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West Midlands and Warwickshire Local Skills Improvement Plan

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Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce

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

Contents

Introduction

Corin Crane, Chief Executive, Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce

The mission of the West Midlands and Warwickshire LSIP is to create a post-16 technical education and training system that puts businesses at the start of the planning process and gives them the people and skills they need to innovate, grow and thrive.

The West Midlands and Warwickshire is famous for its incredible products and services that are sold in every corner of the globe. From the industrial power of the Black Country, the global visibility of Birmingham and the innovation and gaming businesses of Coventry and Warwickshire, we are a region built on business.

However, the issue of workforce skills has dominated the conversation with businesses for decades. Whether this has been the inability to recruit new employees with the right skills and aptitudes to help a business grow or to upskill existing staff to develop new products or services, to find new customers or to lead new teams – for too long our businesses and providers have operated in a system that has sold training and skills to businesses, rather than let them set the agenda for the skills they need.

Led by Coventry and Warwickshire, Greater Birmingham and Black Country Chambers of Commerce, the West Midlands and Warwickshire LSIP seeks to change this conversation. This has been made possible by working with an incredible group of partners focused on changing things for the better. These include our Further Education, Higher Education and Private Providers, the West Midlands Combined Authority, its Unitary Authorities and Warwickshire County Council, our three LEPs, DWP Job Centre Plus, the Careers & Enterprise Company, the West Midlands Regional Economic Development Institute and the excellent Make UK, Federation of Small Business, CITB, NHS, Business in the Community and Multicultural Alliance Partnership, have all contributed their expertise to ensure that local residents and businesses across all sectors can grasp the opportunities of a greener, digital future with both hands.

The West Midlands and Warwickshire LSIP represents comprehensive mapping of existing research, meaningful collaboration between regional stakeholders and educators, and over one thousand engagements with local businesses. From this research, the Plan sets out actionable priorities and a clear roadmap for the region to support providers of post-16 technical education and training in aligning provision with current and future employer need.

Much like the region it represents, this Plan is unashamedly ambitious. Its priorities seek to foster a growing culture of collaboration among providers, continuously inform post-16 technical education and training and forge closer, lasting relationships between providers and businesses.

The LSIP cannot provide a solution to every skills challenge in the region, but we hope that it will help direct a positive trajectory for skills provision, building on the fantastic work that is already being undertaken across the area.

The research has also highlighted many areas where we can help amplify national programmes and potentially work across LSIP boundaries to increase the impact of business engagement. Our desire to create long term relationships between businesses and providers will help prepare employers for the roll out of T-Levels, national programmes looking at Net Zero and Digitalisation will give businesses confidence that their investments are in the right places, and we can continue to make sure that local businesses are maximising the use of the apprenticeship levy and any local schemes through our devolved powers at a WMCA level.

The LSIP will give us a great opportunity to collaborate, to champion local employers and engage with a wide range of national public and private partners to help our businesses grow and create modern, sustainable jobs.

I must express my profound thanks to the employers, stakeholders and providers whose expert insights have informed this plan and with whom we look forward to continuing to work to further our understanding of employer skills needs, facilitate delivery of an agile and responsive skills system, and stimulate investment in skills in the West Midlands and Warwickshire. And, of course, the amazing Chamber teams – Raj, Guppy, Adele, Neil, John and Raj and the brilliant Emily and Louise for penning this report.

Section 1: Context

1.1 West Midlands and Warwickshire

The West Midlands and Warwickshire Local Skills Improvement Plan (WMW LSIP) covers the geographical regions administered by the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) – constituted of the seven local authorities of Birmingham City Council, Coventry City Council, Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, Walsall Council and the City of Wolverhampton Council – and Warwickshire County Council.

Commuter patterns recorded by the most recently available census data (as detailed in Annex A) demonstrate the close economic relationship between Warwickshire and the WMCA area. The crossover of workforce catchments between the two geographies plays an important role in the local labour market.

On occasion, secondary data cited in this report refers to the West Midlands region. This is the large-scale region at International Territorial Level 1 (ITL1), which encompasses the WMW LSIP geography.

1.2 The Current Situation

The working age population of the West Midlands and Warwickshire is estimated to be around 2,211,800.[1] Around 73.0% of residents aged 16-64 are in employment (as of January to December 2022). Approximately 4.4% are unemployed and 24.4% are economically inactive.[2]

The employment rate in the West Midlands and Warwickshire is relatively low compared to the national average over the same period (75.6%), while the area faces relatively high levels of unemployment (3.6% in Great Britain) and economic inactivity (21.5% nationally).[3]

The skills profile of the region is of great significance in attracting business investment and, particularly in challenging economic times, enabling business survival, recovery and growth. The West Midlands Local Skills Report for 2021 cites that on average in across West Midlands region, 25% of all vacancies are skills shortage vacancies, compared to a national average of 22%.[4]

Local data for the West Midlands region shows that as of 17th-23rd April 2023, regional growth in job postings is 42.1% compared with the last week of December 2021. While this is considerably lower than the peak seen in August, it is notably higher than the comparable rate between 18th-24th April 2022 (17.8%). This latest data reflects surveying by Chambers of Commerce across the WMW area, which suggests that in Q1 2023, 62% of businesses looking to recruit experienced difficulties doing so.[5][6]

In 2022, it is reported that 120,615 enterprises were registered in the West Midlands and Warwickshire. The vast majority (88.9%) of enterprises are micro businesses (with 0-9 employees). 9.1% are small (with 10 to 49 employees) and 1.6% medium-sized (50 to 249 employees). Just 0.5% of enterprises are large (defined as 250+ employees).[7]

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[1] Population estimates - local authority based by five year age band, ONS, 2021, Accessed via Nomis
[2] Annual population survey, ONS, 2022, Accessed via Nomis
[3] Annual population survey, ONS, 2022, Accessed via Nomis
[4] West Midlands Local Skills Report Evidence Base, West Midlands Combined Authority, 2021
[5] Labour Market Tracker, Recruitment and Employment Confederation, 2022
[6] Quarterly Economic Snapshot Q1 2023, Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce (unpublished)
[7] UK Business Counts, West Midlands Combined Authority and Warwickshire County Council (combined), 2022, ONS Inter Departmental Business Register, accessed via Nomis

