

Kent & Medway

Local Skills Improvement Plan

2026 – 2029

Shaping the future workforce for Kent & Medway



Fresh Food, Horticulture,
Agriculture & Viticulture

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.

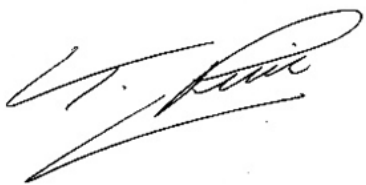
As the designated Employer Representative Body for the Kent and Medway Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce has been proud to lead this work on behalf of the region. Our role has been to listen to employers, draw together evidence from across the economy, and work with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

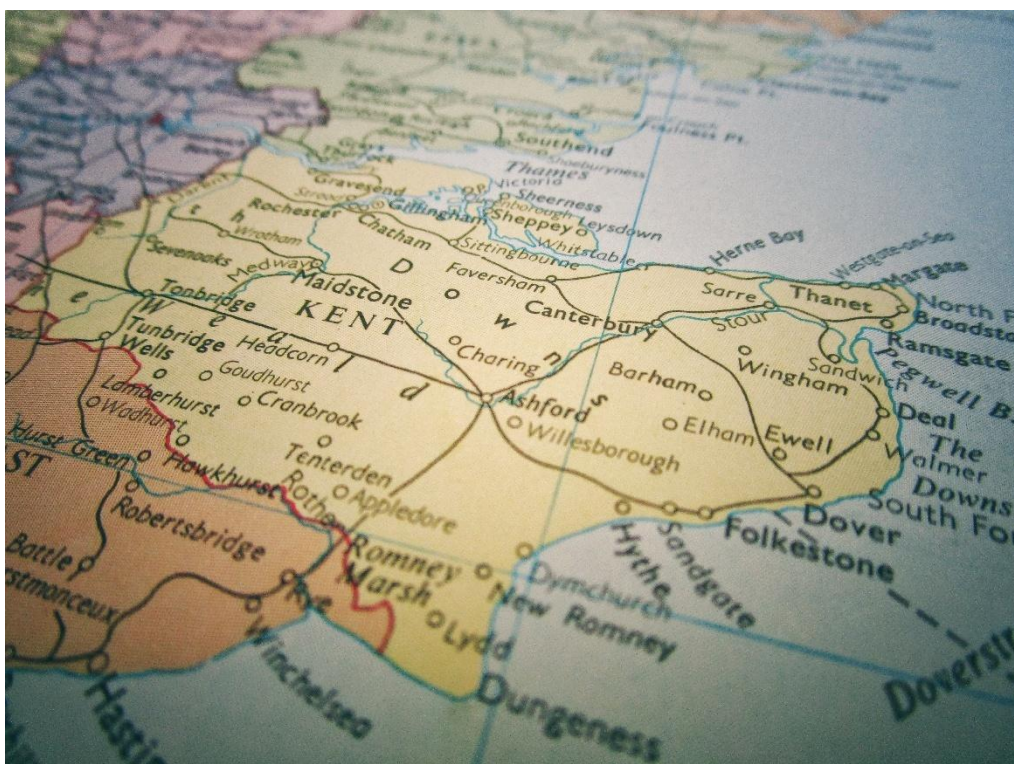
The Kent and Medway Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) is the employer-led evidence base and delivery framework that aligns the skills system to labour market demand, strengthening workforce capability, driving productivity, and enabling sustainable economic growth across the region.

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.

