Kent & Medway

Local Skills Improvement Plan

2026 – 2029

Shaping the future workforce for Kent and Medway

Kent & Medway Local Skills

KENT INVICTA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Funded by UK Government

This report has been produced by the Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce

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Kent & Medway Local Skills

This Local Skills Improvement Plan has been approved by the Secretary of State in accordance with the requirements of section 1 of the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022, and the relevant published statutory guidance.

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Foreword

Skills are fundamental to the future prosperity of Kent and Medway. They shape how our businesses grow, innovate and adapt, and determine whether people can access good jobs and build rewarding careers. They are central to the strength, resilience and competitiveness of our regional economy.

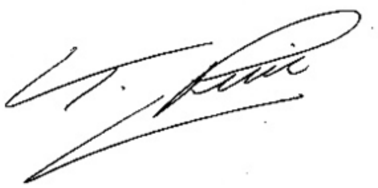
As the designated Employer Representative Body for the Kent and Medway Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce has been proud to lead this work on behalf of the region. Our role has been to listen to employers, draw together evidence from across the economy, and work with education, training and strategic partners to identify where action is most needed.

This new LSIP, covering 2026–2029, builds directly on that employer voice. It provides a clear and practical framework for aligning skills provision with the needs of the local economy, focusing on the priority sectors and cross-cutting capabilities that matter most to Kent and Medway's future. Across sectors including adult social care, construction, creative industries, fresh food and land-based industries, manufacturing and engineering, and the visitor economy, employers have been clear: skills shortages are affecting capacity now, while digital, green and leadership capabilities will be essential for future growth.

The findings also reinforce the need for a skills system that works for the reality of our business base. Kent and Medway is an economy built largely on small and medium-sized enterprises, so skills solutions must be accessible, flexible and responsive to the pressures employers face day to day. This means strengthening entry routes, improving work readiness, supporting progression, and making it easier for businesses of all sizes to engage with training and talent development.

The LSIP is not a document for one organisation alone. Its value lies in the shared commitment it creates across employers, further and higher education providers, local authorities, careers partners and wider stakeholders. This plan sets the direction; delivery must now follow. Employers, providers and partners across Kent and Medway must continue to work together to turn these priorities into practical solutions that strengthen the workforce, support business growth and widen opportunity for people across our region.

I would like to thank the businesses, providers and partners who have contributed their time, insight and expertise to this process. Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce looks forward to continuing this work with partners across the region. By maintaining a clear focus on employer need, collaboration and delivery, we can build a more agile, inclusive and productive workforce, one that supports business growth, strengthens communities and enables Kent and Medway to realise its full economic potential.



Tudor Price
Chief Executive Officer
Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce

Introduction

The Kent and Medway Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) is the employer-led evidence base and delivery framework that aligns the skills system to labour market demand, strengthening workforce capability, driving productivity, and enabling sustainable economic growth across the region.

The LSIP sets out the priority skills needs that matter most to the Kent and Medway economy over the **2026–2029** period and provides a clear, coordinated mechanism to respond to them. It strengthens alignment between education, training and workforce demand, ensuring that skills investment translates into improved performance, participation and economic resilience.

The LSIP sets a common direction for the local skills system, guiding the decisions of employers, providers and place partners that shape skills outcomes. For **employers**, it identifies the workforce constraints affecting delivery, competitiveness and growth, and establishes where coordinated action will unlock recruitment, progression and productivity. For **further and higher education providers**, it provides an employer-validated framework for curriculum planning, provision review and investment, ensuring that delivery is responsive to labour market demand. For **local authorities, economic partners and system stakeholders**, it creates a shared structure for aligning activity, targeting resources and maintaining clear pathways into employment and progression.

Operating within a context of national reform and increasing expectations for employer-led delivery, the LSIP acts as the bridge between **national skills policy and local economic strategy**, translating strategic ambition into actionable, place-based priorities. It establishes a clear route from evidence to delivery, enabling partners to act collectively and maintain alignment as labour market needs evolve.

The document is structured in three integrated parts. The **Strategic and Economic Context** defines the conditions shaping demand. **Part 1: Local Skills Needs** presents the evidence-led assessment of priority sector requirements and cross-cutting capabilities. **Part 2: Agreed Actions** converts these into a coordinated programme of delivery, with defined outcomes and proportionate approaches to evidencing progress, supported through detailed annexes.

Executive Summary

This LSIP sets out how Kent and Medway will align skills supply with employer demand across **2026–2029**, establishing a clear, evidence-led framework for coordinated, partner-delivered action. It defines the economic context, identifies priority skills needs, and translates these into targeted actions that strengthen workforce capability and support growth. The LSIP convenes and aligns the system, while employers, providers and partners lead delivery.

Kent and Medway faces structural workforce challenges, including reduced labour market participation, geographic variation in access to opportunity, and a highly SME-dominated economy. These factors require a more responsive and accessible skills system, one that strengthens entry into work, supports progression and retention, and reflects the practical realities of employer engagement.

Across the six priority sectors; **Adult Social Care; Construction and the Built Environment; Creative Industries; Fresh Food and Land-based Industries; Manufacturing and Engineering; and Tourism and the Visitor Economy**; a consistent picture emerges. Employers require immediate action to stabilise workforce capacity while strengthening pipelines, progression routes and leadership capability. At the same time, **digital and low-carbon competencies are now standard requirements**, embedded across roles and sectors.

A defined set of **cross-cutting workforce essentials** underpins delivery: English, maths and employability skills; digital and AI capability; net zero and decarbonisation; workforce and educator capacity; and effective SME engagement. Strengthening these foundations ensures that training leads to consistent workplace competence and enables employers, particularly SMEs, to participate fully in the skills system.

The LSIP translates these needs into a focused programme of agreed actions that:

- strengthen entry routes and careers visibility;
- embed work readiness and core behaviours;
- expand flexible, employer-aligned upskilling; and
- reinforce progression into higher technical, supervisory and leadership roles.

Delivery is coordinated across partners, informed by employer insight, and kept under active review to ensure sustained alignment with economic need and changing labour market conditions.

This LSIP provides Kent and Medway with a clear, employer-led framework for transforming how the skills system responds to economic demand. By grounding priorities in robust evidence and translating them into coordinated, deliverable actions, it strengthens the region's ability to address workforce challenges and unlock opportunity. Its effectiveness depends on sustained collaboration between employers, education and training providers, and system partners, with the LSIP maintaining a disciplined focus on alignment, responsiveness and impact. Through this approach, Kent and Medway will develop a more agile, inclusive and productive workforce, ensuring that skills investment delivers tangible outcomes for employers, individuals and the wider economy.

Strategic and Economic Context Kent & Medway

The Kent and Medway Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) is the employer-led mechanism for setting out the priority skills needs that matter most to the local economy over the 2026–2029 period. It is designed to strengthen the alignment between education and training provision, and the skills employers need now and in the medium term, while supporting productivity, participation and inclusive growth across the geography.

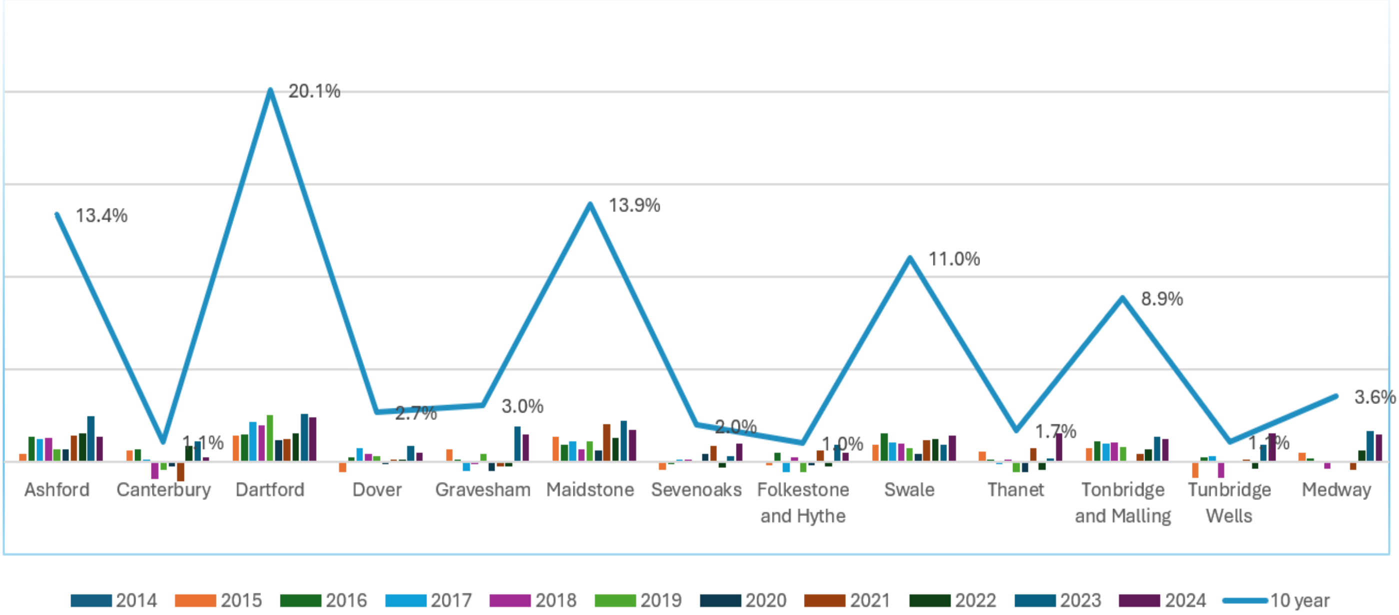
The national direction of travel reinforces the need for this employer-led focus. The Get Britain Working White Paper sets out a programme of reform intended to reduce economic inactivity and raise employment rates through more joined-up support across work, health and skills, with an explicit expectation that local areas convene partners and develop local plans to deliver impact. In parallel, the UK's Modern Industrial Strategy establishes a ten-year framework for investment and growth in eight priority sectors; Advanced Manufacturing, Clean Energy Industries, Creative Industries, Defence, Digital and Technologies, Financial Services, Life Sciences, and Professional and Business Services; supported by targeted interventions including skills packages and sector plans. Together, these national reforms underline the requirement for LSIPs to provide a credible local articulation of demand, to support provider planning and system-wide collaboration, and to ensure local workforce development is aligned to the national growth mission.

Locally, the LSIP sits within an established strategic framework for growth, inclusion and resilience. The Kent & Medway Economic Framework sets out a shared ambition to build an economy that is more productive, sustainable and inclusive by 2030, supported by a focus on business growth and innovation, unlocking talent, resilient infrastructure and place-based renewal. Alongside this, the Local Growth Plan evidence base provides a sectoral lens on Kent and Medway's distinctive growth opportunities and identifies four focus sectors, Agri-Food and Agri-Tech, Ports/Transport/Logistics, Digital and Technologies, and Energy, selected where the area demonstrates clear, buildable strengths. The LSIP therefore provides a practical bridge between national policy direction and local economic strategy, translating the region's growth and inclusion ambitions into employer-validated skills priorities that can be acted upon by providers, partners and stakeholders.

Kent & Medway's economic baseline: scale, growth and spatial variation

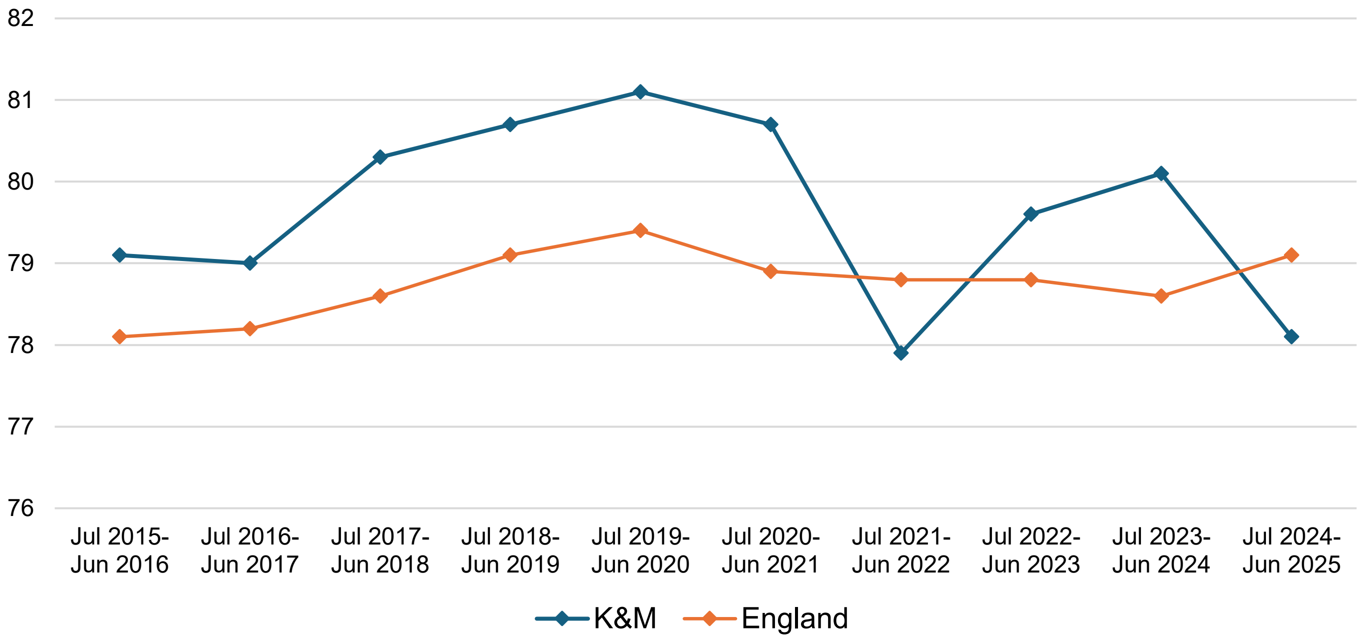
Kent and Medway is a large and growing region, accounting for 3.3% of England's population and reaching an estimated 1.93 million residents by June 2024. Growth has been faster than the national average in recent years and has not been evenly distributed across the area, with particularly strong increases in Dartford, Maidstone and Ashford compared with slower growth in some coastal and eastern districts. This uneven geography is a material factor for skills planning: the pattern of population change, housing development and labour market opportunity differs across the county, so training access and pathway design must be responsive to local context rather than relying on a single "whole-area average".