Where employers are unable to access the skilled talent they need, this can impact on competitiveness, increase costs, and slow technological change and innovation, as reported in the 2019 Employer Skills Survey.[8]

Challenges for the West Midlands and Warwickshire include:
- A relatively low skilled population compared to the national average
- A significant decline in apprenticeship starts and achievements since the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic in the UK
- A relatively high proportion of non and limited internet users
- Employers struggling to access digital skills

Opportunities for the West Midlands and Warwickshire include:
- Regional flexibility in skills provision as a result of the WMCA Trailblazer deeper devolution deal (for the WMCA area)
- A world class automotive cluster, transitioning to production of low emission vehicles
- The advancement of the country's fastest-growing tech sector
- Facilitating emerging strengths in clean tech and green energy
- Stimulating growth in 'Priority Growth Clusters' identified by the WMCA

1.3 What the LSIP is trying to achieve

The LSIP presents a key opportunity at a critical juncture for the West Midlands and Warwickshire to gain a better picture of current and future green skills needs to make the most of local opportunities associated with a just transition to net zero. The LSIP also presents an important opportunity to deepen understanding of employer needs in regard to evolving digital skills, and encourage further, innovative solutions and collaborations where providers of post-16 education and training may understand demand but face other barriers to delivering appropriate training.

To further previous work by the WMCA, the LSIP additionally seeks to develop a better understanding of the strategic priorities of regional employers and whether they have the leadership and management capabilities to meet these, and overcome challenges and/or maximise opportunities associated with digitisation and the advancement of new technologies and the transition towards net zero within the foreseeable future.

The WMW LSIP therefore focuses on the cross-cutting themes of digital and green skills (as defined in Annex A) and associated leadership and management capabilities, building on existing research and meaningful collaboration to:
- develop understanding of the immediate and future skills needs of employers;
- facilitate an agile and responsive system for post-16 technical education and training;
- and help stimulate investment in skills, creating meaningful employment and in-work progression opportunities for local residents.

Stage 1 of the LSIP began with extensive mapping of existing research, informing the local strategic context detailed in Annex A. Following this, Chambers of Commerce worked with the WMW LSIP Operational Board to conduct a significant business research exercise, seeking to build on existing understandings of employer need. This incorporated a series of focus groups, interviews, roundtable discussions, qualitative surveying and 'meaningful engagements'. In total, this exercise engaged over 1000 employers across the West Midlands and Warwickshire, including a broad range of providers and stakeholders. Findings from this research are referenced below and detailed further in Annex B of this report.

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[8] Employer Skills Survey, Department for Education, 2019

Section 2: Introducing the LSIP Priorities

For the West Midlands and Warwickshire, the Coventry and Warwickshire Chambers of Commerce strongly believe that change can only happen through collaboration and a structured approach. Our plan is deliverable, yet aspirational and we are seeking to achieve innovation and long-lasting change through our priorities. Building on the wider economic context of the region and extensive secondary research, original research by the WMW LSIP has been comprehensive and has shown some real opportunities to improve on our current good practices, taking forward initiatives that can be truly transformative.

We will take this forward through our three Skills Priorities, which are complemented by wider considerations, each with a set of employer needs, objectives and recommendations to deliver change.

Skills Priorities

Our three priorities address the provision of skills to individuals and organisations that employers have told us are most important to them.

Priority One: Confirming Sector Skills Needs

> *Participants all agreed that engineering (at all levels) is the biggest shortage, including design engineers, works engineers and planners. The aerospace sector additionally reports a need for more 'space skills' to enable automotive businesses to access the aerospace supply chain' - WMW LSIP Focus Group*
>
> *Businesses require an increased pool of talent with broad engineering skills and more practical engineering experience - WMW LSIP Focus Group*
>
> *A small to medium battery technology and installation organisation is not struggling as a result of skills shortages currently but do require more electricians for solar installations and battery storage products. They also raised that as a smaller organisation they require multiskilled installation staff – roofers, ground workers and electricians. - WMW LSIP Focus Group*

Priority One is based on those sectors which have the most influence on our identified cross-cutting themes of digital and green skills. In contrast to Priorities Two and Three below which concentrate on sector-independent skills, this priority seeks to define the sector specific skills that are needed for the sectors to achieve their growth potential. Priority One will ensure that providers are aware of new and emerging skills needs directly articulated by employers and in doing so support them to build the capacity, both people and facilities, to provide those. It will also seek to provide greater accessibility to information about current post-16 education and training options and carry out further research to address any gaps in provision.

Priority Two: Leadership and Management Skills

> *Focus group participants expressed understanding that there are opportunities for their business associated with digitisation and the advancement of new technologies, participants reported a lack of certainty around how to maximise these opportunities - WMW LSIP Focus Group*
>
> *Among those citing the need for additional leadership and people management skills to overcome challenges and maximise opportunities associated with digitisation, the advancement of new technologies and the transition to net zero over the next three years, the most frequently identified additional skills were: Strategy Development - required by 43% for digitisation and the advancement of new technologies and 38% for net zero; Performance Management - 42% and 28%; Project Management - 34% and 28%; and Change Management - 32% and 28% - WMW LSIP Surveying*

Priority Two identified a lack of leadership and management skills constraining growth, opportunity maximisation or change in regional businesses. Those skills include both general leadership and management skills and also specific skills in subjects including digitisation and the transition to net zero. Priority Two contains actions for providers to address gaps in provision, delivery mechanisms and better promotion of current offers.

Priority Three: Essential Skills for Employment

Companies are keen to upskill their staff that are less accustomed to the digital world - WMW LSIP Focus Group

Many participants also raised concerns about not knowing where to start in making use of new opportunities associated with digital marketing and data analytics - WMW LSIP Focus Group

'Some appear to lack the numerical skills required for high-level careers in finance, and social media is contributing to poor communication skills, which is something that impedes functioning in the workplace' - WMW LSIP Meaningful Engagement with a small finance and insurance business

Priority Three incorporates two significant skills needs that seem to affect businesses of all types across WMW - essential or 'soft' skills, and basic digital skills. Priority Three has actions to ensure that these skills needs can be addressed effectively whilst young people are still in full time education and also to ensure that any adults with skills needs are able to access them.