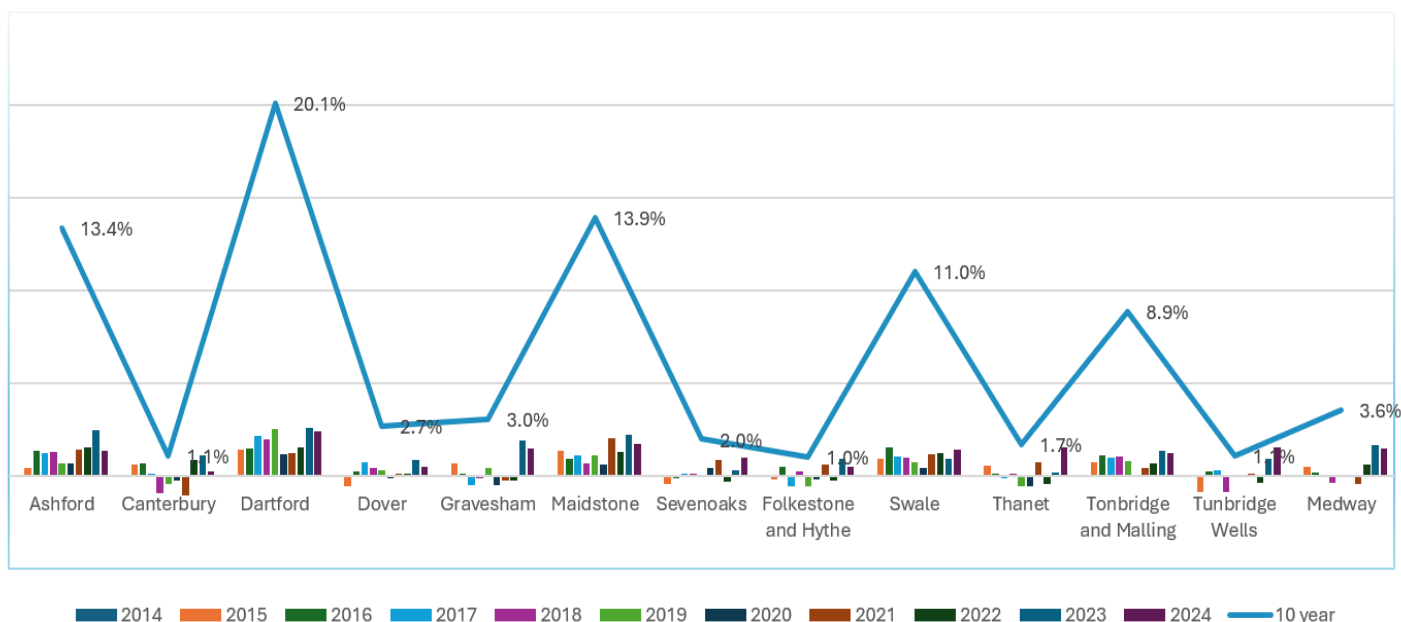
The national direction of travel reinforces the need for this employer-led focus. The Get Britain Working White Paper sets out a programme of reform intended to reduce economic inactivity and raise employment rates through more joined-up support across work, health and skills, with an explicit expectation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

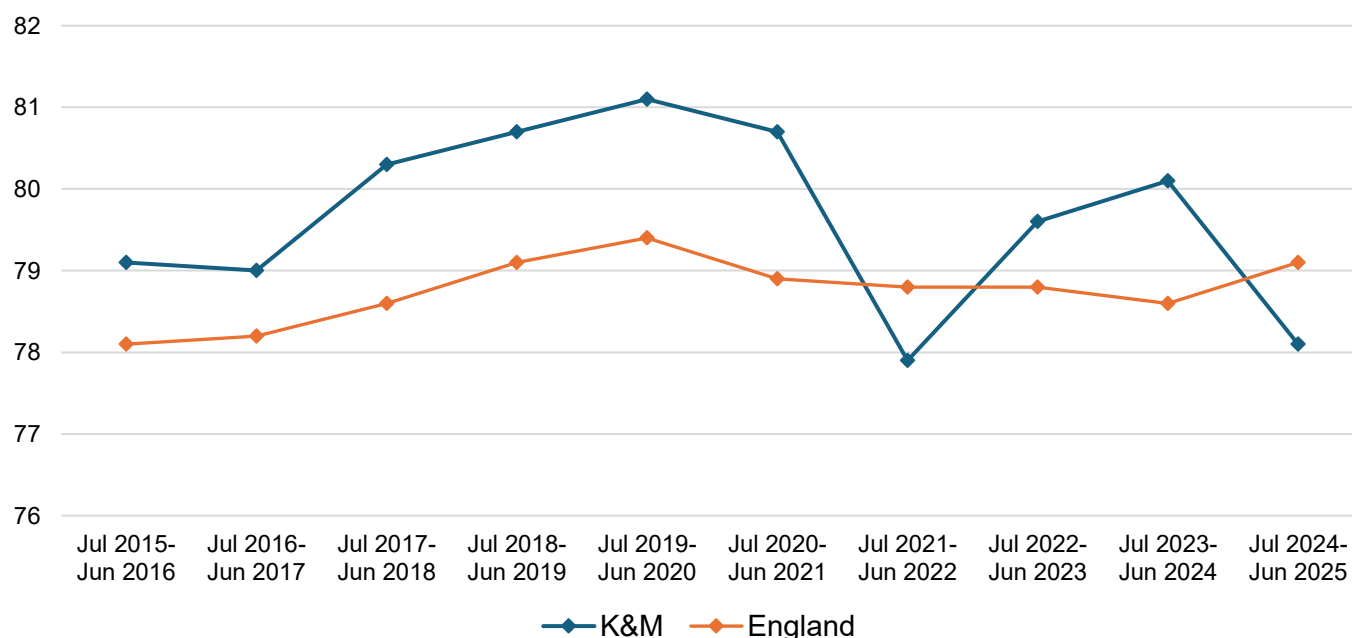
Kent and Medway is a large and growing region, accounting for 3.3% of England's population and reaching an estimated 1.93 million residents by June 2024. Growth has been faster than the national average in recent years and has not been evenly distributed across the area, with particularly strong increases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

