to explore ways to present these using tools such as the Education Landscape Index.

[53] Digital Kent, established 2021

Next steps

8.1 The actions identified are:

Challenge	Decarbonisation agenda	Digitalisation agenda	SME Engagement in Skills
Objective	To ensure this is addressed in all relevant areas, as outlined in the key sectors.	To ensure this is addressed in all relevant areas, as outlined in the key sectors.	To work towards facilitating SME understanding and engagement with the education landscape and associated opportunities.
Proposed activity	Monitoring of the green skills agenda across all sectors to identify opportunities for cross fertilisation in skills provision, approaches, and impact.	• Bring together training providers, digital initiatives (such as Digital Kent) and local employers representing the key sectors to consider the digital skills agenda for business need. • Bring together training providers to consider the embedding of digital skills across the curriculum. • Explore opportunities for courses aimed at existing workforce, considering format, timings, and level, to address basic digital skills needs across all sectors.	• To create a working group to look at the ways in which the education landscape is presented to SME's and explore ways in which this can be made easier using tools such as the Education Landscape Index. • To bring together the employer engagement leads for FE, HE and KATO with selected SME's to work on potential toolkits to facilitate SME engagement in specific elements such as Apprenticeships, T levels, placements and work experiences. • To consider the approaches that will be taken in construction (upskilling & reskilling) and manufacturing & engineering (understanding the landscape) and explore the opportunities to learn from these and apply outcomes to a wider SME audience.
Expected output	• Build on the provision for net-zero skills created for construction, manufacturing & engineering and fresh food, and food production for SDF1. • Increase the impact of green skills initiatives by embedding best practice in green skills delivery in relevant courses.	• Enhanced digital skills elements within existing courses. • Increased provision in specialist digital skills in sectors where this has been identified (construction, manufacturing & engineering, social care) • Explore opportunities for courses aimed at existing workforce, considering format, timings, and level, to address basic digital skills needs across all sectors.	Develop materials to guide SMEs in understanding the skills provision in the region based on and referencing existing tools and materials and which includes: • opportunities for engagement. • career development pathways • the skills offer for the sector for the region.
Monitoring	Monitoring of provision related to green skills	• Monitoring of provision related to digital skills within existing courses. • Employer survey on digital skills progress	• Employer surveys on education landscape understanding to monitor progress.

9. Conclusion

9.1 The plan above sets out the priorities and actions we will be taking in the key sectors, cross cutting themes, as well as our watching briefs, giving us a roadmap to progress the skills provision and workforce needs for the future economic development of the region. These steps will be important to ensure Kent & Medway maintains a vibrant economy supported by an appropriately skilled workforce ready for the future.

9.2 Over and above this, the value in the LSIP has been, and will remain, the raising of awareness around the skills agenda, the focus on how employers can better engage in the skills conversation for the benefit of the upcoming and existing workforce, the economy, and the region as a whole.

Ensuring that we maintain engagement, and the skills conversation remains embedded within employer forums and the open conversation with education providers maintains momentum, this will be crucial to ensure a meaningful impact and legacy for Kent & Medway.

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