The working-age population (16–64) is estimated at 1.17 million (61% of total population), with growth slower than total population due to faster increases in older age groups. This creates a medium-term workforce challenge, reinforcing the importance of improving participation and progression among residents already in the labour market, strengthening entry routes for young people, and supporting those currently outside the workforce to move into sustainable employment.



Kent & Medway Working Age Population Source: NOMIS, 25/11/25

Labour market participation in Kent and Medway broadly tracks national patterns. The working-age economic activity rate is reported at 79.1% for the year to June 2025, with evidence that post-COVID changes have been associated with higher inactivity linked to sickness or disability. Kent and Medway also has a slightly higher unemployment rate (4.4%) than England (4.2%) over the same period. Local employment rates differ by geography and cohort, with stronger outcomes in areas with better access to the London labour market and weaker outcomes in parts of the east, coastal areas and some urban locations. These differences reinforce the need for the LSIP to support both (i) skills supply aligned to local jobs and growth sectors and (ii) clearer and more navigable pathways into work and progression, particularly where barriers to participation are highest.



Economic Activity Rates Source: Annual Population Survey

The trend in economic activity rates illustrates the importance of workforce participation as a strategic constraint, with Kent & Medway moving broadly in line with England but showing a more pronounced dip in the most recent year.

Enterprise structure: an SME-dominated economy with implications for skills delivery

Kent and Medway's economy is characterised by a very large number of small firms. As at March 2025, there were 74,430 active enterprises, with 90.1% classified as microbusinesses (fewer than 10 employees) and only 240 large enterprises (250+ employees). This matters for skills strategy: employer demand is widely distributed across many smaller businesses, many of which face capacity constraints that limit time and resource for training. As a result, skills solutions that rely on large-employer infrastructure or high administrative burden risk excluding a substantial proportion of the local economy.

The enterprise profile also highlights distinctive sector concentrations. Construction accounts for 19.1% of enterprises, substantially above the national average cited for England, indicating the scale of the sector within the local business base and helping explain why self-employment is also higher locally (15.5% of those in employment compared with 12.9% for England). Professional, scientific and technical services (15.3%) and administrative and support services (8.8%) also represent significant components of the enterprise base, while retail, hospitality and information and communication remain substantial.

The enterprise base by sector is shown below, illustrating the prominence of construction and the breadth of SME-heavy activity across the economy.

Sector	Enterprises	Share
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	2,130	2.9%
Mining, quarrying & utilities	415	0.6%
Manufacturing	3,465	4.7%
Construction	14,240	19.1%
Motor Trade	2,260	3.0%
Wholesale	2,365	3.2%
Retail	5,070	6.8%
Transportation and storage	3,445	4.6%
Accommodation and food	4,565	6.1%
Information and communication	4,660	6.3%
Financial and insurance	1,480	2.0%
Real estate activities	2,795	3.8%
Professional, scientific and technical	11,355	15.3%
Administrative and support services	6,560	8.8%
Public administration and defence	285	0.4%
Education	1,380	1.9%
Health and social care	3,220	4.3%
Arts, entertainment and recreation	1,775	2.4%
Other services	2,965	4.0%
Total	**74,430**	

Source: NOMIS, 25/11/25

Employment, productivity and sector composition: strengths, constraints and opportunities

Kent and Medway's employment structure reflects both high-volume foundational sectors and a set of tradable and enabling activities linked to the region's geographic and economic role. Employee jobs are concentrated in Health and Social Care (14.3%), Retail (9.6%), Education (9.5%), Administrative and Support Services (9.0%), Construction (7.8%), and Accommodation and Food Services (7.6%), with additional substantial employment in Professional, scientific and technical services (6.2%), Transport and Storage (6.0%)

and Manufacturing (5.8%). This profile highlights why workforce capacity and skills supply in health/care, construction, hospitality and logistics have system-wide importance: these sectors not only employ at scale but also shape local labour market participation, entry routes, and progression opportunities.

The employee jobs profile by broad sector is shown below.

Sector	Employees	Share
Health and social care	107,000	14.3%
Retail	72,000	9.6%
Education	71,000	9.5%
Administrative and support services	67,000	9.0%
Construction	58,000	7.8%
Accommodation and food services	57,000	7.6%
Professional, scientific and technical	46,000	6.2%
Transportation and storage	45,000	6.0%
Manufacturing	43,000	5.8%
Public administration and defence	33,000	4.4%
Wholesale	30,000	4.0%
Information and communication	19,000	2.5%
Arts, entertainment and recreation	17,000	2.3%
Motor Trade	16,000	2.1%
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	14,000	1.9%
Financial and insurance	14,000	1.9%
Other services	14,000	1.9%
Real estate	13,000	1.7%
Mining, quarrying & utilities	11,000	1.5%
Total	**747,000**	

Source: BRES

Productivity and value-added patterns further illustrate Kent and Medway's distinctive economic shape. Total Gross Value Added (GVA) is reported at £55 billion in 2023 (2.6% of England's total), with a sector mix that differs from England in ways that are strategically relevant for the LSIP. Kent and Medway has notably higher GVA shares in Construction (12.0% vs 7.0% England), Transport and Storage (5.9% vs 3.8%), Utilities (4.4% vs 2.7%), and Health and Social Work (10.2% vs 8.8%). Conversely, it has materially lower shares in Information and Communication (3.5% vs 7.1%), Financial and Insurance (5.4% vs 10.1%), and Professional, scientific and technical activities (6.8% vs 9.8%). These differences signal both strengths and constraints: the region generates high value in construction-linked activity, logistics and utilities, but is structurally under-represented in some knowledge-intensive sectors that tend to support higher productivity and higher-level skills demand.

A comparison of GVA shares (Kent & Medway vs England) for sectors with the largest differences is shown below.

Sector	GVA (bn)	Shares	England Shares
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	401	0.8%	0.6%
Mining and quarrying	37	0.1%	0.1%
Manufacturing	4,069	8.6%	9.8%
Utilities	2,095	4.4%	2.7%
Construction	5,655	12.0%	7.0%
Motor trades	908	1.9%	1.7%
Wholesale trade	1,905	4.0%	4.4%
Retail	2,794	5.9%	5.1%

Transportation and storage	2,794	5.9%	3.8%
Accommodation and food	1,613	3.4%	3.1%
Information and communication	1,667	3.5%	7.1%
Financial and insurance	2,553	5.4%	10.1%
Real estate activities, excluding imputed rental	1,966	4.2%	4.1%
Professional, scientific and technical	3,192	6.8%	9.8%
Administrative and support services	2,692	5.7%	6.2%
Public administration and defence	2,402	5.1%	5.2%
Education	3,733	7.9%	6.9%
Human health and social work activities	4,837	10.2%	8.8%
Arts, entertainment and recreation	636	1.3%	1.6%
Other service activities	1,292	2.7%	1.8%
Activities of households	19	0.0%	0.1%
All industries	**47,260**		
Owner-occupiers' imputed rental	7,703		
Total GVA	**54,963**		

Two further indicators reinforce the strategic importance of skills for productivity and inclusion. First, the region's employee job density is reported at 0.64 (compared with 0.75 for England), indicating that the local economy does not provide one job for every working-age resident and that commuting out of area is an important feature of labour market behaviour. Second, workforce skills levels are below England and regional averages: 32.7% of working-age residents have a Level 4+ qualification compared with 37.1% for England. This strengthens the case for LSIP priorities that support progression, higher-level technical routes and improved local retention of skilled residents, while also responding to immediate recruitment pressures in foundational sectors.

Highest Qualification	Kent and Medway	England
None	11.8%	12.4%
Level 1	11.4%	9.9%
Level 2	17.1%	14.8%
Level 3	20.5%	19.5%
Level 4	32.7%	37.1%
Other not classified	6.5%	6.3%

Source: Census 2021

Alignment to the Industrial Strategy (IS-8): relevance and local priorities

The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy provides a national framework for investment and growth across eight priority sectors, supported by published sector plans and skills interventions. For Kent and Medway, the local growth narrative is shaped by both the current economic structure and the region's distinctive assets. The Local Growth Plan evidence base explicitly notes that Kent and Medway has a below national share of employment in the IS-8 sectors (18.3%), creating a strategic requirement to focus on the sectors where the area can credibly demonstrate strength, while strengthening capability where there are clear productivity and skills gaps.

Four sectors are particularly prominent as locally defined growth priorities, closely aligned to Industrial Strategy missions and supply chains:

1. **Energy (aligned to Clean Energy Industries).** The Local Growth Plan evidence base identifies Energy as a focus sector, with high GVA per job reported for the sector and a clear strategic narrative linked to

energy security. Nationally, the Clean energy jobs plan sets out workforce requirements and actions to scale skills pathways to support clean energy delivery. For the LSIP, this reinforces the need to embed low-carbon competence and energy-related occupational demand across construction, engineering, maintenance and digital/controls pathways, ensuring workforce readiness supports both infrastructure delivery and wider net-zero transition.

2. **Digital and Technologies.** The Local Growth Plan evidence base identifies Digital and Technologies as a priority sector for growth. At the same time, the local economic profile indicates lower representation in Information and Communication than England in both employment share and GVA share, suggesting that strengthening digital capability is both a growth opportunity and a structural gap to address. The LSIP therefore needs to support both foundational digital competence across all sectors and stronger advanced pathways in areas aligned to employer demand, technology adoption and productivity improvement.
3. **Ports, Transport and Logistics (linked to tradable activity and supply-chain resilience).** The Local Growth Plan evidence base identifies Ports, Transport and Logistics as a focus sector, reflecting Kent and Medway's gateway role and distinctive assets that underpin trade and the movement of goods; the local GVA profile also shows a higher share in Transport and Storage than England, reinforcing the scale and economic value of this activity locally. Given its strategic gateway function and its role as a system-critical enabler for multiple industries, the LSIP will recognise the sector's workforce requirements by embedding key entry and progression needs, particularly supervisory, technical and compliance-critical capability, within cross-cutting actions and relevant priority-sector delivery where occupations and skills needs overlap, while keeping the sector under active review as the evidence base continues to develop
4. **Agri-Food and Agri-Tech (linked to national food security and innovation).** The Local Growth Plan evidence base identifies Agri-Food and Agri-Tech as a focus sector, explicitly framing the sector's growth opportunity and the rationale for deeper analysis. This intersects with broader Industrial Strategy priorities through advanced manufacturing, digital technologies and life sciences-adjacent innovation, and supports the case for skills pathways that combine technical competence, digital adoption and sustainable practice in land-based and food supply chains.

Alongside these four locally prioritised growth sectors, the Industrial Strategy's other priority sectors remain relevant through local assets and supply-chain linkages. The Kent & Medway Economic Framework identifies innovation strengths that include life sciences, and national policy includes sector plans across Advanced Manufacturing, Creative Industries, Defence, Professional and Business Services and Financial Services. Evidence of higher-skill recruitment by major employers, including defence-linked demand signals, further reinforces the importance of maintaining strong technical and professional pipelines.

How the LSIP supports and connects to the Get Kent & Medway Working Plan

The Get Kent and Medway Working Plan provides a jointly agreed framework (Kent County Council, Medway Council, DWP/Jobcentre Plus and the NHS Integrated Care Board) for reducing economic inactivity and improving employment outcomes through a more integrated approach across health, work and skills. It identifies five themes of change, including a specific focus on employers, training and work supply, and operating as a system, and explicitly recognises the relationship to the LSIP and the region's wider economic framework.

Within this framework, the LSIP adds value in three principal ways:

1. **Clarifies employer demand and priority skills constraints.** The LSIP provides the employer-validated articulation of where workforce shortages and capability gaps constrain delivery, particularly in high-employment and high-value sectors such as health and care, construction, logistics and the wider

visitor economy. This strengthens the ability of partners to target interventions that support both job entry and sustainable progression.

2. **Supports pathway coherence and navigability.** The Working Plan highlights fragmentation in the local system and the need for better coordination, including improved employer engagement mechanisms and stronger pathways for young people. LSIP priorities that simplify training navigation, strengthen careers information, expand meaningful work experience and improve transitions into work directly reinforce this system ambition.
3. **Complements the Working Plan's focus on participation barriers.** The Working Plan identifies significant numbers of residents outside the active economy and highlights priority cohorts including young people, carers and those with long-term health conditions. The LSIP complements this by ensuring that skills provision and delivery models are designed in ways that are accessible and realistic for both learners and employers, particularly in SME-dominated sectors where flexibility and reduced administrative burden are essential.

The combined effect is a coherent local approach: the Working Plan strengthens the conditions for residents to enter and sustain work, while the LSIP strengthens the alignment of skills pathways and provision to the jobs and progression routes the local economy requires.

Strategic implications for LSIP priorities and delivery (2026–2029)

The evidence and strategy context above point to a set of implications that shape how LSIP priorities should be framed and implemented across the 2026–2029 period.

