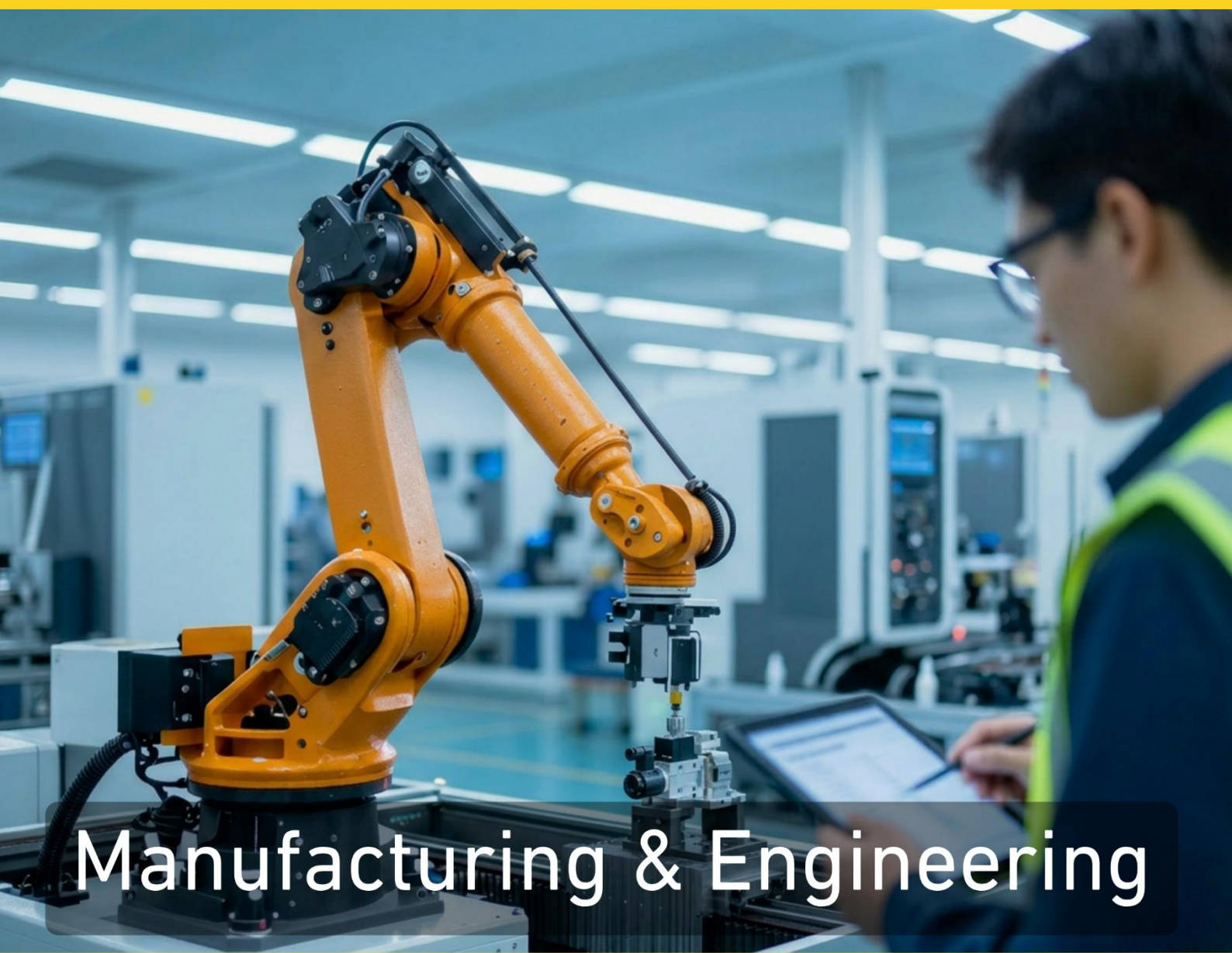


Kent & Medway

Local Skills Improvement Plan

2026 – 2029

Shaping the future workforce for Kent & Medway



Manufacturing & Engineering

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

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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