1.1 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.

1.2 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.

1.2.1 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.



1.2.2 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.

1.3 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 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.



2.2 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.

Fresh Food Horticulture, Agriculture and Viticulture						
Action	Activity	Lead Organisation(s)	Supporting Partners	Timescales	Expected outcomes	Monitoring & Measurement
1. Careers advice and guidance through employer engagement and education partnerships (sector visibility and pathway navigation)	Align employers with schools, colleges and careers partners around a single, coordinated programme that consistently showcases roles from production/packhouse and logistics through to engineering/technology, while signposting clear local entry and progression routes through shared, employer-informed guidance	LSIP Careers Hub Fresh Food Production /Horticulture Task Force FE	HE ITP KATO Employers LA's Industry Bodies Fresh Food Production /Horticulture Task Force DWP National Careers Service (CXK) Kent Agricultural Society Produced in Kent	Y1 – align employers and educators and pilot coordinated careers activity. Y2 – broaden reach and improve pathway signposting. Y3 – review progression and sustain the offer.	A more visible and coherent careers offer is in place across fresh food, horticulture, agriculture and viticulture, showing the breadth of roles from production, packhouse and logistics through to engineering and technology and making local entry and progression routes easier to navigate. This should improve sector understanding, support informed choices and strengthen the talent pipeline into operational and technical roles.	Progress will be measured through: - the number of employers, schools, colleges and careers partners engaged - reach of shared careers activity and guidance materials - learner participation in sector awareness activity - referrals or movement into relevant learning, placements or jobs where data is available - employer/provider feedback on the visibility of the sector and clarity of local pathways.

2. Leadership and management progression to strengthen succession planning (upskilling the existing workforce)	Co-design modular leadership pathway with employers and providers that steps team leaders/supervisors into management through bite-sized development (first-line supervision, retention practice and consistent standards), supported by mentoring/peer networks and applied workplace projects.	LSIP FE HE Careers Hub Fresh Food Production /Horticulture Task Force	ITP KATO Employers LA's Industry Bodies	Y1 – define priority leadership needs and pilot development routes. Y2 – expand participation and embed progression. Y3 – review succession impact and sustain delivery.	A practical modular leadership pathway is in place to help team leaders and supervisors progress into management, combining bite-sized development in first-line supervision, retention practice and consistent standards with mentoring, peer support and workplace projects. This should strengthen succession planning, build management confidence and improve workforce stability in a sector where progression routes are often informal.	Progress will be measured through: - the number of employers and providers involved in the pathway - participation in bite-sized management development, mentoring and peer activity - completion of workplace projects - progression into supervisory or management responsibility where data is available - employer feedback on leadership capability, retention practice and succession readiness.
3. Technical operations, maintenance engineering and hybrid agri-tech capability (Centre of Excellence model as a hub-and-spoke networked offer.	Co-design and agree employer-led technical standards, then roll out a standardised hub-and-spoke Centre of Excellence offer (shared modules, placements and short courses) across providers so operators build technical literacy and multi-skilled maintenance capability, with continuous feedback and short case studies evidencing workplace application and improved	LSIP FE HE I4C Fresh Food Production /Horticulture Task Force	ITP KATO Employers LA's Industry Bodies Fresh Food Production /Horticulture Task Force	Y1 – shape the hub-and-spoke model and pilot priority technical delivery. Y2 – expand networked provision and employer participation. Y3 – review demand alignment and	A more standardised technical offer is in place through a hub-and-spoke Centre of Excellence model, giving operators and technicians access to shared modules, placements and short courses that build technical literacy, maintenance engineering and hybrid agri-tech capability.	Progress will be measured through: - the number of providers and employers participating in the Centre of Excellence model - shared modules, placements or short courses introduced - learner participation and completion in technical and maintenance-related provision - evidence of workplace application or improved maintenance practice