Section 3: Taking the LSIP Priorities Forward

In this section, we seek to further articulate the employer needs identified through our research and consultation. As appropriate to each priority area, we outline:

- What the employers are asking for (key illustrative points from WMW LSIP research, further details in Annex B)
- Current provision and good practice
- What change is needed
- Gaps in provision and new provision needed
- Occupational mapping where appropriate

Throughout our research, employers made several consistent requests and gave ideas regarding the format and availability of training which are applicable to all three of our Skills Priorities:

- Training in a short, modular format would remove barriers of time and cost to a certain extent. It would also mean very specific skills needs could be tackled.
- Micro-credentials concept could mean those wanting to build up to a qualification over time could do so.
- Skills Bootcamps were viewed as good practice, and it was felt they could be extended to tackle technical skills in additional sectors and occupations.

A very strong theme in the research has been the need for cross cutting 'Essential Skills' both in terms of digital and more general workplace soft skills. Some specific examples are:

- The need to upskill 'back office' staff in digital processes to respond to customer needs - for example digitisation of ordering and invoicing systems
- Increasing recognition of the future importance of digital marketing
- The importance of soft skills to the workplace - communication, numeracy, office etiquette

Please note: the term 'FE providers' is used for simplicity and should be taken to include FE Colleges, Sixth Form Colleges, Private Training Providers and any other organisations delivering statutory and non-statutory post-16 education and training. Further, while the remit of this report focuses on provision of post-16 education and training, we also acknowledge the important role of Higher Education Institutions alongside FE providers in addressing skills needs.

Skills Priority One: Confirming Sector Skills Needs		
What do employers and/or sector specific research say?	Occupations	Skill Areas
High Level Sector: Engineering and Manufacturing Incorporating WMCA Priority Growth Clusters of Electric Vehicles and Battery; Aerospace; Health Tech and Med Tech		

Employers agree that recruitment into the sector is a challenge with not enough new talent entering the workforce Consensus that a higher volume of broad engineering skills at Levels 2 and 3 is needed but this is reliant on better promotion of STEM careers at an earlier age Practical experience is vital to employers Some specific hard-to-fill vacancies / skill areas were identified: • Design engineers • Works engineers and planners • More 'space skills' in aerospace sector • Machine operators / engineers • Hydraulic engineering • Fabricators and welders • Specialised Electrical Rewinds • Blacksmiths • Traditional joiners • (Data) Project management • Research and development Within Health Tech and Med Tech: • Health data scientists • Integrating industry-specific competencies such as understanding the nature of a disease, disease algorithms • Engineering, product design • Understanding post-Brexit regulatory environments • Digital skills to ensure that the wider healthcare sector can keep up with rapid changes in healthcare technology such as AI and genomics • Skills for development of new and existing products and services	Engineering Technician Design and Development Technician Fabrication and Welding Operative / Technician Machine Operators Design Engineers Works Engineers IfATE Engineering and Manufacturing Route: • Engineering, Design and Development • Engineering, Manufacturing, Process and Control For Health Tech and Med Tech in addition: IfATE Health and Science Route • Healthcare Science • Science Health Data Scientist	General for entry into sector: • Engineering L2/3 • Mechanical engineering • Design and development • Planning • Electrification Specific for upskilling existing workforce: • Electrification for existing automotive converting to EVs For Health Tech and Med Tech: • Chemistry • Health data science
High Level Sector: Construction Incorporating WMCA Priority Growth Clusters: Modern and Low Carbon Utility; Manufacturing of Future Housing		

CITB The Skills Construction Needs - West Midlands Five Year Outlook 2023-27: The annual recruitment requirement in the West Midlands of 2.3% per year is slightly higher than the UK average of 1.7% and means an extra 25,350 workers will be needed from 2023 to 2027 The occupations with the strongest additional recruitment requirement levels: • Non-construction professional, technical, IT and other office-based staff (1,160 per year) • Other construction professionals and technical staff (990 per year) • Other construction process managers (610 per year) GBS LEP Priority Sectors Skills Research - expansion of the market anticipated to drive two categories of skills needs: • Retrofit skills • Digital skills From focus groups and surveys: • Environmental surveyors • Electricians for solar installations and battery storage products • Multi-skilled installation staff - roofers, ground workers and electricians • New energy technologies • Tunnelling expertise • Project Management • Carbon literacy • Qualifications to work with electric vehicles	Skilled Construction Tradespersons Non-construction professional, technical, IT and other office-based staff Construction professionals Other construction process managers IfATE Construction and the Built Environment route: • Onsite Construction • Building Services Engineering	Retrofit skills Digital skills Electrical for solar installations and battery storage products All skilled trades
High Level Sector: Digital and ICT Incorporating the specialist digital and ICT roles that are needed in other key sectors		
Dashboards produced by the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport show the top digital occupation demands ranked by location quotient (LQ) in the WMCA Area for 2019-2020 were: • Management Consultant	IT Network Professionals IT Consultants	Cloud computing Machine learning Data security / privacy

• IT Consultant • Network Engineer • Field Service Engineer Other areas highlighted by LSIP research: • IT Service Manager • General IT skills for digitisation • Data analytics • AI and automation • Machine learning • Cloud computing • Digital marketing • Search Engine Optimisation • Cyber security • Project management	Technical Support / Managers IT Professional / Technician / Operative IT Data Analyst IfATE Digital Route: • Digital Support and Services • Digital Business Services	Artificial Intelligence and machine learning Extended Reality Quantum engineering/computing
Priority Growth Cluster: Logistics and Distribution		
Important to note conflicting views in this sector needing more investigation: Employers in logistics and distribution highlighted a lack of courses available locally which may be impacting their recruitment and skills gaps. However, providers report low levels of uptake for courses in this sector when they have been available, hence now removed from delivery due to viability issues. Employer observations: • The ageing workforce in the logistics and distribution industry is a concern to the focus group participants, especially considering difficulties in recruiting young people • Participants expressed that the past two years have been difficult for the industry in terms of recruitment, which began with a shortage of HGV drivers that has now extended to coach drivers, mechanics, and technicians	Mechanics Technicians Freight Forwarding HGV Drivers Supply Chain and Operational Managers IfATE Engineering and Manufacturing Route: • Maintenance, Installation and Repair IfATE Transport and Logistics Route: • Transport	Technical Skills - mechanics, technicians HGV licence / Forklift licence - lack of drivers still an issue Customs experience at entry level Driver Certificate of Professional Competence (CPC) Basic office including digital skills Food supply chain awareness and regulatory food standards training