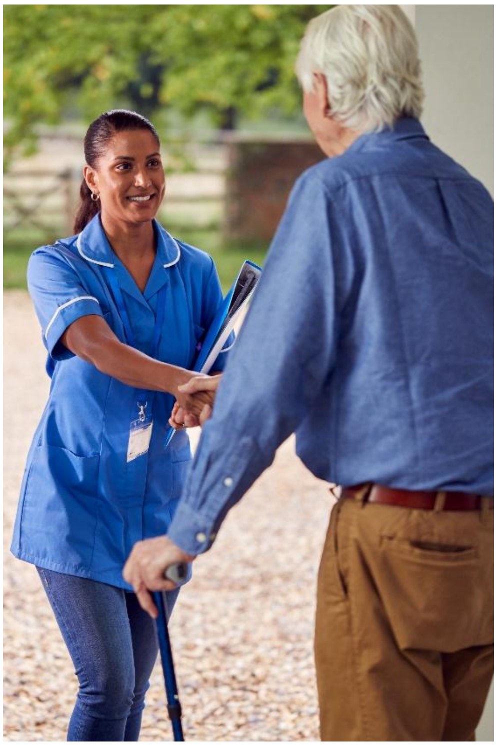
1. **Skills solutions must work for an SME-heavy economy.** With over 90% of enterprises classified as microbusinesses, training models must minimise friction for employers and enable viable cohort formation, including through brokerage, shared provision and more modular offers.
2. **The LSIP must address both immediate capacity constraints and longer-term productivity improvement.** High-volume foundational sectors (health/care, education, retail, hospitality and construction) drive local employment and service resilience, while structural under-representation in some knowledge-intensive sectors reinforces the need for progression pathways and higher-level technical routes to support productivity and inclusive growth.
3. **Local growth priorities should be reflected in skills planning.** The Local Growth Plan evidence base identifies Agri-Food/Agri-Tech, Ports/Transport/Logistics, Digital and Technologies and Energy as priority sectors for growth. LSIP priorities should therefore support both specialist pathways in these areas and the cross-cutting skills (digital, technical, regulatory, supervisory) that enable growth and diffusion across supply chains.
4. **Net zero and digital adoption should be embedded as "business as usual".** National clean energy workforce planning and the broader Industrial Strategy direction emphasise workforce readiness for transition and technology adoption. For Kent and Medway, this reinforces the importance of integrating low-carbon competence, automation, controls and data literacy into mainstream pathways, particularly in construction, engineering, logistics and operational roles.
5. **Place-sensitive pathways are essential.** Population growth and labour market outcomes vary across Kent and Medway, and job density indicates commuting patterns that shape opportunity. LSIP implementation must therefore support consistent access and navigability across the geography, ensuring that pathways are not only available in principle but practical in terms of travel, employer participation and learner support.

In summary, the LSIP is the principal mechanism for turning national direction and local economic priorities into a deliverable, employer-led skills agenda for Kent and Medway. It anchors skills planning in the area's established strategic framework, reflects the locally evidenced sector priorities and Industrial Strategy-aligned opportunities that matter most to the region, and provides the clear basis on which providers and partners can plan and align investment over 2026–2029. Crucially, it is designed to operate as part of the wider system, not alongside it, building on the work and momentum already underway across Kent and Medway to strengthen partnership working, improve pathway navigability and accelerate delivery against shared economic and inclusion goals. In doing so, the LSIP actively supports and feeds into other local plans and strategies, including the Get Kent and Medway Working Plan, by providing the employer-validated skills intelligence and practical delivery focus required to reduce economic inactivity, improve progression and ensure the local workforce is equipped to meet current demand and sustain future growth.

Part 1: Local Skills Needs

This document sets out an evidence-led assessment of the key current and medium-term skills needs across Kent and Medway's priority sectors, in order to inform the priorities and actions of the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) for 2026–2029. Drawing on employer intelligence, labour market analysis and sector-specific evidence, it identifies where workforce shortages and skills gaps are constraining delivery, productivity and resilience, and where targeted intervention will be required to support future growth and transition. The assessment focuses on the key sectors of adult social care, construction and the built environment, creative industries, fresh food and land-based industries, manufacturing and engineering, and the visitor economy.

1.1 Adult Social Care



Adult social care in Kent and Medway is a cornerstone of the local labour market, employing an estimated 54,000 people (posts), a workforce larger than the NHS locally, yet it continues to face persistent recruitment, retention and skills pressures that risk service sustainability. The workforce is ageing with a limited pipeline of younger entrants: only around 7% of workers are under 25, while approximately 25% are over 55. Vacancies remain structurally high, with around 2,700 posts (6%) unfilled, and annual turnover of 21%, meaning roughly one in five workers leave their role each year. These pressures reflect longstanding challenges linked to pay, progression, training access and the perceived attractiveness of social care careers. In recognition of its scale and distinct workforce dynamics, the LSIP will treat adult social care as a standalone priority sector (separate from health) to enable targeted action to grow, upskill and stabilise the workforce.

The workforce is predominantly within the independent sector and relies on flexible staffing models. Around 86% of roles sit within private and voluntary providers, with smaller proportions in local authorities and direct employment by individuals. Most staff are on permanent contracts (86%), but around 21% of roles are on zero-hours contracts, particularly in domiciliary care. The workforce is predominantly female (76%) and diverse, with 35% of workers of overseas nationality and substantial representation from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds in front-line roles, contrasted with less diversity in senior leadership, reinforcing the importance of inclusive progression routes. Skills and qualification profiles remain a concern: only 43% of direct care staff hold a Level 2 or higher adult social care qualification, and apprenticeship uptake among younger workers is limited, restricting the long-term talent pipeline.

Workforce strain is especially acute in roles essential to safe and effective delivery. Registered managers present a clear succession risk: over 35% are over 55, vacancies are estimated at around 12%, and only 59% hold Level 5 or above, highlighting leadership development gaps as regulatory and operational pressures increase. Social care nursing capacity is also narrowing, with an extreme age imbalance (only ~1% under 25 and around 25% over 55), contributing to persistent vacancies that can reduce admissions and, in some cases, affect the viability of nursing provision. These shortages sit alongside the fundamental issue of pay competitiveness: average hourly pay for independent-sector care workers is cited at around £12.00 (late 2024), only marginally above the National Living Wage at the time, leaving the sector exposed to competition from retail, hospitality, logistics and NHS support roles offering similar or better pay with fewer pressures.

Evidence indicates that shortages and turnover are driven by financial pressures, working conditions, limited visibility of progression, and barriers to training. Providers report staff moving for higher wages, while the emotional and physical demands of care work, intensified by vacancies, can accelerate burnout and churn. Retention challenges are particularly pronounced among newer recruits, reinforcing the importance of strong induction, mentoring and early support. Training and upskilling can be difficult to sustain due to the "backfill" problem (releasing staff from rotas), cost pressures, variable employer capacity (especially among SMEs), and the deterrent effect of traditional functional skills requirements for apprenticeship completion. At the same time, skill needs are evolving as digital care planning, assistive technology and integrated working become more embedded, increasing demand for digital confidence and information governance competence.

Against this backdrop, the LSIP sets out a clear direction of travel: a more structured, collaborative response bringing together local authorities, providers, colleges, Skills for Care and the Integrated Care System. Local workforce strategies are shaping delivery through coordinated recruitment activity, "grow-your-own" apprenticeship and professional development routes, and enhanced wellbeing and retention approaches. Activity also focuses on improving the visibility and attractiveness of care careers through regional campaigns, schools and careers engagement, and wider adoption of values-based recruitment. Further education provision is strengthening, with colleges expanding adult social care pathways, integrating work placements, and investing in digital and assistive technology training environments to address emerging capability gaps and support productivity and quality. Collaboration through the ICS reinforces a "one workforce" approach, including shared training, wellbeing support access and digital integration initiatives that build capability across organisational boundaries.

Key skills needs

The LSIP recognises that adult social care employers require a workforce that is resilient, skilled and able to respond to changing models of care, and that the LSIP's role is to convene partners, influence provision and align the local skills system to employer need. Skills needs can be framed across two-time horizons: priorities that support stabilisation and safe, consistent practice in the current term, and priorities that strengthen leadership, progression and workforce sustainability over the medium term.

Current skills needs

- ***Employers require a stronger and more visible entry pipeline into adult social care***, supported by clearer careers information and practical exposure to the breadth of roles across the sector. This includes ensuring adult social care is consistently represented in careers guidance and activity delivered through schools, colleges and careers services, with engagement that reflects the values-led nature of care work and the progression routes available across job families and settings.
- ***Strengthen core skills*** that underpin safe and effective practice, particularly communication, accurate recordkeeping and day-to-day professional behaviours. This reinforces the priority for English, maths and employability to be embedded into adult social care learning through contextualised delivery, enabling staff to apply these skills directly to workplace expectations, including communication with people who draw on care and support, families and multidisciplinary colleagues.
- ***Flexible, responsive upskilling that builds capability quickly*** while recognising shift patterns and limited release time. This includes demand for shorter, targeted provision, such as Skills Bootcamps and other flexible models, to support upskilling in areas including digital care, dementia and delegated healthcare tasks, shaped with employers to reflect local workforce priorities. Provision needs to be designed around bite-sized learning, clear progression from awareness to competence, and realistic opportunities for learners to translate knowledge into practice within the workplace.

Medium skills needs

- ***Strengthening progression pathways and building leadership and management capability*** at every level of the workforce, particularly to support service stability and improve retention. Employers require leadership and management development to be embedded within workforce strategies, with structured routes that support progression for deputy managers and aspiring leaders, aligned with the Care Workforce Pathway and reinforced through peer mentoring.
- ***Leadership development*** is particularly important because it supports succession into hard-to-recruit leadership roles while strengthening consistency in quality and workforce culture. This needs to extend beyond formal qualifications alone and include structured support for operational management and people leadership, including supervision and coaching skills, effective communication and team leadership behaviours, and the practical capability to lead workforce development in setting, such as planning training, supporting competence sign-off and maintaining practice standards.
- ***Strengthen the Registered Manager pipeline*** through mentoring and peer support, recognising that retention and readiness in these roles is critical to wider service stability. Mentoring arrangements for new and aspiring Registered Managers can provide practical problem-solving support, reduce isolation and accelerate confidence in role expectations, particularly for those moving into management from operational care roles.
- ***Stronger collaboration between employers and education providers***, so curricula remain grounded in the realities of care work and aligned with the Care Workforce Pathway. This includes co-development of learning resources and increased opportunities for teacher placements in care settings so that teaching reflects current practice and regional needs, and learners are better prepared for workplace expectations and progression.
- Finally, given the high proportion of small and medium-sized providers, a continuing medium-term priority is ***improving how effectively SMEs can engage with the skills system***, so training is accessible, navigable and responsive across Kent and Medway. This includes simplifying access to training opportunities, enabling shared learning through local networks and forums, and maintaining LSIP-facilitated dialogue between SMEs, providers and strategic partners to ensure provision is shaped around employer requirements and taken up consistently across the region.

1.2 Construction & Built Environment

Kent and Medway's construction and built environment sector remains a major driver of local growth and employment, supporting roughly 7–8% of jobs (around 58,000 roles in 2024) and close to one in five businesses. Over the last five years, local construction employment has expanded sharply (around +20% since 2019), outpacing regional and national trends and reflecting a strong development and infrastructure pipeline, including Ebbsfleet Garden City and the Lower Thames Crossing.

Labour market intelligence reinforces both the scale of the sector and its medium-term trajectory. The data estimates 55,331 construction jobs across Kent and Medway districts in 2024, rising to 57,094 by 2030 (+3.2%), with average pay estimated at £45,672 per job in 2024 and construction GVA at £5.1bn in 2022. It further highlights the sector's exceptionally large business base and its concentration in parts of the Thames Gateway: construction enterprises accounted for 18.3% of all Kent enterprises in 2024 (excluding Medway), while Medway's share is higher still at 24.1%, with Gravesham and Dartford among the highest concentrations in Kent.

However, the sector's ability to deliver is increasingly constrained by workforce pressures that are now binding on capacity. Employers continue to report persistent shortages across core trades; bricklaying, carpentry and joinery, plumbing and heating, electrical installation, plastering and drylining, scaffolding, groundworks and plant operation, alongside rising pressure on supervision, commercial functions and planning-related capacity. These constraints are compounded by workforce ageing, reduced inflows of experienced labour and the structural realities of an SME-dominated industry, where micro and small firms often face practical barriers to training uptake, placement continuity and apprenticeship administration.

The regional context intensifies these challenges. Kent and Medway sit within an integrated South East and London labour market, with high workforce mobility and competition for scarce skillsets. CITB evidence points to sustained recruitment requirements across the South East through the remainder of the decade, driven by both growth and replacement demand, underlining that reliance on short-term labour inflows will not provide a durable solution where neighbouring areas face similar constraints.

Training pipelines are expanding, but not yet at the scale or speed required to match recruitment and replacement needs. Apprenticeship starts have improved and FE learner volumes indicate a sizeable entry-level pipeline, yet achievement outcomes remain a concern and qualified outputs remain below the level implied by projected demand and replacement pressures. Provider capacity constraints, especially shortages of experienced tutors in key trades, can also limit growth in provision even where learner demand is strong, strengthening the case for collaboration and shared capacity across the local and regional system.

Major programmes will shape demand most sharply in the late 2020s as housing delivery overlaps with large-scale infrastructure delivery. The Lower Thames Crossing, in particular, represents a significant medium-term driver of civil engineering demand across earthworks, concrete, steel fixing, plant operation, logistics, surveying, building services and project leadership, and it is positioned as an employment and skills opportunity through a dedicated jobs, skills and education approach. At the same time, the region's sustained programme of housing growth across major strategic sites in Kent and Medway provides a long-term opportunity to embed apprenticeships, placements and local recruitment at scale, provided partner commitments are coordinated and applied consistently.

The direction of travel locally is increasingly coordinated and employer led. Partners are mobilising a response focused on scaling apprenticeships, strengthening SME support (including practical help with funding and levy transfer), improving work-readiness through site exposure and placements, and expanding provision aligned to both immediate shortages and future demand. Priorities include building retrofit and green construction capability, embedding digital and modern methods competence into mainstream pathways, and strengthening progression into supervision, site management and commercial roles to address leadership bottlenecks. The strategic intent is to turn major projects into 'skills factories' while modernising the wider training offer and building a resilient, locally rooted workforce able to sustain the region's ambitions.

Key skills needs

Skills needs are shaped by a high-demand, SME-dominated construction and built environment sector where persistent shortages in delivery-critical trades and civils capability are already constraining programme pace, with growing pressure in supervision, commercial functions and adjacent planning and design capacity. The priority is to stabilise workforce supply now while embedding green and digital competence across progression routes, so delivery keeps pace with changing methods, technologies and standards.