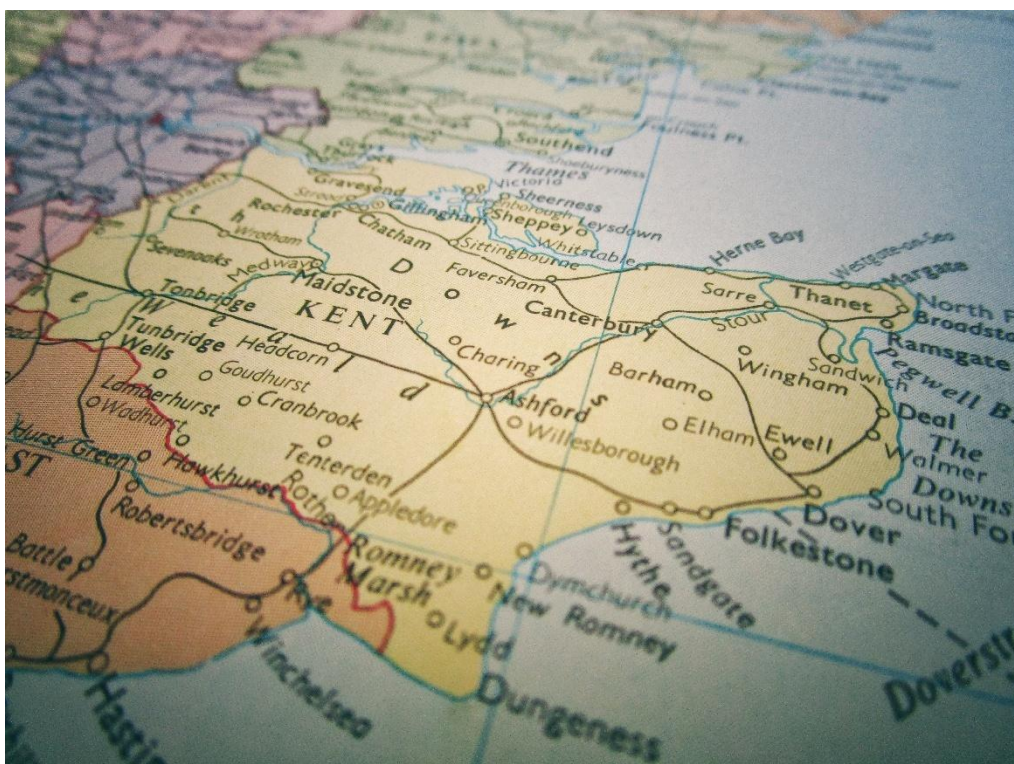
The Kent and Medway Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) is the employer-led evidence base and delivery framework that aligns the skills system to labour market demand, strengthening workforce capability, driving productivity, and enabling sustainable economic growth across the region.

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.