• Reductions in FE colleges' budgets for running courses in the logistics and distribution industry have meant that there are fewer providers, making it more difficult to undertake training locally • A focus group participant highlighted having to send employees out of the area to attend residential courses due to lack of local provision • One employer highlighted the best practice of 'bootcamps' at level 3, which can be completed alongside existing work commitments Employer recommendations: • Replicate the model of Skills Bootcamps to make training more convenient and easily accessible to those with other commitments, especially where there are skills gaps in roles such as mechanics and technicians • Apprenticeships are a common route into the logistics and distribution industry, however the fact that it is not possible to offer this form of training on a part-time basis restricts entry to the profession for a certain demographic of individuals		

Skills Priority Two: Leadership and Management Skills

What do employers say?	Current provision / good practice	Change needed
General subject areas from employer survey: • Strategy development • Performance management • Project management • Change management Short modular courses with the potential to build up to a qualification if desired	General Leadership and Management • Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses • Help to Grow: Management	Increased availability of Leadership and Management training programmes in WMW, particularly through modular, short course provision, that businesses can access flexibly to meet business needs
Specialist Leadership and Management training in subject areas including:	Skills Bootcamps are available through	Increased availability of specialist

• Digitisation • Advancement of new technologies • Transition to net zero Short modular courses with the potential to build up to a qualification if desired Skills Bootcamps a good model of delivery	limited providers in limited locations covering some of these subjects. Various short courses are available covering some topics through a variety of providers - FE, HE, private training providers, in person, online There is also existing examples promoted as business support rather than training through HE and other business support providers regionally	Leadership and Management training programmes in WMW, particularly through modular, short course provision and using existing formats such as Skills Bootcamps Review of Skills Bootcamp subject coverage and availability to determine greater volume/additional subjects needed Micro credentials are short courses that have the potential to build to larger qualifications. These could be easily implemented for these subject areas by FE providers who are already delivering this content as part of other programmes.

Skills Priority Three: Essential Skills for Employment

What do employers say?	Current provision / good practice	Change needed
Essential or soft skills such as: • Communication • Collaboration / team working • Numerical skills • Organisation • Accountability • Innovation and problem solving • Office skills: letter writing, office etiquette, answering the phone • Skills for resilience: dealing with uncertainty and ambiguity, working through uncertainty Widespread sentiment that those entering the workforce are not adequately equipped with these skills	For students leaving education: Essential and soft skills are generally covered in tutorial and personal development programmes as part of full time FE courses. Students should have a good grasp of these concepts upon leaving education For adults following unemployment or a career break - these skills are delivered as part of pre-work/into work programmes from DWP, for example	Greater support from employers to translate classroom knowledge into workplace skills - this could be structured into work experience placements with specific focus from the employer on these skills Supporting employers to implement coaching or mentoring of new entrants in the workplace to support development of soft skills, instead of or to complement training programmes Joint work between providers and employers to define a short programme that

Use of the Skills Builder Partnership Skills Builder Universal Framework received positive employer feedback		could be incorporated into any kind of work placement whether for students or adult returners
Essential Digital Skills Survey 2022 - 15% in the West Midlands (8% nationally) have zero of the Essential Digital Skills for Work as defined by the DfE framework WMCA 2020 Local Skills Plan Evidence Report from 2019 Employer Skills Survey - proportion of skills shortage vacancies which are made difficult to recruit to due to a lack of specific IT skills. Basic IT skills such as Microsoft Office are a major constraint in Black Country (39%), less so in Greater Birmingham and Solihul (GBS) (30%) and lower in Coventry and Warwickshire (20%). GBS was identified has having a notable shortage of data analysis and data science skills.	Free basic IT short courses for adults are provided through adult and community learning hubs and college adult education budget The Skills Toolkit accessed via the National Careers Service offers a range of online short courses in IT, digital and computing subjects Digital Skills Bootcamps are available but cater more for those seeking a career in IT rather than to gain essential digital skills.	Increased availability of short, modular courses, focusing on individual topics rather than broad areas (e.g. Microsoft Excel only, rather than all Microsoft Office package) Different approaches to upskilling different demographics in essential digital skills - 16-18, unemployed adults, employees Consistent approach across providers to give comparative and reliable skills trusted by employers

Wider Considerations

Further to the three priorities outlined above, the WMW LSIP also received feedback from employers regarding a number of broader underlying themes for wider consideration, as represented in the below table. Recognising and effectively addressing these system challenges is critical to stimulating investment in skills, thereby creating meaningful employment and in-work progression opportunities for local residents.

What do employers say?	What needs to change?	Outcomes needed
Around 74% of regional employers haven't worked with post-16 education and training providers in the last 5 years A majority of businesses are unaware of or only have a limited awareness and understanding of all listed post-16 education and training initiatives	Clearer articulation of post-16 education and training opportunities at WMW level, including: • T Levels • Apprenticeships	Businesses have improved knowledge of the post-16 skills offer in their local area/region, e.g, T Levels, Apprenticeships, SWAPs, Skills Bootcamps