Current skills needs

- ***Immediate workforce pressure in core trades and site delivery.*** Across the region, employer evidence and labour market intelligence point to a consistent set of roles where shortages are already constraining delivery. In housing, the most acute scarcity continues to be reported in bricklaying and carpentry, roles that directly determine programme pace and are difficult to substitute when labour is tight.
- **Plumbing and electrical installation** remain persistent shortage areas, with demand intensified by both ongoing newbuild activity and the electrification and decarbonisation agenda, which is increasing the complexity and volume of building services work. Plastering and drylining shortages are particularly disruptive at finishing stages, while roofing and scaffolding constraints can create delays where access and limited weather windows are critical.
- ***Infrastructure and civils capacity, including plant, groundworks and specialist operations.*** For infrastructure and civils programmes, skills pressure is commonly felt in plant operation and logistics, alongside groundworks capability and specialist civils roles such as formwork, steel fixing and concrete operations. These occupations are highly sensitive to project scheduling peaks and can become binding constraints when multiple programmes overlap across the region.
- As demand rises for these operational roles, the requirement for ***competent surveyors, site engineers and civils supervisors*** also increases, reflecting the safety-critical and coordination-heavy nature of major delivery and the need to manage quality, sequencing and risk effectively.
- ***Site leadership and commercial capability as a strategic bottleneck.*** Alongside trade shortages, employers describe a structural constraint in site leadership and commercial functions. Site managers and supervisors require both technical competence and leadership capability, and retirements alongside competition from major projects can leave local firms exposed.
- ***Quantity surveying, estimating and procurement*** remain difficult to recruit, yet these functions are central to cost control, bidding and delivery. Where capacity is constrained, firms can struggle to bid competitively, manage risk and maintain margins, which can limit growth even where regional demand is strong.
- ***"Adjacent" capacity that can still limit delivery: planning, design and plant maintenance.*** Skills needs are not confined to onsite roles. Planning capacity sits adjacent to the sector but can be equally limiting; insufficient planning officer and technical capability can slow approvals and extend uncertainty, which then cascades into delivery challenges and undermines workforce planning for contractors and developers.
- Similarly, shortages in ***building services design capability*** can sit behind delivery issues, particularly as systems become more complex and the industry transitions towards low-carbon solutions. For major programmes, plant maintenance and mechanic capability can also become a hidden constraint; where plant availability is critical, the ability to maintain and repair equipment rapidly underpins productivity and safety.
- ***Cross-cutting competencies employers increasingly require (now and over the medium term).*** Across these high-demand roles, employers consistently emphasise the growing importance of transferable and enabling competencies. Leadership is required not only at senior level but within site supervision and foreperson roles, particularly as compliance, documentation and client assurance requirements increase.

- ***Digital competence*** is becoming a baseline expectation as sites adopt digital reporting, electronic permits, BIM-enabled coordination and data-driven progress tracking. As a result, employers highlight the need to strengthen communication, numeracy, problem-solving and digital literacy alongside technical competence, so the workforce can adapt as methods, technologies and regulatory expectations evolve.

Medium skills needs

- ***Green construction, retrofit and digital delivery***. Looking ahead across the region, demand is expected to grow for green and specialist roles. Skills needs are rising quickly in retrofit coordination, low-carbon heating design and installation, energy efficiency assessment and renewables integration, with demand often exceeding the current local supply of formally qualified individuals.
- ***Digital capability*** is becoming more significant across roles as information management, BIM, digital surveying and data-enabled site management become more embedded in routine practice. In this context, shortages are increasingly about evolving competence, digital literacy, regulatory awareness and leadership capability, as well as workforce numbers.

Overall, the evidence points to a combined challenge of immediate scarcity and medium-term transition. Meeting current demand requires expanding entry and progression routes into the most pressured trades and operational roles, improving completion and retention and enabling SMEs to participate in training. At the same time, the region needs stronger progression pathways into leadership and professional roles, with green and digital competencies embedded across the workforce so that skill supply keeps pace with changing methods, technologies and standards.

1.3 Creative Industries

Kent and Medway's creative industries are sizeable in absolute terms but remain under-represented relative to the national picture, indicating both untapped growth potential and a need for targeted action to strengthen the workforce pipeline. As of 2024, the area supports around 20,800 creative jobs (including self-employment). Creative employment accounts for roughly 1.4% of all jobs locally, compared with an estimated ~2.5% nationally. In output terms, the sector contributes approximately £1.2bn GVA (around 2–3% of local GDP), while the UK creative sector contributes ~5.2% of GDP and ~7.1% of employment, reinforcing the scale of the gap and the opportunity to close it.

The sector spans the full range of DCMS-defined creative subsectors, but Kent and Medway's profile is shaped most strongly by digital and media-related activity. Local occupational demand is concentrated in roles such as programmers and software developers and IT managers, alongside wider technical and project delivery functions. Screen industries also represent a significant component of the local ecosystem, supported by assets including Maidstone Studios and the regular use of locations such as Chatham Historic Dockyard for film and television production; local employment in film, television, video and photography is estimated at around 11–17% of creative jobs, with a higher share in Medway than in Kent. Performing and visual arts remain culturally and economically important, while design, advertising and architecture form a substantial share of the business base, often clustered in West Kent and key urban centres.

Creative activity is unevenly distributed across the geography. West Kent districts (including Tunbridge Wells, Sevenoaks and Tonbridge & Malling) show higher concentrations of creative businesses, influenced by proximity to London and stronger professional networks, while parts of coastal and North Kent have historically lower densities but are now a focus for regeneration and targeted growth. This spatial pattern matters for skills and progression, because access to networks, training and early-career opportunities remains closely tied to where clusters are strongest.

Despite the national creative sector's strong growth trajectory, Kent and Medway has not consistently captured that momentum. Without effective intervention, local creative job numbers are projected to decline slightly (around -1.1%) by 2030, contrasting with national forecasts of growth (around +6.5%). Stakeholder feedback suggests a post-pandemic rebound in 2023–24 and renewed momentum that now needs to be consolidated, making improved local recruitment, development and retention a priority.

Workforce challenges are multi-layered and mutually reinforcing. Employers report persistent shortages in off-stage and production skills (lighting, sound, stage management and comparable production operations roles), often alongside an oversupply of performance-facing roles in parts of the sector. Rapid technological change is also driving demand for digital and emerging-tech capability, including animation/VFX, immersive and extended reality production, and the practical use of data and AI-enabled tools within creative workflows. Alongside technical capability, gaps in commercial and professional skills remain pronounced in a labour market dominated by freelancers and micro-businesses, including pricing and negotiation, financial management, marketing and client development, and confidence in contracts and intellectual property. Employers also cite deficits in job-readiness behaviours and transferable skills such as communication, teamwork, self-management and resilience.

Entry routes remain a pressing barrier, with limited genuinely entry-level roles, reliance on informal recruitment and networks, and continued use of unpaid or low-paid experience as a gatekeeper. This interacts with inconsistent careers information and limited awareness of local opportunities and can weaken diversity and inclusion (the workforce is reported as around 62% male and 38% female). The freelance-heavy nature of the sector also constrains access to employer-led training routes and can limit affordable CPD due to time and income instability.

Within this context, the region has a growing portfolio of initiatives that collectively form a multi-pronged response. Kent and Medway's involvement in the Thames Estuary Production Corridor and Creative Estuary provides a framework to attract investment, develop infrastructure and coordinate talent interventions. The Docking Station at Chatham Historic Dockyard (led by the University of Kent's iCCi with partners) is positioned to bring high-end production and innovation capability into the area and to strengthen the bridge from education into industry through placements and industry engagement. Provision spans specialist HE and vocational routes (including UCA Canterbury, the University of Kent and CCCU; and FE provision such as EKC Group and MidKent College), with targeted sector routes such as ScreenSkills-supported training and regional intermediaries supporting rapid progression into screen roles. Place-based programmes (including Creative Tunbridge Wells (Young Creatives) and Creative Catalyst (Thanet)) and employer-led models (including the Marlowe Theatre's apprenticeship approach) demonstrate practical responses to entry barriers, while business growth support such as Create South East helps enable creative SMEs to scale and invest in workforce development.

Key Skills Needs

Skills needs are shaped by a sector that is proportionally smaller than national averages, highly fragmented, and characterised by micro-businesses and freelance work. The priority is to strengthen the pipeline into technical and digital roles, improve job-readiness and commercial capability, and expand progression and retention so the region can capture renewed sector momentum rather than falling further behind national trends.

Current Skills Needs

- ***Technical production and delivery capability (live, screen and digital).*** A central immediate need is stronger technical capacity in roles that underpin delivery across live, screen and digital production. Employers report persistent shortages in off-stage and production occupations where competence depends on practical experience, familiarity with specialist equipment and strong operational discipline. These shortages are frequently described alongside an oversupply of performance-facing roles in parts of the sector, creating a structural imbalance between creative talent and the technical capability required to deliver work safely and to specification.
- ***Digital and creative technology ("fusion") skills.*** Digital and creative technology skills are a clear current priority, reflecting the prominence of digital-oriented activity locally and demand for hybrid 'fusion' skills that combine creative practice with technical fluency. Immediate needs include competence in screen and digital production processes, animation and VFX pipelines, immersive/XR techniques, and the application of data literacy and AI-enabled tools to creative development and delivery. These needs cut across specialist roles and wider creative occupations because digital tools increasingly shape day-to-day practice.
- ***Commercial, business and professional skills (freelance- and micro-business reality).*** Widespread business and commercial skills needs persist because many practitioners must manage both creative delivery and business sustainability. Reported gaps include pricing and negotiation, financial management, marketing and client development, and confidence in contracts and intellectual property. Employers also highlight shortfalls in professional behaviours and transferable skills (communication, teamwork, self-management and resilience), which are critical in project-based environments where supervision capacity is limited.
- ***Entry routes, job-readiness and transition into paid work.*** A pressing current challenge is the transition from learning into work. Limited genuinely entry-level roles, informal recruitment and network-based hiring, and the continued use of unpaid or low-paid experience restrict access and progression. The immediate need is therefore to create structured opportunities for individuals to build portfolios, accumulate supervised experience, and demonstrate readiness for paid work in real production conditions, alongside clearer and more consistent careers information about the breadth of creative occupations.

Medium Skills Needs

- ***Continuous upskilling to keep pace with technology and changing workflows.*** Over the medium term, skills needs are shaped by rapid technological change and the requirement for continual upgrading in a freelance-heavy sector. AI-enabled content production, data-informed creative decision-making and advanced digital production workflows are expected to become more embedded across roles, increasing the importance of accessible CPD for freelancers and micro-businesses that does not create time or cost barriers.
- ***Leadership, management and project delivery capability in SMEs and freelance-led teams.*** A second medium-term need is stronger leadership and project delivery capability within creative SMEs and among senior freelancers coordinating project teams. Capability in people leadership, project management, commercial strategy and partnership working influences whether businesses can scale, offer more stable employment and create credible progression routes, improving retention and reducing reliance on informal networks.

- ***Workforce sustainability, inclusion and retention (skills implications, not just employment conditions).*** Precarity, unpaid work and informal hiring can drive attrition and limit who can sustain a creative career. Workforce sustainability therefore has skills implications, including inclusive recruitment and progression practice, and development of transferable professional skills that support mobility across subsectors and project types. This includes building confidence, networking capability and professional behaviours for new entrants, and ensuring training approaches and workplace expectations are inclusive for a diverse workforce.
- ***Place, clustering and fragmentation: aligning provision to demand across districts.*** Geography and fragmentation shape access to training, networks and early-career opportunities. Over the medium term, effective skills development depends on clearer visibility of demand across subsectors and districts, so provision aligns to occupational shortages and emerging digital competencies. Maintaining an up-to-date evidence base through ongoing employer input and intelligence gathering supports this alignment and strengthens the case for targeted skills investment where it can deliver the greatest impact.

Taken together, the current priority is to strengthen technical delivery capacity, digital 'fusion' skills and commercial/job-readiness capability, while the medium-term emphasis is on continuous upskilling, stronger leadership in SMEs and freelance-led teams, and regionally aligned provision that supports sustainability, inclusion and progression. Overall, Kent and Medway has strong creative assets and an increasingly active programme landscape but remains underweight against national benchmarks and faces a projected employment headwind without intervention. The critical task is to convert existing initiatives and infrastructure into a coherent, scalable skills pipeline that improves entry, strengthens progression, supports continuous upskilling and increases employers' ability to recruit locally, positioning the region as a more resilient and productive hub with clearer pathways into sustained creative careers by the end of the decade.

1.4 Fresh Food, Horticulture, Agriculture and Viticulture

Kent and Medway are a national powerhouse in agriculture and food production, with the region's 'Garden of England' identity supported by fertile land, a strengthening agri-tech ecosystem and a value chain spanning primary production, processing, packing, logistics and research-led innovation. The combined fresh food, horticulture, agriculture and viticulture economy is described in the evidence as comprising around 4,180 businesses and around 65,000–65,100 jobs, contributing approximately 4.8% of local GVA and an estimated £2.4 billion annually. Enterprise scale is significant, with Kent described as hosting 2,145+ food and drink production businesses, with Medway adding roughly another hundred.

The region's national reach is reinforced by specialisation and high-profile assets. While Kent accounts for around 3% of England's land, it is reported to contain around 13% of England's horticultural acreage and produce around 40% of national soft fruit and stone fruit output (c. 43,400 tonnes, valued at £253 million). This position is supported by strategic logistics links and recognised centres of production and innovation, including Thanet Earth, NIAB East Malling and the Natural Resources Institute in Medway.

Viticulture provides a further point of differentiation, with 50+ vineyards and a reported location quotient of 6 for wine production, indicating a high concentration of activity. Together, these strengths underpin skilled employment, value-added production and wider opportunities linked to visitor economy growth.

Against this backdrop, the evidence points to intensified labour and skills pressures since 2023. The most acute risk is the availability of seasonal and casual labour for harvesting, planting and packing. In 2021, 39.5% of Kent's agricultural workforce (around 5,231 people) were recorded as casual/seasonal workers, around three times the England average cited (13.1%). Post-Brexit changes and reliance on a time-limited visa route have increased volatility, with growers reporting persistent difficulties securing sufficient workers at critical points in the production cycle and associated cost pressure, including instances where produce was reportedly left unpicked.