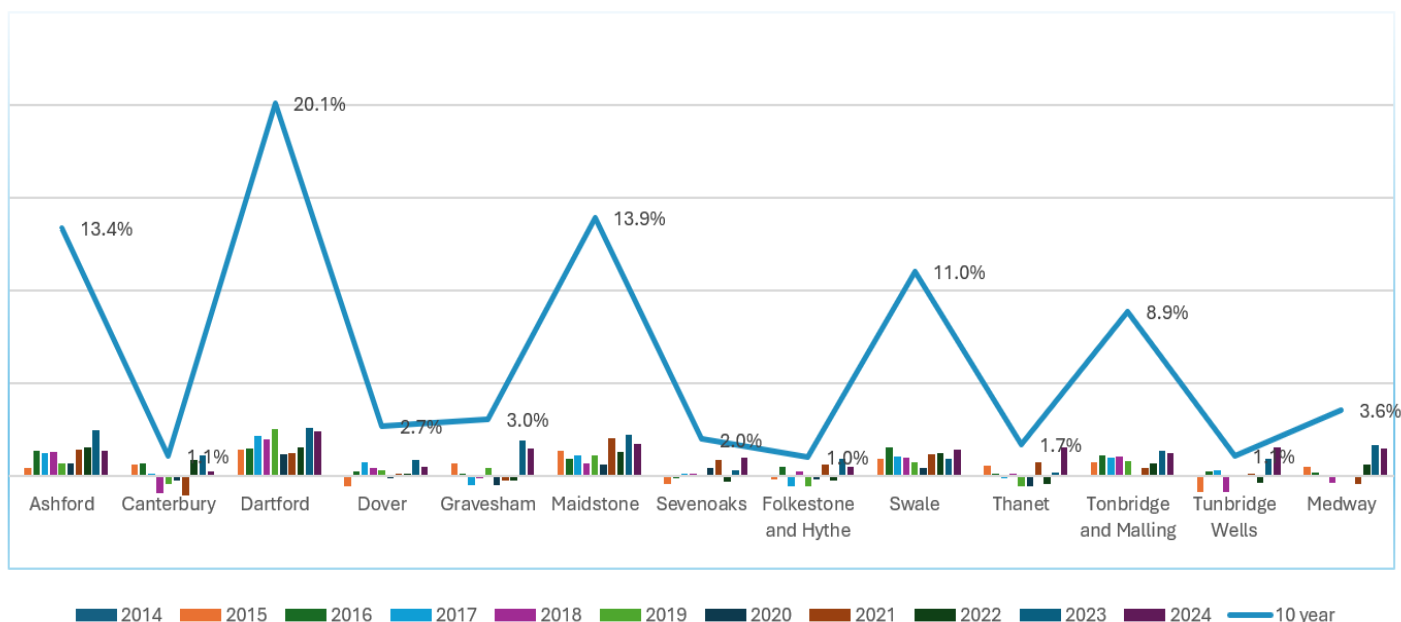
The national direction of travel reinforces the need for this employer-led focus. The Get Britain Working White Paper sets out a programme of reform intended to reduce economic inactivity and raise employment rates through more joined-up support across work, health and skills, with an explicit expectation 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

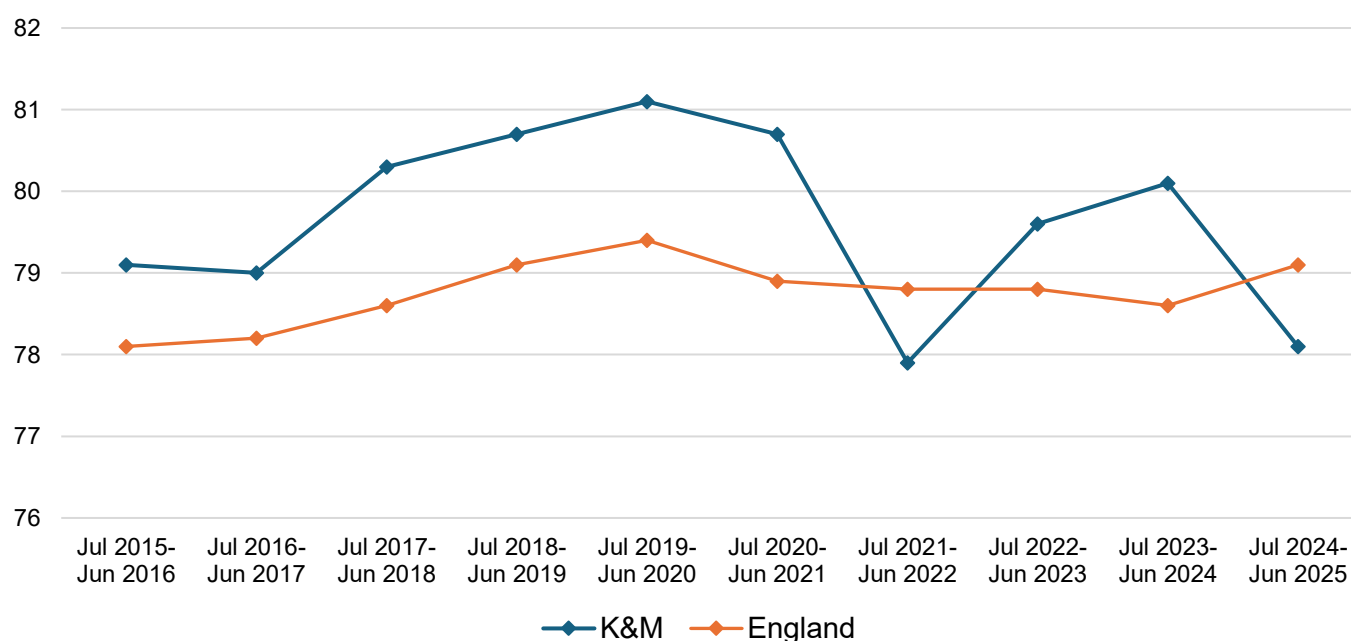
Kent and Medway is a large and growing region, accounting for 3.3% of England's population and reaching an estimated 1.93 million residents by June 2024. Growth has been faster than the national average in recent years and has not been evenly distributed across the area, with particularly strong increases 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. This document focuses on manufacturing and engineering.