	• Sector Work Based Academy Programmes (SWAPs) • Skills Bootcamps • Co-creation of bespoke training with providers	Businesses are more easily able to access information about the specific post-16 skills provision in their local area, e.g subjects and offers available by provider
Providers must work together better, recognising and building on individual specialisms Reduce competition between providers Trial facilitation of cluster or sector groups setting training priorities for providers to bid to deliver with kitemark that others recognise There is reluctance around introduction of a central 'one-stop-shop' - national portals criticised for not being accurate and up to date	Clearer and easier access to providers to gain information about post-16 education and training opportunities. FE providers, particularly Colleges, generally have business development or employer engagement teams that are tasked with working with businesses to raise awareness. Lack of funding and recruitment difficulties have meant that this resource has been reduced in recent years - this could account for low levels of awareness and engagement.	Medium to long term independent business engagement with businesses - to develop skills plans and support work placements
20% of respondents identified that independent funded support to identify skills needs and advise on suitable training provision would help overcome barriers to increasing investment in skills and training Access to independent advice on skills provision and funding may support those that haven't utilised post-16 education and training previously to do so	FE providers, and other support organisations such as Warwickshire Skills Hub, can provide this service but it is not something that is routinely funded with funding and recruitment issues further reducing availability This type of service needs investment and consistency so that more businesses are aware of and can engage with it	Businesses are able to access funded, expert support to carry out training needs analysis, skills and workforce planning or similar
Employers are experiencing significant challenges in attracting young talent to industry 'Apprentices and school leavers in the 16-19 age bracket present the most recruitment challenges' - a small logistics firm Employers shared concerns regarding pipeline talent and a lack of drive towards STEM and engineering in secondary schools in particular	More resources need to be allocated by FE providers to promote career pathways in a targeted and coordinated manner to increase effectiveness More employers need to be engaged in this work to directly share information about careers in their sector	Pathways into employment in key sectors are widely known and promoted across FE providers

54% of employers (58% of manufacturers) surveyed believe that more extensive careers education would attract more young people (16-24 year olds) to their sector		
Several employers indicated interest in finding out about opportunities to engage in jobs fairs and support to upskill locally in a WMW LSIP focus group 50% of employers surveyed believe that more sector specific careers fairs and 59% of employers surveyed believe that building relationships between businesses in their sector and education providers would attract more young people (16-24 year olds) into their sector	More employers need to be engaged in this work to directly share information about careers in their sector	More employers are engaged in work to promote careers in their sector in schools, colleges and through careers activities
Difficulties in attracting staff into support and delivery roles within FE provider organisations including skilled staff needed to deliver against skills gaps	A career in FE in particular needs to be viewed as feasible and attractive option Greater information should be available about what it means to be a lecturer in FE, what experience and qualifications are needed, etc. Promotion of flexibility, shared education-industry job roles and other benefits of working in FE	More delivery staff recruited or accessed through partnership working in key sector shortage areas Building positive relationships and engaging more employers in further education and skills to contribute to course development and delivery within key sector areas
FE providers experience difficulties competing with salaries and benefits packages offered by industry	Increased funding for FE providers	
Employers seem willing to work with FE providers on innovative solutions but there are barriers of time, cost and knowledge to achieving this on both sides	Funding needed to facilitate conversations at a senior level between employer and providers to develop innovative, collaborative solutions to mutual skills solutions	

Section 4: Delivering the LSIP Priorities

This section is our roadmap for change. Our Three Skills Priorities and Wider Considerations translate into recommendations that contain objectives, actions, recommendations and responsibilities.

Importantly, we have also sought to describe the ways in which we see these priorities being mobilised - through funding programmes, innovative trials and collaborations.

The West Midlands area is currently benefiting from the Devolution Powers granted to West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) which have given the region greater control over planning and funding of post-16 education and training. Announced in March 2023, the Deeper Devolution Deal will maximise WMCA's current role and responsibilities and revolutionise how Government funding is implemented. Skills and Careers provision are a vital part of this deal and this LSIP must ensure that recommendations complement and enable WMCA's aspirations, whilst providing positive challenge in the form of the employer voice.

For Warwickshire, we must recognise the work of Warwickshire County Council, and in particular the Warwickshire Skills Hub, in providing a coordination point for skills and careers. This LSIP must also complement and enable their work to ensure that a level playing field is created for Warwickshire alongside its WMCA neighbours.

Our recommendations recognise the excellent work already being done by the FE Colleges, Universities, private training providers, business support providers and other employer representative bodies. We have a huge wealth of expertise and facilities in our region already. This roadmap seeks to draw on all of that provision and give it a critical mass of visibility and reach through collaboration and shared resources.

Our recommendations are designed to be included in the Local Skills Improvement Fund application by FE providers, and with further consideration in Stage 2 of the LSIP process.

We recognise our existing strengths but we must be committed to change and making those strengths work for the future.

Priority One: WMW Sector Skills

Aim: To ensure that post-16 education and training provision across the WMW region meets the ongoing and changing needs of employers across the key sectors

Objectives:
- To demonstrate the significant breadth and depth of provision already available across the WMW region in key sectors
- To highlight any gaps in provision and review the reasons for this
- To consider and enable the structured introduction of new, viable curriculum areas with appropriate investment in facilities and expertise
- To ensure that employers are engaged in the process, inputting into curriculum planning at regional and/or local level as appropriate, contributing their skills and expertise

Description

The aim of the WMW Sector Skills priority is to guide FE providers, of all types, about what we see as appropriate responses and future actions to ensure that identified skills needs are met, and that ongoing consultation with employers continues. We hope that this will enable funding, including the WMCA's Trailblazer Deeper Devolution Deal and the Local Skills Improvement Fund, to be channelled in a way that meets employer demand but also gives FE providers the flexibility to adapt their own provision over time and in response to the very local needs that they are best placed to identify.

To support the growth of the region, we recommend that the following key sectors are given primary importance:
- Engineering and Manufacturing
- Construction
- ICT and Digital
- Logistics and Distribution

The table in Annex B shows the comprehensive coverage by our FE colleges already in place for these key sectors, with the exception of Logistics and Distribution.

For the first three sectors, in practice, we believe that this translates into a definite capability to adapt provision into the specialist areas highlighted by employers in Priority One - Confirming Sector Skills Needs, and to expand provision to create a larger output of new entrants to the workforce.

Given the obvious gap in provision, certainly across the FE Colleges in WMW, for the Logistics and Distribution sector, work needs to be done to improve coverage.

We also recognise the importance of the Health and Social Care sector, the Creative Industries and the Business and Professional Services Sector to the West Midlands and Warwickshire economy. More research should be carried out in the next phase to support an understanding of skills needs and FE providers supported to respond to those sector needs as demand in their local areas determines.