Pressures extend into permanent roles, where employers report recruitment and retention challenges across field and packhouse operations, machinery and technical positions. These issues are shaped by competition from other sectors, the physical demands and perceptions of agricultural work, and longer-term pipeline concerns linked to an ageing workforce and succession. The labour-intensive nature of local farming is reflected in 13,253 on-farm workers across 2,534 holdings in 2021 (5.2 workers per holding, compared with the England figure cited of 2.8).

At the same time, rapid technological change is sharpening demand for higher-level and hybrid skills. The evidence identifies shortages in technical and engineering capability to operate, maintain and troubleshoot automated machinery, climate control systems, robotics and precision agriculture tools, alongside demand pressures in professional and scientific roles (including agronomy, plant science and viticulture). Digital and data capability is increasingly required across production and supply chains, while stronger management and leadership skills are needed to support adaptation, productivity and future leadership capacity.

A further constraint is an education–workforce disconnect and an enduring image and awareness challenge. The evidence highlights that awareness of modern agri-food careers drops sharply after primary school, with a particular gap around ages 11–14. Young people often do not recognise the breadth of opportunities spanning engineering, science, technology, business, logistics and marketing, and training routes can be difficult to navigate or insufficiently aligned to employer needs, especially for flexible, short-course provision and practical application of new technologies.

In response, stakeholders have mobilised more coordinated initiatives that signal a shift towards an integrated workforce development ecosystem. Growing Kent & Medway (GKM), an £18 million innovation programme, supported the development of Workforce 2030 as a sector skills strategy and helped connect training infrastructure with innovation assets such as the GreenTech Hub for Advanced Horticulture at NIAB East Malling. Alongside this, an employer-led Fresh Food Production & Horticulture Task Force has elevated skills and the talent pipeline as a primary objective and strengthened links between employers and providers.

Delivery examples include the Thanet Earth Centre of Excellence in Greenhouse Horticulture, developed with Hadlow College (North Kent College) and industry to provide commercial-standard facilities for learners and upskilling for existing workers, with employer input embedded in curriculum and delivery. The evidence also highlights the EKC student media pilot, using student-led digital storytelling to improve awareness and tackle perceptions through curriculum-ready content for schools and careers settings. Expansion of new technical routes, including the T Level in Agriculture, Land Management and Production (from September 2023), is positioned as an important mechanism for strengthening workplace alignment through substantial industry placements.

Key Skills needs

Skills needs in fresh food and land-based industries reflect a dual challenge: maintaining operational capacity in a labour-intensive system while adapting to rapid technological and market change. Priorities can be framed across two horizons, immediate requirements to stabilise workforce supply and close urgent capability gaps, and medium-term needs to build resilience, productivity and progression through stronger technical pathways, leadership and hybrid agri-tech skills.

Current skills needs

- ***Seasonal, entry-level and operational workforce capability***. A defining short-term requirement is sufficient seasonal and casual labour for harvesting, grading and packing, supported by consistent induction and workplace readiness. Employers need reliable competence in safe manual handling, basic food hygiene, teamworking, productivity expectations and adherence to quality procedures, because small performance differences at scale can materially affect throughput and yield recovery.
- ***Recruitment, retention and first-line supervision***. Persistent recruitment and retention challenges in permanent operational roles increase the need for stronger first-line supervision. Team leaders are required who can plan work, maintain performance, manage quality controls, support retention and implement consistent standards across shifts, helping stabilise delivery without relying solely on additional recruitment.
- ***Maintenance engineering and technical operations (automation and controlled environments)***. Automated machinery, controlled environments and software-enabled systems are increasing demand for multiskilled technical staff and technically confident operators. Employers need practical capability to run, maintain and troubleshoot equipment (mechanical and electrical maintenance, safe isolation and use of diagnostic information), reducing downtime and improving fault escalation in high-throughput settings.
- ***Food safety, quality assurance and traceability***. Producers and packhouses supplying major buyers require strong food safety, quality and traceability competence, including consistent recording, specification adherence and audit readiness. This spans entry-level handling and hygiene through to quality technicians and compliance leads.
- ***Practical digital skills across the workforce***. Digital tools are embedded in crop monitoring, scheduling, packhouse reporting and supply chain management, but digital confidence is uneven. The immediate need is applied capability: using sector-specific software, interpreting dashboards and sensor outputs, and understanding how data supports quality, efficiency and resource management.
- ***Careers awareness and attraction (the pipeline challenge begins early)***. Strengthening awareness of modern agri-food careers, particularly for 11–14-year-olds, is a near-term priority. Employers need a broader pipeline that includes engineering, technology, business, logistics and scientific talent, alongside traditional land-based entrants, to address current shortages and future capability needs.

Medium skills needs

- ***Hybrid agri-tech skills for a more automated and data-driven sector***. As automation, AI-enabled monitoring and precision approaches expand, demand will increase for hybrid roles combining production knowledge with technology operation and data literacy. This requires structured pathways from entry-level roles into technical specialisms, with modular upskilling for existing workers and clear routes for new entrants.
- ***Higher-level technical, scientific and specialist production capability (including viticulture).*** Diversification into higher-value production increases demand for agronomy, crop science, viticulture and quality/technical management. Employers need clearer progression from Level 3 into higher technical and

degree-level pathways, supported by occupational mapping that makes roles and advancement routes visible.

- ***Leadership, business and succession skills***. Ageing workforce dynamics and market complexity create a requirement for leaders who combine operational credibility with business capability (finance, HR, compliance governance and strategic planning). Strengthening leadership and management development supports succession, technology adoption and resilience.
- ***Sustainability and resource efficiency skills embedded into roles***. Competence in sustainable production and resource efficiency must be practical and role-based, embedded within technician, supervisor and management training as businesses seek productivity gains and reduced input risk.
- ***Rebalancing the workforce model: reducing vulnerability while improving progression***. Medium-term planning needs to maintain operational capacity while systematically upskilling and progressing workers into higher-value technical, supervisory and specialist roles, reducing exposure to seasonal volatility through productivity-enhancing innovation and a stronger domestic pipeline.
- ***Building on work underway: scaling what works*:** Scaling the EKC student media pilot; The EKC 'Agri and Horticulture Futures' pilot uses student-produced interviews with sector role models to create curriculum-ready resources and shareable digital content. Scaling this approach would provide a consistent, modern careers narrative across Kent and Medway, showcasing the full range of roles and linking inspiration to local pathways.
- ***Developing a hub-and-spoke Centre of Excellence model***. Commercial-standard training environments and employer co-design directly address gaps in technical competence, work readiness and training relevance. A countywide hub-and-spoke model would avoid duplicating high-cost facilities by using a hub to define employer-led standards and specialist provision, supported by local spokes delivering aligned modules, placements and short courses responsive to demand.

In summary, immediate priorities focus on stabilising seasonal and permanent workforce supply, strengthening supervision and retention, and closing urgent gaps in maintenance and technical operations, quality compliance and applied digital capability. Over the medium term, priorities shift towards building hybrid agri-tech capability, expanding specialist and higher-level technical skills (including viticulture) and strengthening leadership and business skills to support succession and innovation-led productivity. Scaling the EKC pilot and advancing a hub-and-spoke Centre of Excellence network provide a coherent attract–train–progress mechanism aligned to these needs and deliverable through existing partnerships.

1.5 Manufacturing & Engineering

Kent and Medway's manufacturing and engineering sector is a significant, though comparatively underrepresented, pillar of the local economy. It supports a diverse industrial base and generates strong economic value through high-productivity activity. The sector comprises around 3,465 businesses (2025), approximately 4.7% of all enterprises locally, and provides an estimated 43,500 jobs (2024), equating to 5.8% of total employment. In gross value-added terms, manufacturing and engineering generated around £4.07bn in 2023 (c. 7.4% of combined local output), underlining its importance despite the South East's more services-led structure. Typical earnings in manufacturing locally are comparatively strong (c. £43,000 per year), reflecting the concentration of higher-value activity across parts of the sector. Forecasts indicate continued expansion potential, with manufacturing employment projected to grow by around 6.5% to 2030, outpacing the national average.

The sector's structure is broad, spanning traditional production and advanced, technology-intensive manufacturing. Advanced engineering activities (including metal fabrication, machinery, electronics and transport equipment) represent the largest segment by business count (around 46–47% of local manufacturing enterprises). Other sizeable components include wood/paper/printing (around 19–20%), alongside chemicals/plastics (c. 9–10%) and food and drink (c. 7–8%). Kent and Medway also host major anchor employers and specialist clusters, most notably life sciences and pharmaceutical activity around Discovery Park, alongside a large base of SMEs embedded across supply chains. Integration with national and international markets brings opportunity, particularly given proximity to major gateways, but also exposure to disruption, increasing the focus on resilience and supply chain adaptation.

Manufacturing and engineering activity is distributed across Kent and Medway rather than concentrated in a single dominant cluster, although some areas show higher concentrations. Swale stands out for both the scale and intensity of manufacturing employment (around 5,500 jobs and over 10% of the local workforce) and a higher-than-average concentration of manufacturing businesses. Maidstone and Medway hold the largest absolute numbers of manufacturing firms, while Ashford and Dartford/Gravesham are positioned for growth linked to investment, accessibility and wider corridor development. The sector is characterised by a long tail of smaller employers, with around 90% of enterprises reported as micro-businesses, meaning skills needs often present as dispersed, localised pressures.

Evidence highlights persistent labour market constraints, including chronic recruitment difficulties in roles such as welders, CNC machinists, maintenance engineers and design technicians, alongside growing demand in automation and digital-adjacent occupations. These shortages are compounded by an ageing workforce profile, with a substantial share of employees over 45 and relatively low participation among under-25s. Skills gaps also extend within the existing workforce as firms adapt to digitisation, automation and new production methods, particularly in automation and control engineering, data literacy and broader STEM competencies, with a comparatively limited share of the workforce holding Level 4+ qualifications. This combination of replacement demand, constrained entry rates and changing technical requirements is a central risk to productivity and the sector's capacity to grow.

At the same time, the sector is at a pivotal moment in relation to innovation, technology adoption and sustainability. Automation, robotics and digitalisation are increasingly viewed as essential responses to labour constraints and competitiveness pressures, but uptake remains uneven, especially among SMEs, despite clear examples of modernisation (including robotics, advanced design tools and data-led process improvements). The push towards decarbonisation is also reshaping demand, with firms responding to energy price volatility through efficiency investments and exploring cleaner technologies, electrification and low-carbon product opportunities. The transition to net zero is therefore both a competitiveness agenda and a skills agenda, increasing demand for capability in energy management, low-carbon technologies and sustainable production practices.

Workforce development capacity is a regional strength, with FE and HE providers delivering a breadth of technical pathways, from technical certificates and T Levels through to degrees, supported by upgraded facilities and collaborative infrastructure such as the Kent & Medway Institute of Technology. Apprenticeships remain central to the pipeline, but current volumes are not sufficient relative to replacement and growth needs, and the 'missing middle' at Levels 4–5 continues to constrain technician supply. The review sets out evidence-informed solutions focused on widening and diversifying entry routes; scaling higher technical provision and progression pathways; embedding Industry 4.0 and green competencies into core curricula; strengthening employer co-design; removing barriers for SMEs to participate in apprenticeships and training; and investing in dual-professional teaching models to address tutor shortages. A particularly significant development is the proposed Group Training Association (GTA), positioned under the strategic leadership of the Industry 4.0 Council, to provide shared apprenticeship infrastructure, enable viable cohorts in niche and emerging specialisms, and reduce administrative burden for SMEs.

Key Skills Needs

Manufacturing and engineering in Kent and Medway is experiencing a well-evidenced combination of demographic pressure, persistent technical skills gaps and an accelerating requirement to upskill for digital and green technologies. In practice, this translates into immediate skills needs affecting recruitment, retention and productivity, alongside medium-term needs linked to higher technical capability, automation, digitalisation and low-carbon delivery.

Current skills needs

- ***A stronger entry-level skills pipeline, including employability and workplace readiness.*** A key current need is increasing the supply of job-ready entrants, given low youth entry and the need to broaden access through flexible pathways. Employers require new starters who can operate safely and reliably in production and engineering environments and who bring the transferable behaviours that support performance at work; communication, teamwork, timekeeping and problem-solving; alongside the confidence to apply foundational technical learning in real settings. This is closely tied to the availability and quality of meaningful work placements (including T Level placements and pre-apprenticeship activity), which are critical to converting learners into competent entrants for the sector.
- ***Capacity to deliver and sustain apprenticeships and structured training, particularly for SMEs.*** SMEs make up a significant share of the manufacturing base and face practical barriers to engaging with apprenticeships and structured training. The immediate need is therefore not only for apprentices and trainees, but for a delivery model that makes participation viable, including shared support with administration, placement coordination and pastoral arrangements so smaller firms can recruit, develop and retain people successfully. The emerging GTA model relates directly to this requirement by providing shared infrastructure to aggregate demand and enable cohorts where individual employers cannot sustain them alone.
- ***Build sufficient teaching and training capability in engineering disciplines.*** A shortage of qualified engineering tutors limits the region's ability to expand provision at pace and respond to employer demand. This creates an immediate requirement to strengthen dual-professional capacity, industry practitioners who can teach part-time and bring current practice into learning, alongside flexible recruitment and transition routes that make it easier for experienced engineers and technicians to contribute to delivery.
- ***Closer employer involvement to keep provision aligned to real roles and tasks.*** Technical training needs to reflect current workplace methods, equipment and job requirements through deeper employer co-design and employer participation in delivery and assessment. In skills terms, this means reducing mismatch, so learners develop competence in the tasks, standards and applied problem-solving expected in modern manufacturing and engineering roles, supported by curricula that use live industry briefs and authentic assessment.