	maintenance practice as automation expands.			sustain the model.	This should improve multi-skilled capacity, strengthen maintenance practice as automation expands and make specialist provision more accessible across the system.	• employer feedback on technical literacy, multi-skilling and responsiveness to automation needs.
4. Embedded food safety and quality assurance as a standard module within the developing Centre of Excellence model	Co-design an employer-led food safety/QA module within the Centre of Excellence offer, embed it across existing provision, and deliver flexible, applied audit-readiness training (with short add-on options for new entrants/returners) so consistent recording and specification compliance becomes standard practice across sites.	FE LSIP Fresh Food Production /Horticulture Task Force	FE HE ITP KATO Employers LA's Industry Bodies	Y1 – develop and pilot the standard module. Y2 – embed it across the emerging network. Y3 – review uptake and sustain consistent delivery.	Food safety and quality assurance are embedded more consistently as a core element of the Centre of Excellence offer and wider provision, supported by applied audit-readiness training and flexible add-on options for new entrants and returners. This should improve recording, specification compliance and audit confidence and help make quality practice a consistent operational standard across sites.	Progress will be measured through: • the number of programmes or modules updated to include food safety and quality assurance • provider adoption across the Centre of Excellence network • participation in audit-readiness or add-on training • achievement or completion where available • employer feedback on compliance, recording and audit preparedness • examples of improved quality practice in the workplace.
5. Progression into higher-level specialist skills (including viticulture) with sustainability/resource efficiency	Co-design an employer-led careers and occupational map and modular “stepping-stone” learning route from technician to supervisor to leadership into agronomy/crop	LSIP FE Careers Hub Fresh Food Production /Horticulture Task Force	FE HE ITP KATO Employers LA's Industry Bodies	Y1 – define priority higher-level routes and pilot specialist provision. Y2 – expand participation	A clearer stepping-stone route is in place from technician to supervisor, leadership and specialist areas such as agronomy, crop science, viticulture and technical management, with	Progress will be measured through: • the number of specialist modules or progression stages introduced or revised • employer and provider participation in the

embedded into leadership routes	science/viticulture/technical management, embedding sustainability/resource efficiency as standard in each module and leadership development, then evidence take-up and behaviour change through employer/provider narratives and short case studies of applied projects shared via forums and provider networks.			and embed sustainability content. Y3 – review progression and sustain pathways.	sustainability and resource efficiency embedded throughout. This should strengthen progression into higher-level specialist skills, support succession into technical leadership roles and increase the sector's capacity to respond to changing environmental and production pressures.	occupational map and route design • learner participation, completion and progression into higher-level or specialist learning where data is available • uptake of sustainability and resource-efficiency content • employer/provider feedback and case evidence on applied learning and behaviour change.
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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	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,

					employability gaps raised by employers across sectors.	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	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	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

	practice, not a separate specialism.				changing technologies, standards and employer expectations rather than treating decarbonisation as a separate specialist topic.	employer/provider feedback on how consistently net zero 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	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

	through simple, shared 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.	• use of shared processes or support tools • 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

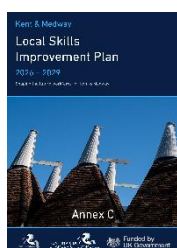
The Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce, as the designated Employer Representative Body for the Kent & Medway Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), leads coordinated engagement across employers, education and training providers, and local stakeholders. This role includes supporting implementation of the 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.



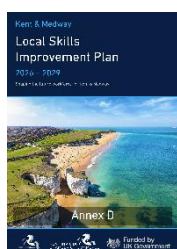
Annex A – Further Information on Skills Needs



Annex B – Detailed Delivery Activity



Annex C – Background & Methodology



Annex D – Kent & Medway Education Landscape



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