In addition, importance should be placed on providing sector specific and cross-cutting responses to skills development in our core themes of:
- Transition to Net Zero
- Digital Skills
- Leadership and Management

Indicative Actions and Considerations	Potential funding and next steps	Delivery partners and responsibilities
Engineering and manufacturing • Further investment in facilities to enable provision of specialist skills or increase capacity to enable growth of new entrants • Health Tech and Med Tech Sector is an area to consider specific expansion of facilities and introduction of new courses in consultation with employers • Further promotion of T Level Engineering which has good coverage of WMW by FE Colleges but is still a new programme. In other sectors, T Level Industry Placements are being used to create a future workforce pipeline through very structured placements with a defined recruitment process and clear pathways into a job role. This approach could be replicated in engineering to increase the number of new entrants.	Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF) funding for investment in new facilities and course development FE providers to consider other funding routes available to them, e.g. T Level Capital, FECTF, etc	Solihull College and University Centre to lead an LSIF bid All FE providers WMCA / WCC to support as appropriate
Construction • Further investment in facilities to enable provision of specialist skills or increase capacity to enable growth of new entrants • Consider widening subject and geographical coverage of Skills Bootcamps to encourage job seekers and career changers to reskill		
ICT and Digital • Further investment in facilities to enable provision of specialist skills or increase capacity to enable growth of new entrants • ICT and digital roles widely in demand in most sectors, no longer confined to those defining themselves as an IT business. For example, machine learning and AI. Consider how best to support non-IT specialist businesses with		

defining and accessing skills for IT roles • AI and machine learning is a potential area for introduction of new courses/facilities		
Logistics and Distribution There are clear gaps in provision for this priority growth cluster delivered by WMW FE Colleges (as illustrated in Annex B) • Invest in facilities related to logistics and distribution sector to enable delivery • Consider piloting co-created approached with employers, is there potential for co-located provision given volume of transportation hubs, warehousing sites, etc across the region • Use of Skills Bootcamp approach to developing technicians and mechanics alongside their job role as recommended in the employer focus groups		
General Actions to be incorporated into all sector solutions: Considerations of different needs of different target groups: • Training of new entrants through 16-19 provision • Upskilling for adults in the workforce • Reskilling for adults considering a career change • Pre-employment support for unemployed adults and NEETs Key employer request across all sectors - modular, short course training to fit in around business need and timescales Maximise existing approaches to training by diversifying into new subjects and geographies: • Apprenticeship levy transfer opportunities • Skills Bootcamp models • Adult Education Budget funded short courses • DWP in work programmes • Employer financing • Sector Work-based Academy Programmes (SWAPs) • Prince's Trust programmes Support for young people to access sector roles - increased employer engagement to promote work experience such as T Level Placements as an opportunity for employers to begin training early and create a pipeline of new entrants Link to the wider considerations of targetting additional lecturing/instructor staffing into FE providers in this sector		

Further research into gaps in provision vs employer feedback • Deeper dive into occupation areas identified in Priority One • Ensure clarity on true gaps vs lack of employer knowledge/understanding of option	Further research through LSIP Stage 2 continuous feedback and review objectives	Employer Representative Body (ERB) to drive forward
FE provider task group convened to consider collaborative response to gaps in provision • Collaborative approaches and shared resources to be encouraged • Geography and reasonable travel to learn distances taken into account to avoid duplication	Key part of LSIF project in WMW	Solihull College and University Centre to lead LSIF proposal

Priority Two: WMW Leadership and Management Skills

Aim: To facilitate business growth in WMW through the provision of excellent, flexible leadership and management training in general and specific topics according to business need

Objectives:

1. To increase fundamental leadership and management capabilities within WMW businesses through the provision of flexible, modular, stackable training and business support for current and future leaders and managers
2. To provide specific leadership and management training opportunities in areas such as supporting with digitisation, advancement of new technologies and the transition to net zero
3. To ensure that any provision is mapped effectively and promoted via collaborative engagement amongst FE providers

Indicative Actions	Potential funding and next steps	Delivery partners and responsibilities
Creation of a new, flexible programme of Leadership and Management training, focusing on employers' request for short, modular training and/or a microcredit approach	Employer funded AEB for eligible individuals	FE providers

Creation of new, flexible programmes of Leadership and Management training focused on specialist areas of: • Digitisation • Advancement of new technologies • Transition to Net Zero focusing on employers' request for short, modular training and/or a microcredit approach	Employer funded AEB for eligible individuals Skills Bootcamp funding	
Consider whether the Skills Bootcamp model for both general and specialist Leadership and Management training is a good model to take forward to cater for those looking for a larger programme of training from the outset Skills Bootcamps are available in similar subjects so could be funded as such: • 100% funded by DfE/ WMCA for eligible individuals seeking employment/career change • 10% (SME)/30% (Large employer) of cost to be funded by employers for existing workforce	Skills Bootcamp funding model - WMCA/DfE Individual providers to apply for Skills Bootcamp funding Or inclusion of pilots within LSIF project	

Priority Three: WMW Essential Skills

Aim: To respond to employer requests for greater levels of essential skills for work and workplace digital skills

Objectives:

1. To increase the levels of employability skills in people entering the workplace through the provision of a consistent, trackable 'Essential Skills' programme drawing on best practice from recognised schemes such as "Skills Builder"
2. To review essential skills for work provision and trial new methods to increase effectiveness including, for example, including structured essential skills for work support in work experience placements to contribute to converting classroom knowledge into workplace skills
3. To increase the levels of digital skills for the workplace across the workforce in all sectors of the WMW economy through the provision of short course, modular upskilling and longer programmes according to individual need
4. Review of existing good practice and consideration of a new digital skills programme for delivery by FE providers for employees to upskill, across the region ensuring consistent, comparable and reliable provision, trusted by employers