Medium skills needs

- ***Higher technical capability at Levels 4 and 5 to address the 'missing middle'.*** The region needs more advanced technicians and junior engineers, which depends on strengthening Level 4 and 5 pathways and creating clearer progression routes from Level 3 through to higher and degree apprenticeships. This occupational tier underpins innovation, maintenance, systems integration and production optimisation, and is therefore central to productivity and growth.
- ***Embedded Industry 4.0 competence, including automation and data-enabled production.*** As the sector transitions toward automation and digitalisation, the workforce must be able to operate, maintain and improve technology-enabled systems. Programmes need to develop applied competence in areas such as robotics, data analytics and digital manufacturing approaches, underpinned by access to relevant equipment and staff capability to teach these areas effectively. Enabling technologies referenced include PLCs, robotics kits and digital twins, indicating the direction of travel for regional technical capability.
- ***Green and low-carbon skills integrated into mainstream engineering provision.*** Sustainability requirements mean that low-carbon technologies and approaches need to be core content rather than optional add-ons. The medium-term requirement is therefore for technicians and engineers who can apply sustainability principles in manufacturing and engineering contexts and work confidently with low-carbon technologies, supported by updated provision and staff development.
- ***Scalable, employer-led models that can respond to emerging specialisms.*** The region's medium-term needs include the ability to generate viable cohorts in niche and emerging areas, such as mechatronics, robotics and digital manufacturing, by aggregating demand across employers and coordinating delivery. The GTA approach, under strategic leadership linked to the Industry 4.0 Council, is positioned as a mechanism to enable this where individual organisations struggle to create volume or sustain provision alone.

Taken together, the evidence points to immediate demand for job-ready entrants with strong employability and foundational technical competence, alongside sufficient delivery capacity, placements, apprenticeships and tutor capability, to translate training into workforce supply at scale. Over the medium term, priorities strengthen the case for higher technical progression and for systematically embedding Industry 4.0 and green skills, so Kent and Medway develops a workforce able to support automation, digitalisation and the low-carbon transition.

1.6 Tourism and Visitor Economy

Kent and Medway's tourism and visitor economy is a cornerstone of regional prosperity, generating around £4 billion annually and supporting approximately 77,000–78,000 jobs (around 10–11% of all local employment). The sector's breadth, spanning heritage attractions, coastline and countryside, food-and-drink experiences, accommodation, events and hospitality, means its performance directly influences local enterprise, jobs, productivity and place reputation across the area.

Following the pandemic, the sector has shown strong resilience and recovery. By 2022, visitor spend had climbed to £3.7 billion (around 10% below the 2019 peak) and tourism-related employment rose to 74,462 jobs (10% of all employment; up 27% from 2021). By 2023, the visitor economy had effectively returned to pre-pandemic levels, approaching 61 million trips and generating roughly £4.1 billion in visitor spend, with Kent's recovery outperforming national trends and areas such as Thanet and Medway recording overseas visitor numbers around 10% above 2019 levels.

The sector's scale is reinforced by business and productivity indicators. In 2025, Kent and Medway hosted around 6,800 tourism-related enterprises (around 9.1% of all businesses). In 2024, tourism employee jobs reached around 78,000 (around 10.4% of total employment), with nearly two-thirds concentrated in food and beverage service activities. Kent Analytics estimates that accommodation and food service activities and arts, entertainment and recreation generated a combined £2.248 billion in GVA in 2023 (£1.614bn and £0.634bn respectively), underlining the sustained contribution of the wider visitor economy to regional output.

Kent and Medway's distinctive offer is built on a strong mix of heritage and natural assets. Internationally recognised sites such as Canterbury Cathedral, Dover Castle, and the historic dockyards at Chatham sit alongside gardens, estates and landscapes that support year-round visitation. Coastal and rural destinations remain central to demand, with the Isle of Thanet's continuing resurgence and Medway's cultural calendar drawing significant visitor volumes. The region's growing reputation for food-led tourism and wine, supported by an expanding vineyard base and associated visitor experiences, also helps convert day visits into longer stays and higher-value trips.

Behind the headline recovery, employers continue to report pressures that risk constraining growth and diminishing visitor experience. The most acute and persistent issue remains labour shortage, with recruitment difficulties across entry-level and skilled roles, including chefs, kitchen staff, housekeepers, front-of-house staff and supervisors. Employer evidence points to reduced labour supply following Brexit, pandemic-driven occupational exit, changing candidate expectations around working patterns, and the geographic and seasonal dynamics of coastal and rural labour markets. These constraints have tangible operational impacts, including reduced opening hours, capped capacity, and pressure on service quality during peak periods. At the same time, there is a consistent message that retention can be strong once individuals enter the workforce and feel supported, indicating that attraction, work readiness and early-stage development are the key pressure points in the talent pipeline.

Skills needs combine behavioural and technical gaps. Employers repeatedly highlight "work readiness" and soft skills; communication, customer service etiquette, reliability, teamwork and resilience; as recurring deficits, particularly among younger entrants with limited workplace exposure. Alongside this are technical shortages in commercial kitchen competence (including specialisms such as pastry and butchery), hotel operations (including housekeeping supervision and front desk management), events coordination, visitor experience, multilingual capability and digital marketing. These challenges are compounded by the sector's structure, with a high prevalence of small and micro businesses that often have limited capacity to release staff for training or navigate complex programmes without support.

Local education and training infrastructure provides important foundations, including established FE hospitality provision supported by industry-standard facilities and live commercial settings, but the scale of need continues to outstrip supply in several roles and sub-sectors. Stakeholders across Kent and Medway are therefore pursuing interventions that combine entry routes, employer-led training, job matching and improvements in job quality.

A flagship development is the Hospitality Skills Passport (HSP), a nationally recognised, employer-led programme rolled out from 2025 and delivered through Sector-Based Work Academy models. The HSP provides an intensive 20-day route into employment that blends core training aligned to Level 2 hospitality apprenticeship standards with work placement experience and a portable digital credential. Early delivery in Kent has demonstrated strong conversion into employment, with rapid job outcomes reported from initial cohorts and growing momentum through subsequent programmes. The HSP is positioned not only as a recruitment response but as a mechanism to professionalise entry into the sector, strengthen work readiness, and provide a stepping stone into apprenticeships and longer-term progression.

Alongside the HSP, employer engagement points to practical priorities: expanding placements and industry encounters for young people; supporting SMEs to access apprenticeships and shared levy funding mechanisms; strengthening careers promotion to shift perceptions of hospitality as a "stopgap"; and improving recruitment pipelines through targeted job hubs, fairs and Jobcentre collaboration. There is also growing emphasis on strengthening retention through better job quality, pay and benefits, rota practices that support work-life balance, clearer progression routes, and healthier workplace culture, while recognising the margin pressures created by rising operating costs. Technology adoption is emerging as a pragmatic enabler to reduce workload pressure and improve productivity, while remaining complementary to the people-led nature of the visitor experience.

A significant structural change in destination management also shapes the context for the sector's future. Following the closure of Visit Kent in 2025, Kent County Council and Medway Council have moved to establish Brand Kent to maintain destination promotion, business support and market intelligence. This transition creates an opportunity to embed workforce development more explicitly within destination strategy, recognising that sustainable growth relies on skilled people delivering consistently high-quality visitor experiences and that strengthening off-peak demand can support more stable year-round employment patterns.

Key skills needs

Kent and Medway's visitor economy has recovered strongly in demand and value, but employer engagement continues to highlight workforce capacity and skills availability as the most material constraint on service quality, business performance and sustained growth. Skills needs are best understood as immediate recruitment and job readiness gaps alongside medium-term capability shifts linked to digitisation, sustainability, leadership capacity, careers visibility and year-round resilience.

Current skills needs

- ***Increase the flow of entrants*** into core hospitality roles while ensuring they are ready for live customer environments. Recruitment difficulties persist across chefs (all levels), kitchen and catering assistants, cleaners and housekeepers, front-of-house customer service roles (including waiting staff and baristas) and supervisors and managers, shaped by reduced labour supply post-Brexit, pandemic-related occupational exit, changing expectations around working patterns, and coastal and rural labour market dynamics. The most consistent skills gap reported by employers relates to ***communication, customer service etiquette, confidence, resilience, teamwork, reliability and professional behaviours, with additional concerns around phone etiquette and interview readiness***. Structured ***work experience*** is repeatedly described as making a marked difference, improving confidence and shifting perceptions, suggesting ***employability and work readiness*** should be treated as a core component of skills delivery rather than an optional add-on.
- Employers identify immediate operational competence gaps in ***commercial kitchen skills*** (including harder-to-source specialisms such as pastry and butchery), food safety and hygiene, and ***operational capability across hotels and venues*** including housekeeping supervision, front desk operations, events coordination and guest services. Visitor-facing businesses also highlight the need for stronger ***visitor experience capability*** and, where relevant, multilingual support and modern promotional skills to respond to international visitors and contemporary demand patterns. Given the prevalence of SMEs, there is a continued emphasis on ***short, flexible and locally accessible training*** that supports rapid

onboarding and upskilling without destabilising day-to-day operations. Employer-led entry routes such as the ***Hospitality Skills Passport***, alongside locally commissioned pathways (including Skills Bootcamps where relevant), are identified as practical pipelines that can convert jobseekers into work-ready recruits while reducing the burden on employers.

Medium skills needs

- ***Stronger careers education*** and a clearer "front door" into hospitality and tourism so that young people and wider communities better understand the breadth of roles across the visitor economy, from culinary and accommodation to events, visitor experience, heritage operations and marketing, and see the sector as a credible long-term career option. This requires earlier and more consistent exposure through talks, encounters, taster opportunities and curriculum-linked activity, alongside more visible progression routes that show how entry-level roles can develop into skilled, supervisory and management careers. In parallel, employers underline the importance of progression pathways and people-management capability, with a particular need to build team leader, supervisor and manager capacity through in-work development, mentoring and stronger leadership skills to reduce churn and sustain service quality.
- ***Digital capability*** is also increasingly central, including confident use of booking and reservation systems, digital POS and payments, CRM tools, social media content and campaign delivery, and basic use of data to understand and respond to visitor behaviour. As technology adoption grows to reduce pressure on staff and improve productivity, the workforce will need the ability to implement and operate these tools consistently. ***Green skills*** are rising in importance as sustainability expectations become mainstream, with practical capability required in resource-efficient operations, waste reduction and recycling, sustainable procurement and adoption of recognised green standards where appropriate. Finally, employer evidence highlights the need for a coordinated system response that reflects ***seasonality and place-based labour markets***, aligning training with vacancies, scaling proven entry routes such as the HSP, and supporting a more stable year-round workforce model that reduces the "stop–start" cycle in some local economies. The transition to Brand Kent provides a route to link demand generation, business support and skills pipelines more directly, embedding workforce considerations within destination management.
- ***Growth and resilience will depend on building a larger, better-prepared and more adaptable workforce***, supported by coordinated employer–provider action and stronger system leadership. The recommendations therefore emphasise ***scaling up the Hospitality Skills Passport*** across Kent and Medway, formalising an ***employer-led Kent Hospitality Focus Group*** to align provision with emerging needs and embed evaluation, and strengthening work-based learning and careers promotion to improve sector visibility and progression. It also highlights the increasing importance of ***digital skills*** *(*from booking and POS systems to CRM and marketing analytics) and ***green skills*** (resource efficiency, waste reduction, sustainable procurement and carbon reporting), reflecting the direction of travel in consumer expectations and business operations.

Taken together, these actions provide a practical framework for addressing immediate recruitment and capability gaps while positioning the sector for longer-term sustainability, innovation and inclusive growth.

1.7 Additional skills needs to note

Alongside the headline priorities set out in this LSIP, the development process has identified additional skills needs which, while not central to this iteration, remain important to note.

1.7.1 Ports, Transport and Logistics

Although Ports, Transport and Logistics is not included in the six priority sectors, it remains a system-critical enabling sector for Kent and Medway and is retained as an active watching brief because it underpins trade, supply chains and delivery capacity across multiple priorities. Anchored by nationally significant gateway infrastructure, including the Port of Dover and the Channel Tunnel, the sector supports a substantial local footprint (around 45,000 jobs and approximately £2.8bn GVA) and is characterised by a predominantly micro and SME business base, driving demand for skills from entry-level operational roles through to specialist technical and operational leadership capability. The LSIP will address these requirements through priority-sector actions and cross-cutting themes, strengthening shared pipelines for enabling occupations, accelerating engineering and maintenance capacity, embedding digital and data capability to support automation and systems adoption, and building net zero competence to support fleet and operational transition, while monitoring sector intelligence and implementing additional cross-sector responses where skills pressures cannot be met through existing pathways. A detailed skills analysis for Ports, Transport and Logistics is provided in Annex A.

1.7.2 Health and Lifesciences

Although Health, Life Sciences and Med-Tech is not included in the six priority sectors, it is retained as an active watching brief because Kent and Medway's "bench-to-bedside" ecosystem, spanning R&D, regulated manufacture, diagnostics and adoption through the health system, is strengthening and is already generating cross-cutting skills pressures that align directly to LSIP priorities. The LSIP will respond through priority-sector actions and cross-cutting themes by hardwiring digital and innovation capability (including data and AI-enabled tools), improving visibility and entry into technical and non-clinical roles, and embedding contextualised English and maths and core employability behaviours as standard outcomes across relevant pathways. Expanding meaningful, well-scoped work experience and placements, enabled through consistent brokerage and practical, standardised support that reduces friction for SMEs, remains essential to widening participation and converting interest into progression. A detailed skills analysis for Health and Lifesciences is provided in Annex A.

1.8 Cross cutting themes

The LSIP evidence base is clear: a small number of cross-cutting capabilities determine whether sector actions can be delivered at pace and whether investment in training converts into consistent workplace competence. These themes matter because they are **workforce essentials**, the baseline conditions that shape productivity, progression, compliance and service quality across the economy. While the intensity of demand varies by sector, these are not sector-specific issues: they are the shared foundations that employers expect the skills system to strengthen at scale.

1.8.1 English, maths and employability skills

Employers consistently point to work readiness as a decisive factor in recruitment and early performance. Professional behaviours, clear communication, reliability, and the confident application of English and maths underpin effective working across all roles, from day-to-day problem solving to customer interaction and team communication. This requirement is most visible where the consequences of error are highest or where interaction is constant: in Adult Social Care, communication and accurate record-keeping are integral to safe practice, and in the Tourism & Visitor Economy and Creative Industries, employers repeatedly stress readiness for workplace expectations and dependable professional standards.