1.1 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.



1.2 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.

1.2.1 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.

1.2.2 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.

1.3 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.

1.3.1 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.

1.3.2 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.

1.3.3 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.

1.3.4 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.

1.3.5 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.

1.4 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.

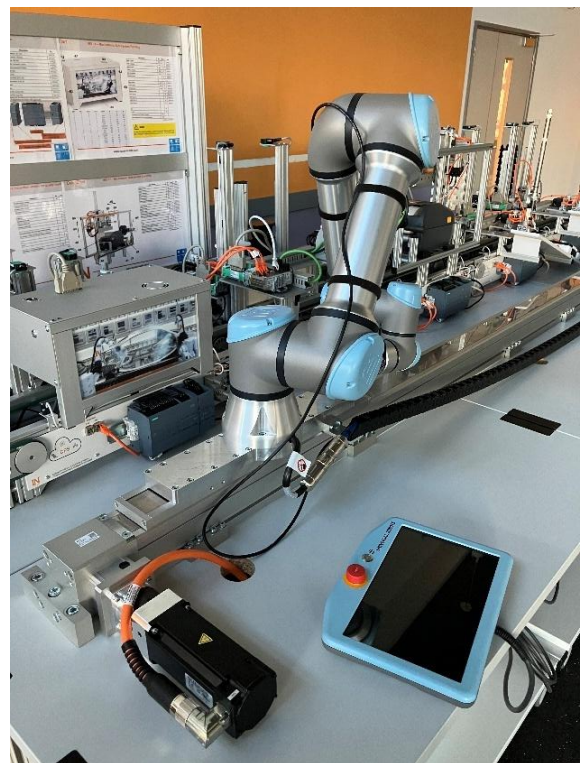
Part 2: Agreed Actions

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 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.



2.2 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

2.3 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.



Annex B – This Annex outlines the specific activities required to implement each of the recommended actions as identified in Part 2. Agreed Actions

Where specific lead organisations are not yet confirmed, activities are assigned to broad delivery partners. Specific lead organisation(s) will be agreed for each activity as the LSIP moves into delivery, and engagement with relevant providers has already commenced.

Manufacturing and Engineering						
Action	Activity	Lead Organisation(s)	Supporting partners	Timescales	Expected outcomes	Monitoring & Measurement
1. Entry pipeline, work readiness and placements (CIAG, sector image and SME engagement)	Co-design an SME-friendly, employer-led "single front door" careers and placements offer with providers/careers partners, aligning IAG to real workplace standards (safe working, reliable behaviours, applied foundations) and delivering low-burden T Level/other placements via brokerage, shared tools, mentoring and authentic tasks.	LSIP Careers Hub I4C	FE HE ITP KATO Employers LA's Industry Bodies KMFG DWP National Careers Service (CXK) MAKE UK	Y1 – pilot the front door and shared placement processes. Y2 – expand participation and embed brokerage. Y3 – review progression and sustain the model.	A clearer, employer-led front door is in place for careers, guidance and placements in manufacturing and engineering, aligning information, advice and guidance to real workplace expectations around safe working, reliable behaviours and applied foundations and making T Level and other placements easier for SMEs to host. This should improve sector image, strengthen work-readiness and increase progression into placements, apprenticeships and jobs.	Progress will be measured through: - the number of employers, providers and careers partners using the front door - placement and brokerage activity, including SME participation and T Level placements - learner participation in sector-entry activity - progression into placements, apprenticeships or employment where data is available - employer feedback on work-readiness, fit with workplace standards and the accessibility of the model.