Indicative Actions	Potential funding and next steps	Delivery partners and responsibilities
Creation of a new, flexible, short course programme of essential employability skills	Employer funded AEB for eligible individuals DWP in work programme Potential for LSIF inclusion	FE providers
Further promote existing training available through Multiply for increasing adult numeracy skills	Government Multiply programme, most FE providers engaged at some level	FE providers
Pilot use of Skills Builder scheme for employability skills already being used by some providers and supported by Government	LSIF project inclusion	Solihull College and University Centre as LSIF bid lead
Pilot use of work experience programmes to support students to translate classroom knowledge into workplace skills - specifically designed to tackle essential skill areas		
Pilot use of a mentoring or coaching programme for employers to help them to support new entrants to their business to develop essential skills		
Creation of short course provision in digital to fill any existing gaps in essential digital skill areas, for example through AEB community learning and National Careers Service Skills Toolkit	Employer funded AEB for eligible individuals DWP in work programme	FE providers
Considerations of different needs of different target groups: • Training of new entrants through 16-19 provision • Upskilling for adults in the workforce • Reskilling for adults considering a career change • Pre-employment support for unemployed adults and NEETs	DWP in work programme Potential for LSIF inclusion and/or inclusion in AEB funding	FE providers

Key employer request across all sectors - modular, short course training to fit in around business need and timescales Maximise existing approaches to training by diversifying into new subjects and geographies: • Skills Bootcamp models • Adult Education Budget funded short courses • DWP in work programmes • Sector Work-based Academy Programmes (SWAPs) • Prince's Trust programmes		

Wider Considerations

The opportunity to support and maximise the increased power and flexibility that Deeper Devolution to the WMCA gives our region needs to come through strongly in this LSIP. The strategic level work to achieve this is already well underway and our objectives in regard to these wider considerations seek to convey the voice of employers, convene the collective capability of our FE providers and support the WMCA to make the most of Deeper Devolution.

The indicative actions and considerations presented below are also intended to help inform the work of the Department for Education and local stakeholders in Warwickshire as a non-devolved authority.

Collaborative Engagement

Aim: To tackle the employer identified lack of knowledge and understanding of and access to post-16 education and training opportunities in order to increase the number of employers successfully participating in skills development

Objectives:
1. To raise awareness of and simplify access to post-16 skills provision through the development of a "skills quality mark" and increased collaborative employer engagement by FE providers
2. To continuously seek, receive and analyse feedback from employers to improve service provision and to feed back into LSIP updating

Indicative Actions and Considerations	Potential funding and next steps	Delivery partners and responsibilities
Establish a WMW Skills Quality Mark to create a consistent and trusted brand for provision across WMW *Concept:* Shared identity for collaborative employer engagement across WMW using the existing mechanisms already in place at FE providers: • Funding sought to develop and pilot, and to increase employer engagement capacity of each provider • Network of local signposting services according to what works best for the location • Shared brand gives consistency across the region • Network ensures service can act regionally but is accessed locally	LSIF proposal by FE Colleges, including other eligible providers as appropriate, in WMW to pilot activities Future considerations: If an LSIF pilot proves successful, this could be evidence for future change	Solihull College and University Centre to incorporate into LSIF with support of other partners ERB to consider

Skills Quality Mark criteria and tracking of signposting and outcomes ensures independence of service Retaining local access points but reduces perception of competition, replaces with collaboration Where FE providers are already including training needs analyses or similar in their engagement with businesses, consider whether creating consistency between providers would be beneficial Increased Employer Engagement and Facilitation resource is needed by post-16 providers - not possible with current funding constraints and recruitment difficulties	For the provision of training needs analyses or other workforce planning there are links to business support provision funded through UKSPF - ensure complementarity not duplication	alternative solutions
Delivery of awareness raising and employer engagement campaigns using WMW Skills Quality Mark to promote post-16 education and training across WMW including Apprenticeships, T Levels, Supported Internships, Workforce Development training, Skills Bootcamps, SWAPs - Consistent branding - Centrally produced materials to support local campaigns - Social media campaigns - consistent and complementary - Centrally tracked to avoid duplication but encourage complementarity - Activity doesn't need to be additional or replace any existing individual provider activities.		
Create a central repository for skills data from employers including information from training needs analyses and informal feedback on future skills needs Expansion of WMW LSIP website currently being developed https://www.insight-unlocked.co.uk/west-midlands-region/home.html	LSIP Stage 2 funding	WMW ERB through LSIP Stage 2

Pathways into Employment

Aim: To increase the number of new entrants to key priority sector workforces by promoting careers in STEM subjects to school and college age young people and adults seeking a career change

Description

Through the Deeper Devolution Deal, WMCA will take responsibility for Careers provision across the Combined Authority area. The provision of an All-Age Careers Service is a central objective of WMCA's work. This gives an opportunity for employers to be engaged not only in promoting career pathways to young people in education, but also to adults throughout their working life.

Warwickshire County Council are also very active in strategic careers provision for Warwickshire and delivering careers advice through the Warwickshire Skills Hub. We must also seek to support that work, whilst using our role to influence how activity may be funded in the future by showcasing best practice from the neighbouring WMCA area.

Objectives:
1. To ensure that FE providers are providing clear information about pathways into employment for both young people in education and adults seeking a new career
2. To increase the numbers of employers taking an active role in promoting their sector to young people and adults seeking a new career
3. To support the WMCA and Warwickshire County Council to deliver careers programmes in the area

Indicative Actions and Considerations	Potential funding and next steps	Delivery partners and responsibilities
Determine how providers can add value to existing services, initiatives and aspirations stated in current regional plans FE providers to support increased employer engagement with the aim of involving employers in defining pathways into employment and promoting those opportunities Ensuring employers are aware of the opportunities to use T Level Industry Placements, other work experience, Supported Internships and Apprenticeships as tools to create their own workforce pipeline. To include piloting of initiatives that test the best ways to achieve positive outcomes	Specific delivery of activities could be included for FE providers within LSIF bid Any strategic level considerations and wider implementation needs to be led by existing work of WMCA through Deeper Devolution Deal and WCC through central Government funding routes	All FE providers Careers and Enterprise Company Local/regional careers hubs Employers across sectors

Expertise into Education

Aim: To increase the number of industry experienced staff available to teach on key sector post-16 programmes in WMW and the number of support staff seeking roles within FE

Objectives:

1. To promote careers in further education and skills, tackling the identified difficulties in recruiting staff into teaching, delivery and support roles
2. To build positive relationships and engage more employers in further education and skills, contributing to course development and delivery within key sector areas