1.8.2 Digital (including AI)

Digital capability is now a core employability requirement, not a specialist add-on. As organisations embed digital reporting, automation and data-driven processes, the ability to work confidently with digital tools, and increasingly with AI-enabled workflows, has become central to safe practice, compliance and productivity across the workforce. Demand is most pronounced in Manufacturing & Engineering, where automation, controls and data literacy are directly linked to performance, and in Creative Industries, where digital "fusion" skills explicitly extend to AI- and data-enabled workflows alongside production-ready toolchains.

1.8.3 Net Zero / Decarbonisation

Net Zero competence is rapidly becoming standard workplace practice. Low-carbon awareness, sustainable operating behaviours and compliance requirements increasingly need to be embedded within mainstream occupational routes, so that the workforce can deliver decarbonisation as part of normal practice rather than treating it as a separate specialism. This is most evident in Construction, where green fundamentals must be integrated across trades and technical pathways, and it is strongly relevant to Manufacturing & Engineering and the Visitor Economy, where sustainability expectations are reshaping operating models alongside continued adoption of digital processes.

1.8.4 FE Workforce

Delivery capacity in the skills system is a critical enabler in its own right. Tutor supply, industry currency and the ability to keep curriculum aligned to modern workplaces directly determine whether priority provision can expand, adapt and remain credible to employers. This is particularly acute in Manufacturing & Engineering, where technical delivery depends on scarce expertise and requires structured approaches such as Industry Associate models, Teacher Encounters and targeted CPD. It is also significant in Construction, where educator capacity is closely tied to sustaining trade and technical provision that reflects current site practice and standards.

1.8.5 SME Engagement

In an SME-heavy economy, the LSIP must work for the majority of employers, not only those with dedicated HR and training capacity. Smaller firms often face practical barriers: limited time, constrained capacity to host placements, and difficulty navigating provision alongside day-to-day operations. The challenge is therefore to make engagement simple, accessible and low-burden so that SMEs can participate consistently. This theme is strongest in Construction, the Visitor Economy, Creative Industries, and Manufacturing & Engineering, where micro and small firms are central to the labour market and where the feasibility of engagement is as important as the underlying demand for skills.

Taken together, these themes form the LSIP's delivery logic**.** They are the shared workforce conditions that sit beneath sector priorities and determine whether actions translate into real improvements for employers and residents. Addressing them strengthens the whole system: it makes sector delivery more implementable, supports employer participation, especially among SMEs, and keeps provision focused on the workplace outcomes employers consistently value. Detailed delivery activity to implement these changes will be set out in Annex B.

1.9 Conclusion

Part 1 sets out the **current** and **three-year** skills needs across Kent and Medway, providing a clear, evidence-led foundation for the actions and activities that follow. It brings together employer insight, labour market data and sector intelligence to show where shortages and capability gaps are already constraining delivery and where the system must build stronger pipelines, progression and workforce resilience. It also highlights the cross-cutting essentials, work readiness, digital (including AI), net zero capability, provider delivery capacity and SME engagement, that will determine whether training investment translates into consistent workplace competence at scale.

Part 2: Agreed Actions

This section sets out the agreed actions that respond directly to the skills needs identified in Part 1, translating the evidence into a clear programme across priority sectors. The priorities below have been agreed with strategic partners and will be delivered through employers, education and training providers, and wider system partners, with the LSIP convening and brokering collaboration and keeping progress under review. For each sector, the actions specify the intended outcomes and impacts and set out proportionate measures to evidence progress, grounded in employer and provider insight, established forums and networks, and qualitative examples, supported by contextual indicators where these are available. Detailed delivery activity to implement these changes is set out in Annex B, presented as a table of specific activities (including leads, supporting partners, timescales, expected outcomes and monitoring/measurement) to provide system partners with clear line-of-sight from action to implementation.

2.1 Adult Social Care

1. **Entry pipeline, careers education and sector perception:** Strengthen the flow of entrants through consistent representation of adult social care in schools, colleges and careers services, with practical exposure to roles and progression routes. Deliver a coordinated careers offer shaped through employers, providers and careers partners, with the LSIP aligning activity and brokering connections. Increase awareness and engagement to build a more consistent pipeline and improve early retention. Evidence progress through the reach of careers engagement, partner feedback, indicative trends in enquiries, applications and starts where available, and contextual vacancy and turnover trends supported by qualitative case evidence.

2. **Essential core skills for safe practice (communication, record keeping and professional behaviours):** Build stronger foundational capability for safe, consistent practice by delivering contextualised English, maths and employability that new entrants can apply to workplace expectations, including effective communication and accurate records. Strengthen accessible, care-based learning reinforced through workplace coaching, supervision and reflective practice, with the LSIP convening partners to align expectations and remove barriers to participation. Improve confidence, job readiness and progression, contributing to improved quality and workforce stability. Evidence uptake through participation and completion, partner feedback on practice standards, quality signals where available, and qualitative examples of improved practice and progression.
3. **Flexible, bite-sized upskilling aligned to employer priorities and shift patterns:** Expand short, targeted training delivered around rotas and limited release time, including modular provision in priority areas such as digital care, dementia and delegated healthcare tasks. Co-design and deliver responsive training through blended and in-workplace models, align employer priorities with provision through the LSIP, and identify scalable approaches across different provider sizes. Increase access and confidence in priority skill areas and readiness for evolving models of care. Evidence progress through participation and completion, partner feedback on relevance and application in practice, and qualitative examples of implementation.

4. **Progression pathways and leadership capability, including the Registered Manager pipeline:** Strengthen progression routes and leadership development aligned to the Care Workforce Pathway, with a focus on readiness and retention in Registered Manager roles. Strengthen and simplify pathways into senior and management posts, embed mentoring and peer networks, and convene employers and providers through the LSIP to promote shared offers where appropriate. Increase leadership confidence and capability and strengthen service stability through clearer succession routes. Evidence progress through participation in leadership development and mentoring, partner feedback on readiness and confidence, indicative leadership stability trends where available, and qualitative examples.
5. **Employer–education provider collaboration and SME accessibility to the skills system:** Make training easier to navigate and consistently accessible for an SME-heavy sector, while strengthening employer–provider collaboration so curricula reflect care practice and remain aligned to the Care Workforce Pathway. Improve access and signposting into training, strengthen shared learning networks and delivery models that enable SME participation, and embed co-design and feedback loops that keep provision responsive. Increase SME engagement, improve curriculum relevance and job readiness, and strengthen employer–provider relationships. Evidence progress through employer participation and repeat engagement, partner feedback on ease of navigation and relevance, and signs of active collaboration such as curriculum updates.

2.2 Construction and Built Environment

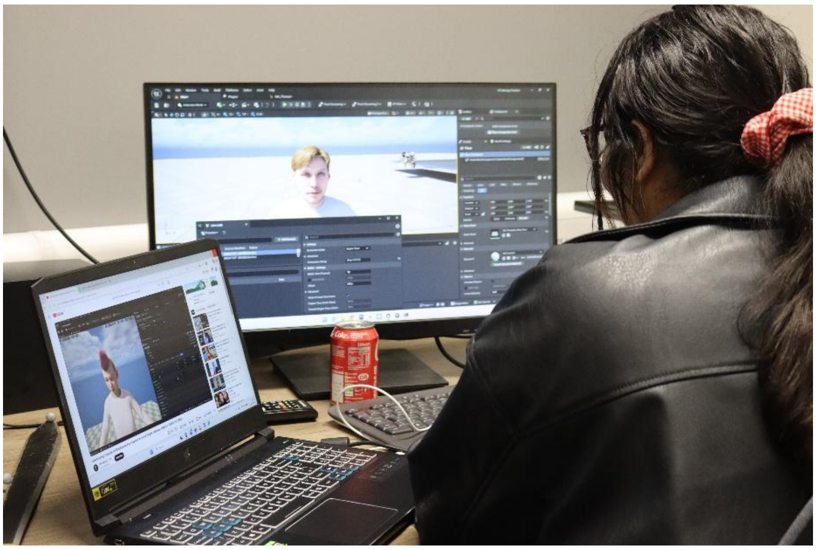
1. **Entry pipeline, careers, sector perception and work readiness (digital + green fundamentals):** Maintain a coherent, area-wide construction careers and pre-employment offer embedding safe working practice, professional behaviours, baseline digital competence and early green fundamentals, and broker SME access to placements and entry-to-site activity through simplified, shared approaches to improve readiness, progression and early retention. Evidence progress through employer forum feedback on readiness and safe behaviours, provider starts/participation for entry routes and placement/brokerage activity (including SME engagement).
2. **Delivery-critical core trades and building services (digital baseline + low-carbon mainstreaming + educator capacity):** Scale capacity in priority trade and building services routes by aligning employers and providers around provision that reflects current site requirements, with digital competence treated as baseline for reporting, QA and compliance and low-carbon awareness integrated into mainstream delivery. Strengthen educator capability through employer-led CPD and Industry Associate-type models and enable SME participation through brokerage that reduces administrative burden. Evidence progress through provider starts (and participation where available), employer forum insight on recruitment difficulty, work readiness and compliance capability, and educator-capacity signals showing whether constraints are easing.
3. **Infrastructure enabling capacity: groundworks, plant operations and plant maintenance (ticketing barriers + digital readiness + SME access):** Expand routes into enabling roles underpinning

infrastructure mobilisation, including progression into civils, groundworks, plant operations and plant maintenance, reducing barriers linked to ticketing costs, entry requirements and insurance constraints through coordinated, shared delivery that improves SME access. Embed digital readiness and green awareness as standard to support compliance. Evidence progress through starts/participation where providers can report, supply-chain and employer forum feedback on constraints, downtime and unfilled roles, and qualitative evidence that compliance behaviours and basic digital reporting practices are improving.

4. **Progression into site leadership and commercial capability (supervision, management, QS/commercial; digital leadership + green compliance):** Strengthen progression from experienced trades into supervisory, managerial and commercial roles through structured development in planning, QA, health and safety management, contract administration and people leadership, alongside routes into quantity surveying, estimating and procurement, with digital leadership and green compliance explicit throughout. Support SME participation through flexible delivery and brokerage to strengthen programme certainty, quality and commercial resilience. Evidence progress through participation starts where providers can share them, employer forum feedback on changed practice and easing delivery constraints, and qualitative examples captured through employer/provider networks.
5. **Specialist technical capability, planning capacity and low-carbon/retrofit delivery (digital integration + educator upskilling + SME market access):** Strengthen pipelines into professional and technical roles (including civil/structural and building services engineering/design) and sustainable routes into planning and development management, while building low-carbon and retrofit capability through specialist pathways and embedded sustainability content, with digital integration treated as core. Strengthen educator capability through employer-led CPD and Industry Associate-type models and support SMEs into emerging markets through simplified routes and shared cohorts. Evidence progress through starts/participation where shareable, employer forum feedback on digital competence and compliance capability, and qualitative evidence that firms are staffing and delivering higher-performance and retrofit work.

2.3 Creative Industries

1. **Entry pipeline, careers, inclusion and job-readiness (with paid routes into work and digital/green fundamentals):** Widen awareness of creative occupations, including technical/off-stage, production operations and digital routes, and strengthen job-readiness for project-based work through professional behaviours, baseline digital capability and sustainability/'green' awareness, improving the consistency of entry expectations across a project-led sector. Expand paid entry routes, including Bootcamps and apprenticeships, broker placements, and simplify engagement so SMEs and micro-businesses can participate. Evidence progress through employer panel insight, provider network intelligence, documented case examples and triangulated stakeholder feedback.



2. **Technical production and delivery capability (live, screen and digital):** Strengthen technical capability in roles such as lighting, sound and stage management through earn-while-you-learn routes grounded in real equipment and production conditions, with clear competence expectations for safe working, operational discipline and specification-led delivery. Improve shared access to specialist facilities through anchor venues/studios and use employer-led briefs and placements to build portfolio evidence aligned to local workflows, supporting readiness and reducing recruitment friction. Evidence progress through employer panel insight, provider network intelligence, documented case examples and triangulated stakeholder feedback.
3. **Digital and creative technology ('fusion') skills and continuous upskilling (including AI/data-enabled workflows):** Embed hybrid 'fusion' capability across mainstream programmes and accessible CPD so the workforce can apply production-ready digital workflows, including animation/VFX, immersive/XR techniques and practical use of data and AI-enabled tools, strengthening currency as toolchains evolve. Align provision to employer practice through shared toolchain/workflow expectations and employer-led labs, sprints and mentored project work focused on real production problems. Evidence progress through employer panel insight, provider network intelligence, documented case examples and triangulated stakeholder feedback.
4. **Commercial, business and leadership capability for freelancers and SMEs:** Strengthen commercial confidence through integrated 'business for creatives' content covering contracts/IP, pricing, cashflow, client management and sales, supported by practical clinics, mentoring and leadership/project delivery development for senior freelancers and SME leads, reinforcing business sustainability. Strengthen supervision and mentoring so smaller employers can recruit and develop entrants with clearer progression and more sustainable early careers. Evidence progress through employer panel insight, provider network intelligence, documented case examples and triangulated stakeholder feedback.
5. **Place-based coordination: aligning provision to demand across districts and sustaining the workforce:** Strengthen place-based coordination to reduce fragmentation, maintain responsive curricula and short-course offers, and improve access to networks and opportunities across districts, ensuring engagement is not constrained by location or existing connections. Widen reach through brokerage and delivery nodes, including pop-up and satellite provision and blended learning, and strengthen inclusive recruitment and progression to reduce reliance on informal hiring and unpaid work and widen access to paid opportunities. Evidence progress through employer panel insight, provider network intelligence, documented case examples and triangulated stakeholder feedback.