2. Apprenticeships and SME participation through shared capacity (GTA-enabled)	Develop and operationalise a GTA-enabled brokerage that aggregates SME apprenticeship demand into shared cohorts, runs recruitment/admin and wraparound support centrally, and provides shared mentoring/coaching so delivery is aligned to real job tasks and SMEs aren't carrying the supervisory burden alone	I4C GTA LSIP	FE HE ITP KATO Employers LA's Industry Bodies KMFG	Y1 – establish shared capacity and pilot cohorts. Y2 – scale starts and deepen SME participation. Y3 – review completions and sustain the brokerage.	A GTA-enabled brokerage is in place to aggregate SME apprenticeship demand into shared cohorts, centralise recruitment and administration and provide wraparound mentoring and coaching. This should make apprenticeship participation more viable for smaller firms, increase starts and completions and improve alignment between apprenticeship delivery and real job tasks in priority occupations.	Progress will be measured through: - the number of SMEs engaged - vacancies or cohorts brokered through the GTA-enabled model - apprenticeship starts, retention and completions - use of shared recruitment, administration and support functions - repeat SME participation - employer/provider feedback on reduced burden, cohort viability and alignment to workplace need.
3. Educator capacity, CPD and industry-associate delivery	Develop the Industry Associate model by recruiting practising professionals to co-deliver and mentor, and embed regular Teacher Encounters (planned, routine exposure of teaching staff to current workplaces, processes and equipment) alongside structured CPD so curricula are refreshed through live briefs/authentic assessment and remain	LSIP FE I4C	HE ITP KATO Employers LA's Industry Bodies KMFG	Y1 – pilot CPD, exchanges and industry-associate delivery. Y2 – expand educator capacity across priority areas. Y3 – review impact and sustain the model.	Educator capacity is strengthened through a more active Industry Associate model, regular Teacher Encounters and structured CPD that keep teaching and assessment grounded in current production environments, automation and low-carbon practice. This should help address technical tutor shortages, improve curriculum currency and increase learner exposure to live	Progress will be measured through: - the number of Industry Associates recruited or engaged - staff participation in Teacher Encounters and structured CPD - programmes refreshed through live employer input - provider feedback on tutor capacity and curriculum currency - employer feedback on relevance to modern production environments

	aligned to modern production, automation and low-carbon practice.				briefs, authentic assessment and current workplace standards.	examples of authentic assessment, live briefs or updated teaching practice.
4. Industry 4.0 and green competence embedded as standard practice	Develop and embed a shared core curriculum baseline that hardwires automation, controls, data and low-carbon content into mainstream delivery, gives learners access to enabling technologies and employer-set briefs, and uses employer networks to agree credible assessment while evidencing impact through partner feedback, forum insight and short applied case studies.	LSIP FE HE I4C GTA	ITP KATO Employers LA's Industry Bodies KMFG	Y1 – agree priority content and pilot delivery changes. Y2 – embed Industry 4.0 and green competence across provision. Y3 – review take-up and refresh the model.	A stronger shared core curriculum baseline is in place across manufacturing and engineering, embedding automation, controls, data and low-carbon content within mainstream delivery and linking learning to employer-set briefs and credible assessment. This should improve learner capability in Industry 4.0 and green practice and make these competencies a normal expectation rather than a specialist add-on.	Progress will be measured through: - the number of programmes updated to reflect the agreed baseline - employer participation in shaping content and assessment - learner access to enabling technologies and employer-set briefs - participation and completion in revised provision - employer/provider feedback on the relevance of automation, data and low-carbon competence to modern manufacturing roles.
5. Higher technical development routes and employer-aligned pathways	Co-design higher technical routes with employers and providers by mapping learning outcomes and assessment to real occupational tasks/equipment, then use coordinated engagement via the GTA and I4C to aggregate SME demand into	LSIP FE HE I4C GTA	ITP KATO Employers LA's Industry Bodies KMFG	Y1 – map demand and pilot priority higher technical routes. Y2 – expand employer-aligned pathways.	Higher technical pathways are better aligned to real occupational tasks, equipment and SME demand, with coordinated engagement through the GTA and I4C helping to build responsive cohorts in areas such as mechatronics, robotics	Progress will be measured through: - the number of higher technical routes or cohorts introduced or revised - employer, GTA and I4C participation in pathway design and demand aggregation - learner applications, starts, completions and progression into higher-