Indicative Actions	Key Consideration Points	Potential funding and next steps	Delivery partners and responsibilities
WMW localised awareness raising campaign for careers in FE, designed in support of Government's 'Teach in FE' campaign	Perception change is needed about what is important: • industry skills not teaching experience • not a full-time commitment • sharing time between industry and education is ideal • supported by your employer Case studies of existing FE lecturers and instructors Promote positive benefits of working in FE Support from other stakeholders to add credibility, e.g. Chambers of Commerce, FSB	Promotional campaign and employer engagement programme - LSIF project to pilot methodologies, results used as evidence to seek longer term funding Potential areas that an LSIF project could test include: Incentives for employers to release their staff: • Tax credit system • Funding from central Government budgets to backfill salaries • Other staff training available in return for specialist expertise Joint working protocols between employers and providers Shared employment of staff across FE providers	All stakeholders ERB to support
Pilot a number of innovative solutions to bring skills into FE from industry	• Form a task group of FE Provider leaders and employers • Develop a range of innovative pilot solutions • Roll out pilot programme • Further employer engagement activity to bring new employers into the process, particularly from key sectors and hard-to-recruit subject areas		
Targeted employer engagement programme to directly support employers who want to provide expertise into FE			

Section 5: Next Steps - LSIP Stage 2

The West Midlands and Warwickshire is home to a wide range of exceptional post-16 technical education and training provision from independent training providers, colleges, and universities. The sector has established networks and relationships to facilitate increasing pan-regional collaboration between providers, wide-ranging examples of innovative best practice and devolved powers in the WMCA to afford flexibility regarding funding of provision. The region has strong education institutions in place to up-skill and re-skill local residents to take advantage of opportunities on the horizon associated with digitisation and the advancement of new technologies, the transition towards a more environmentally sustainable future, and high-value priority growth clusters.

This Plan represents Stage 1 of the LSIP and the extensive research and engagement activities conducted between October 2022 and May 2023. Moving forward, Stage 2 of the WMW LSIP will be focused on supporting our local partners to respond to the LSIP and working collaboratively to maximise the opportunities associated with deeper devolution of skills provision to the WMCA. Stage 2 will also seek to work with the large Higher Education sector in the region to support them in maximising opportunities to deliver progression routes and boost graduate retention as a result of the findings of Stage 1.

A dedicated LSIP team at Coventry and Warwickshire Chambers of Commerce – comprising a Project Manager, Business Engagement Officer, and Project Coordinator – will continue to work collaboratively with employers, providers, and stakeholders. Actions for this team will include:

1. Ensuring that employers are fully utilising the provision already available and can navigate the local skills system.

The Chamber will seek to encourage employers to take up apprentices, take on learners on work placements (e.g. T Level Industry Placements), to promote learning and training programmes for upskilling and reskilling existing employees (e.g. Skills Bootcamps), use apprenticeship levy transfers and build closer, innovative relationships with employers to address mutual challenges. In particular, this will support Priority One of the LSIP and delivery against the wider considerations of the Plan, regarding collaborative engagement, pathways into employment and expertise into education.

2. Working with local providers on developing curriculum and commercial training opportunities from those areas highlighted in the report.

To support all three priorities of the WMW LSIP, Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce will continue working with stakeholders and providers of all sizes through an LSIP/LSIF Delivery Group/FE Provider Task Group convened by Colleges West Midlands and the West Midlands Provider Network (incorporating Warwickshire providers), to ensure they understand the asks set out in the LSIP and the contents of the subsequent annual progress reports, identify how any existing or additional employer skills needs can be articulated in ways that are meaningful and actionable, and support development of an LSIF application.

The Chamber will also seek to engage with providers and WMCA on curriculum planning and delivery, including accountability agreements, and seek updates and feedback from providers on progress they and others are making/have made on delivering the changes set out in the LSIP.

3. Seeking feedback from relevant employers on the effectiveness of any changes that are being/have been implemented locally as a result of the LSIP.

Coventry and Warwickshire Chambers of Commerce will convene an LSIP Steering Group, comprised of 3 providers (1 from each of the 3 Chamber geographies across the West Midlands and Warwickshire) and 6 employers (2 from each Chamber geography), which will meet every 8 weeks to provide feedback, increase dialogue and break down barriers between employers and providers.

The Chamber will also continue to coordinate meetings of the WMW LSIP Operational board to ensure that the LSIP is embedded into local strategies in a way that is mutually reinforcing and continue working closely with organisations involved in raising learners' demand for new skills.

Both groups will gather feedback on the effectiveness of any changes implemented as a result of each of the WMW LSIP priorities and wider considerations.

In coordinating meetings of these groups, the Chamber will also seek to identify and engage new stakeholders, where relevant, who have not been part of Stage 1 of the LSIP.

4. Furthering existing research and supporting employers to better articulate their skills needs and aggregate demand in a way that translates into stronger demand signals for providers.

The Chamber will coordinate a regular series of roundtable discussions as well as online surveys in partnership with various employer representative bodies to address any gaps in our data sets and engage with any new significant sectors or industries that may develop or move into the area. These will be used to support each of the WMW LSIP priorities and the wider consideration of collaborative engagement.

The Chamber will also convene a group of senior employer representatives engaged in developing the skills agenda in the West Midlands and Warwickshire to participate in short, regular snap polling via a mobile application. This application will be used to further develop LSIP research and identify aggregate demand. Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber plans to recruit this group of employer representatives through existing relationships, focussing on facilitating engagement among hard-to-reach small and medium enterprises and tapping into organisations which have had limited engagement with the development of stage 1 of the LSIP.

5. Using relevant data and analysis to monitor the progress that is being made on delivering the changes set out in the LSIP and to underpin any new actions or priorities that are identified.

Progress will be reported in years two and three of the LSIP (2024 and 2025) detailing which of the actions or changes set out in this plan have been achieved, the associated impact and benefits, and what still needs to be achieved.

Through ongoing collaboration with stakeholders and the mobile application mentioned above, Stage 2 of the LSIP will gather up-to-date labour market intelligence, especially where employers' skills needs change as a result of evolving industry or government requirements. This will be presented on the West Midlands and Warwickshire LSIP website as the project progresses.