2.4 Fresh Food, Horticulture, Agriculture and Viticulture

1. **Careers advice and guidance through employer engagement and education partnerships (sector visibility and pathway navigation):** Strengthen coordinated employer engagement that improves sector visibility and provides clear local pathway navigation, addressing the image and 11–14 visibility gap. Deliver aligned activity with schools, colleges

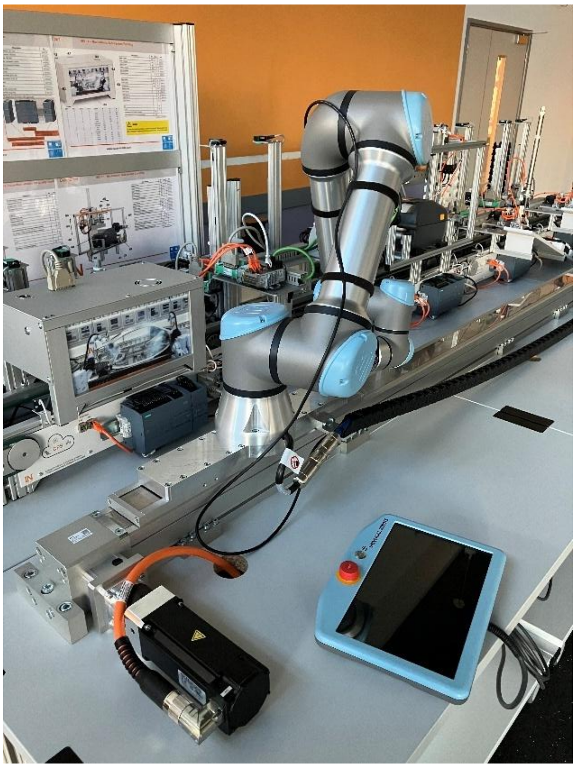
and careers partners that showcases roles across production/packhouse operations, logistics, engineering and technology. Increase the reach and consistency of employer-informed guidance so more people can navigate entry and progression routes with confidence. Evidence progress through partner feedback, forum themes and short case studies demonstrating stronger guidance practice and clearer pathways.

2. **Leadership and management progression to strengthen succession planning (upskilling the existing workforce):** Strengthen leadership and management capability through structured progression from team leader and supervisor roles into broader management and leadership routes as operational complexity increases. Deliver activity that strengthens first-line supervision, improves retention practice and consistency of standards, and builds continuity across operations and technical functions. Increase leadership confidence and strengthen succession routes so employers retain resilience as requirements evolve. Evidence progress through employer and provider insight shared via networks and short case studies documenting leadership activity and applied practice change.
3. **Technical operations, maintenance engineering and hybrid agri-tech capability (Centre of Excellence model as a hub-and-spoke networked offer):** Strengthen technical operations, maintenance engineering and hybrid agri-tech capability by developing and standardising the Centre of Excellence model as a hub-and-spoke networked offer. Deliver employer-led technical standards and an aligned modular offer that builds technical literacy for operators and strengthens multi-skilled maintenance capability. Increase technical confidence and maintenance response so sites remain resilient as automation expands. Evidence progress through confirmation of agreed standards and modules, partner feedback on workplace application, and short case studies showing improved technical confidence and maintenance practice.

4. **Embedded food safety and quality assurance as a standard module within the developing Centre of Excellence model:** Strengthen consistent food safety and quality assurance practice by embedding it within existing provision and integrating it as a standard module within the developing Centre of Excellence model. Deliver flexible, applied learning aligned to employer standards that reinforces audit readiness, recording discipline and specification compliance, with add-on options for short courses for new entrants and returners. Increase competence and audit readiness and strengthen consistency of standards across sites while supporting routes into quality and compliance roles. Evidence progress through provider narrative on embedding and use, employer feedback on competence, and short case studies showing improved practice and consistency.
5. **Progression into higher-level specialist skills (including viticulture) with sustainability/resource efficiency embedded into leadership routes:** Strengthen progression into agronomy, crop science, viticulture and technical management, embedding sustainability and resource efficiency across technician, supervisor and leadership routes. Deliver occupational mapping and modular steppingstones into specialist and management pathways, embedding sustainability/resource efficiency within leadership development as standard practice. Increase specialist capability and embed sustainability/resource efficiency in supervisory and leadership behaviours through practical application. Evidence progress

through qualitative employer and provider insight, narrative examples and short case studies of applied projects and workplace practice change.

2.5 Manufacturing and Engineering



1. **Entry pipeline, work readiness and placements (CIAG, sector image and SME engagement):** Strengthen sector attraction by improving careers information, advice and guidance so roles, routes and workplace realities are consistently understood, and address image and perception through employer-led engagement that is accessible to SMEs. Align entry routes to real workplace expectations; safe working, reliable behaviours and applied foundational learning; and strengthen placements (including T Level placements) through low-burden brokerage, shared approaches, mentoring and authentic tasks that make standards explicit. Evidence progress through employer, provider and careers-partner feedback, employer forum insight on SME engagement and placement experience, and short case examples showing stronger readiness and transition into work.
2. **Apprenticeships and SME participation through shared capacity (GTA-enabled):** Remove practical barriers for SMEs by aggregating demand, simplifying coordination and enabling viable cohorts across priority pathways, with shared recruitment and wraparound support that reduces administrative and supervisory burden. Strengthen employer confidence that delivery reflects real roles, tasks and standards, with mentoring and coaching capacity that supports retention and completion conditions through partner delivery. Evidence progress through SME feedback on feasibility, provider network intelligence on responsiveness, forum themes on relevance to priority occupations, and qualitative examples of capability strengthened in priority roles.
3. **Educator capacity, CPD and industry-associate delivery:** Address tutor shortages directly by expanding dual-professional and industry-associate models and keep provision current through structured CPD and regular exposure to modern workplaces, processes and equipment. Use employer input to refresh curricula through live briefs and authentic assessment so learning reflects contemporary production, automation and low-carbon practice. Evidence progress through provider feedback on capacity and curriculum currency, employer perspectives on competence and relevance, and clear case examples of updated delivery improving workplace readiness.
4. **Industry 4.0 and green competence embedded as standard practice:** Embed automation, controls, data literacy and low-carbon competence into mainstream programmes so digital and green skills become business as usual. Expand access to enabling technologies and employer-set briefs that apply learning to real production, maintenance and improvement challenges, reinforced by shared expectations and credible assessment through employer networks. Evidence progress through partner feedback on workplace application, forum insight on uptake and emerging priorities, and short case studies demonstrating applied improvements and sustainable practice.
5. **Higher technical development routes and employer-aligned pathways:** Strengthen advanced technical routes by aligning learning outcomes and assessment to occupational tasks, methods and equipment, and by enabling responsive cohort models that sustain emerging specialisms such as mechatronics, robotics and digital manufacturing. Use coordinated employer engagement, supported by the GTA and I4C, to prioritise need, widen SME access and strengthen consistency across provision, while

delivery remains partner-led and progress remains under LSIP review. Evidence progress through employer and provider feedback on route clarity and alignment, provider network intelligence on responsiveness, and narrative examples demonstrating improved role-readiness.

2.6 Tourism and Visitor Economy

1. **Hospitality Skills Passport (HSP), careers advice and guidance, and a coordinated entry pipeline:** Strengthen the flow of job-ready entrants by scaling the Hospitality Skills Passport and strengthening sector-specific careers advice and guidance through consistent representation of tourism and hospitality across schools, colleges and careers services. Deliver a coordinated careers and entry offer shaped through employers, providers and careers partners, aligning cohorts to live recruitment demand, with the LSIP brokering connections. Increase readiness by embedding practical work readiness as a core programme component. Evidence progress through the reach of careers engagement, partner feedback, indicative pipeline signals, and qualitative case evidence via forums and networks.

2. **SME-accessible training, placements and work-based programmes (including T Levels and sector work-based routes):** Strengthen SME participation by expanding modular training and workplace exposure that businesses can use without undue disruption. Deliver brokerage-supported placements and work-based routes, including T Levels, that reduce burden, improve matching and strengthen placement standards. Increase credible pathways so individuals build confidence and convert into jobs or apprenticeships. Evidence progress through employer participation and repeat engagement, provider feedback on accessibility and quality, qualitative learner and employer insight, and delivery partner updates on movement into work and sustained employment.
3. **Priority technical competence in operations and visitor experience (kitchens, accommodation, events and guest services):** Strengthen role-ready competence by expanding short, employer-aligned technical modules and train-to-vacancy pathways across core operational areas. Deliver training through live or simulated commercial environments so learning aligns to occupational tasks and accelerates real-world competence. Increase service consistency, reduce pressure on experienced staff and strengthen visitor satisfaction through a more reliable frontline offer. Evidence progress through partner updates on offer and uptake, employer sign-off and feedback on competence in role, qualitative examples of improved standards, and employer-forum insight on reduced skills-related operational issues.
4. **Progression, supervision and retention: build team leader/manager capability and strengthen in-work development:** Strengthen supervisory and people-management capability to support retention through visible, credible pathways. Deliver practical supervisor and first-line manager development and strengthen in-work development from entry through to management. Increase stability and internal progression through stronger onboarding, clearer progression visibility and workplace culture improvements. Evidence progress through participation in development activity, employer feedback on supervisory capability and team performance, and qualitative examples captured through employer forums and provider networks.
5. **Kent Hospitality Focus Group and system alignment (including Brand Kent/Visit Kent) to coordinate delivery and embed digital + green capability as business as usual:** Strengthen

employer-led coordination to align provision to vacancies, scale entry routes and respond to seasonality, embedding workforce development within destination strategy. Deliver an employer-led Kent Hospitality Focus Group to agree priorities, align delivery across partners and keep impact under review. Embed digital capability (booking/reservations, POS/CRM and social media) and green capability (waste reduction and sustainable procurement) as business as usual across businesses of all sizes. Evidence progress through Focus Group engagement and actions progressed, provider network updates on aligned delivery, employer-reported practice adoption, and qualitative examples of improved resilience, productivity and sustainability.

2.7 Cross cutting themes

1. **English, maths and employability skills:** Strengthen work readiness across priority sector routes by embedding contextualised English, maths, communication and professional behaviours into pre-employment, apprenticeships and adult upskilling so learning translates into consistent workplace competence. Delivery will align employer expectations with provider practice through established forums and networks, supporting safer practice, improved early performance and smoother progression. Evidence progress through employer feedback on job readiness and applied core skills, provider confirmation that core skills are embedded within priority pathways, and short qualitative examples showing improved communication, reliability and applied English/maths in workplace contexts, supported by participation/completion signals where partners can share them.
2. **Digital (including AI):** Make baseline digital confidence, including appropriate awareness of AI-enabled workflows, a standard employability expectation across priority sectors so staff and entrants can work safely and productively as workplaces adopt digital reporting, automation and data-enabled processes. Delivery will focus on simple, bolt-on modules and clear signposting that employers (including SMEs) can use without heavy burden, reinforcing compliance, productivity and service quality. Evidence progress through employer and provider insight on improved digital confidence and safe practice, confirmation that digital/AI content is routinely included in priority pathways, and short case examples showing how baseline digital capability is improving day-to-day performance, with contextual indicators used where available.
3. **Net Zero / Decarbonisation:** Embed low-carbon awareness and sustainable operating behaviours within mainstream occupational routes so Net Zero competence becomes standard workplace practice rather than a separate specialism, with relevance across sectors where compliance, customer expectations and operating models are changing. Delivery will focus on "green fundamentals" integrated into existing provision and applied to real job roles, reinforcing consistent behaviours in day-to-day practice. Evidence progress through provider confirmation that sustainability content is embedded across priority pathways, employer feedback on workforce readiness for low-carbon practice, and qualitative examples showing applied change in workplace behaviours, supported by relevant system signals where these are available.

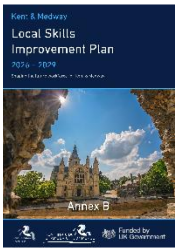
4. **FE workforce:** Strengthen delivery capacity and curriculum currency by scaling practical educator upskilling through targeted CPD, teacher encounters and Industry-Associate-type approaches, ensuring priority provision can expand, adapt and remain credible to employers. Delivery will prioritise low-burden employer participation and regular exposure to modern workplace practice so technical routes remain current and scalable. Evidence progress through participation in CPD/industry-engagement activity, qualitative feedback from employers and providers on improved currency and confidence, and provider signals that delivery constraints are easing (for example refreshed content, improved credibility and the ability to sustain cohorts), triangulated through existing networks.
5. **SME engagement:** Make the skills system simpler and more accessible for SMEs by strengthening navigation, signposting and brokerage into training and placements, using shared approaches that reduce time and administrative friction for micro and small firms across priority sectors. Delivery will focus on practical, repeatable mechanisms that enable SMEs to participate consistently despite limited capacity, improving take-up and sustaining engagement over time. Evidence progress through SME participation and repeat engagement, partner feedback on ease of access and reduced burden, and qualitative examples showing SMEs successfully using training or placements that were previously hard to access, with contextual indicators used where partners can share them

2.8 Conclusion

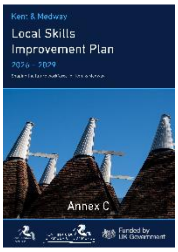
Collectively, these agreed actions provide a clear line of sight from the evidence in Part 1 to delivery across the system: strengthening entry and careers visibility, embedding work readiness and core behaviours, expanding flexible upskilling aligned to employer operating models, and reinforcing progression into supervision, leadership and higher technical capability, with digital and sustainability embedded as standard practice. Delivery will be led by employers, education and training providers and wider system partners, with the LSIP convening, brokering alignment and keeping progress under review through established employer forums, channels and provider networks. Progress will be evidenced through a proportionate, evidence-led approach that prioritises partner feedback and qualitative insight on what is changing in practice, supported by documented case examples and relevant system signals where these are available. Detailed delivery activity to implement these changes is set out in Annex B.

The Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce, as the designated Employer Representative Body for the Kent & Medway Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), leads coordinated engagement across employers, education and training providers, and local stakeholders. This role includes supporting implementation of the LSIP's priorities, reviewing the plan in response to emerging evidence and employer intelligence, and reporting annually on progress and outcomes. Further evidence, insight and the agreed actions that support delivery of the LSIP are provided in the Annexes, available at kentemployerskillsplan.org or via the QR code.

Annex A – Further Information on Skills Needs



Annex B – Detailed Delivery Activity



Annex C – Background & Methodology

Annex D – Kent & Medway Education Landscape

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