	responsive cohorts (including mechatronics, robotics and digital manufacturing), keeping delivery partner-led and progress under LSIP review.			Y3 – review progression and sustain the offer.	and digital manufacturing. This should strengthen progression into higher-level skills, make provision more responsive to employer need and improve access for SMEs to higher technical development.	level learning where data is available • SME participation in responsive cohorts • employer feedback on alignment to occupational tasks, equipment and sector demand.
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Cross Cutting Themes						
Action	Activity	Lead Organisation(s)	Supporting Partners	Timescales	Expected outcomes	Monitoring & Measurement
1. English, maths and employability skills	Co-design with employers and providers through established forums to embed sector contextualised English, maths, communication and professional behaviours into each priority pathway (taught/assessed through real job tasks in workplace or simulated settings)	FE/ITP Careers Hub LSIP	HE Employers LA's	Y1 – agree the framework and pilot contextualised delivery. Y2 – extend embedding across priority pathways. Y3 – review impact and mainstream the model.	English, maths, communication and professional behaviours are embedded more consistently across priority pathways, taught and assessed through real job tasks in workplace or simulated settings rather than as separate standalone inputs. This should improve learner confidence, work-readiness and progression while addressing core employability gaps raised by employers across sectors.	Progress will be measured through: • the number of pathways embedding contextualised English, maths and employability content • provider adoption of the agreed approach • learner participation, completion and assessment evidence where available • employer involvement in contextual design • employer/provider feedback on communication, professional behaviours and readiness for work.

2. Digital (Including AI)	Bring employers, providers and digital initiatives together to define a workforce-wide baseline for digital (including AI) capability, then embed it consistently across FE and apprenticeship pathways and accessible upskilling/CPD for existing staff as a standard employability expectation	LSIP FE/HE	Employers LA's KCFG KMFG KHFG DWP	Y1 – define core digital and AI priorities and pilot delivery Y2 – embed them across sectors and provision types Y3 – review uptake and refresh the approach.	A clearer baseline for digital capability, including AI awareness and responsible use, is defined and embedded across FE, apprenticeships and accessible upskilling for the existing workforce. This should make digital and AI capability a more consistent employability expectation across LSIP sectors and support employers and learners to adopt relevant tools safely and effectively in day-to-day practice.	Progress will be measured through: - the number of programmes, pathways or CPD offers updated to reflect the agreed baseline - employer and provider participation in defining and embedding the standard - learner and staff participation in digital or AI-related learning - examples of digital or AI tools being used in teaching, learning or workplace practice - employer feedback on practical relevance and workforce readiness.
3. Net Zero/ Decarbonisation	Education and training providers embed existing “green fundamentals” and low-carbon operating behaviours into mainstream curriculum, assessment and work-based learning across priority occupational routes so Net Zero competence is consistently applied in real job roles as standard day-to-day practice, not a separate specialism.	FE/HE LSIP	Employers KCFG KMFG KHFG DWP	Y1 – agree priority net zero content and pilot integration. Y2 – extend embedding across sectors and programmes. Y3 – review relevance and sustain delivery.	Green fundamentals and low-carbon operating behaviours are embedded more consistently across mainstream curriculum, assessment and work-based learning so that net zero capability is developed as part of everyday practice across priority occupational routes. This should improve workforce readiness for changing technologies, standards and employer	Progress will be measured through: - the number of programmes and occupational routes embedding green fundamentals - provider adoption across curriculum, assessment and work-based learning; learner and staff participation in low-carbon learning or CPD - employer involvement in defining priority low-carbon behaviours - employer/provider feedback on how consistently net zero

					expectations rather than treating decarbonisation as a separate specialist topic.	capability is being applied in real job roles.
4. FE Workforce	Convene education providers and employers (through existing networks) to co-design and scale targeted CPD and regular Teacher Encounters, and to grow Industry Associate/dual-professional models that depend on sustained employer input to tackle technical tutor shortages (especially Construction and Engineering) while keeping priority provision current, credible and scalable	FE Gatsby LSIP	Employers HE ITP's	Y1 – pilot CPD, exchanges and industry engagement models. Y2 – expand participation and embed workforce approaches. Y3 – review impact and sustain capacity.	Targeted CPD, regular Teacher Encounters and stronger Industry Associate and dual-professional models are scaled to help address technical tutor shortages and keep priority provision current, credible and scalable, particularly in construction and engineering. This should strengthen FE workforce capability, increase employer input into delivery and improve the currency of teaching and assessment in LSIP priority areas.	Progress will be measured through: - the number of staff participating in CPD and Teacher Encounters - Industry Associates or dual professionals engaged - priority programmes refreshed through employer input - provider feedback on staff capacity and confidence, particularly in technical shortage areas - employer feedback on curriculum currency and credibility.
5. SME Engagement	Build a coordinated SME support and brokerage offer that helps small firms navigate the skills and education landscape, then matches and supports them to engage with the right education partners for training and placements through simple, shared	LSIP KICC/ERB SECTEC	FE/HE/ITP Employers KCFG KMFG KHFG I4C	Y1 – establish shared engagement routes and pilot support. Y2 – widen SME participation in design and delivery.	A more coordinated SME support and brokerage offer is in place, helping small firms navigate the skills system and engage with the right education partners for training and placements through simpler shared processes.	Progress will be measured through: - the number of SMEs supported through the brokerage offer - the number engaging in training, placements or co-design activity - repeat participation by SMEs - use of shared processes or support tools

	processes that minimise admin and make repeat participation realistic.			Y3 – review effectiveness and sustain the approach.	This should reduce administrative burden, widen SME participation and make repeat engagement in the local skills system more realistic across LSIP sectors.	employer/provider feedback on ease of navigation, reduced burden and the value of coordinated support.
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This table will be treated as a **live document and updated as needed throughout the three-year LSIP cycle.*

***Where baselines are not already available, they will be established in Year 1. Monitoring will include counts of employers meaningfully engaged through co-design, placements, mentoring, curriculum input or take-up of provision; changes to curriculum or delivery models; learner starts, participation and completion where available; and progression into priority provision, work experience, apprenticeships or employment. Timescales are intentionally concise and show the main delivery focus in Year 1, Year 2 and Year 3, with Year 1 centred on design and piloting, Year 2 on embedding and scaling, and Year 3 on review, refresh and sustained implementation.*

Existing and emerging national and local initiatives will support delivery of the actions identified within the LSIP, providing additional routes into work, progression and upskilling aligned to employer demand. These include Connect to Work, Skills Bootcamps, Sector-based Work Academy Programmes (SWAPs), pre-employment and supported employment programmes, apprenticeships (including Foundation Apprenticeships), T Levels and Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs), delivered through local partners including DWP, Local Authorities, Further and Higher Education providers, Independent Training Providers and employer-led networks across Kent and Medway. Collectively, these initiatives will strengthen access to opportunities for a diverse range of learners and jobseekers, including those who are economically inactive or unemployed, young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET), individuals with experience of the criminal justice system, and Armed Forces service leavers, ensuring the local skills system supports inclusive progression across all priority sectors.

Guide to Abbreviations

LSIP	Local Skills Improvement Plan	DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
KICC	Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce	LA's	Local Authorities (Kent County Council and Medway Council)
ERB	Employer Representative Body	KCFG	Kent Construction Focus Group (Employer Forum)
FE	Further Education	KMFG	Kent Manufacturing Focus Group (Employer Forum)
SECTEC	South East Construction Technical Excellence College	KHFG	Kent Hospitality Focus Group (Employer Forum)
HE	Higher Education	I4C	Industry 4 Council
ITP's	Independent Training Providers	GTA	Group Training Association
KATO	Kent Association of Training Providers	ICCI	Institute of Cultural and Creative Industries

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 kentemployersskillsplan.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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Kent & Medway Local Skills Improvement Plan

