DERBYSHIRE & NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

Local Skills Improvement Plan

Funded by
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fsb

**Federation of
Small Businesses**

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[1], and in accordance with the LSIP statutory guidance[2].

1   https://www.legislation.gov.uk/en/ukpga/2022/21/contents/enacted
2   https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-skills-improvement-plans

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We would like to express our appreciation for the help, support, and input provided by all the employers who have contributed to the findings contained in this report and its attached annexes. Without their support, we would not have been able to present such a detailed view of the existing and future skills and training needs of businesses in Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire.

We extend our gratitude to the further and higher education providers and the adult learning providers in Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire, as well as various private sector providers. Their contributions and ongoing feedback throughout the development of this report have been instrumental in shaping its outcomes.

We must also recognise the support and guidance provided by the LSIP Steering Group and the partnership groups. Their regular meetings and advice have been invaluable to our project team, and we thank them for their time and dedication.

Additionally, we are grateful for the expertise and advice received from a diverse range of stakeholders representing the public, private, and third sectors, all of whom share a vested interest in skills development and training. We extend our gratitude to Arup and The Knowledge Ladder for their contributions.

Our engagement efforts involved over 500 individuals through a range of meetings, personalised 1-2-1 sessions, interactive focus groups, and enlightening surveys. It is through their active participation and collaboration that we have gained such an intricate understanding of the region's skills landscape.

To all those involved, we extend our appreciation. We eagerly anticipate the opportunity to work alongside you in implementing the Local Skills Improvement Plan for Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire. Together, we can make a tangible difference in terms of enhanced skills, well-paid employment opportunities, career progression, and overall business growth and profitability. Let us embark on this transformative journey together!

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INTRODUCTION

Background

The Department for Education has designated Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) as the Employer Representative Body (ERB) responsible for developing the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) for Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire, encompassing Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham, and Nottinghamshire, also referred to in this report as 'the region'.

FSB is a non-profit, non-partisan organisation that supports small businesses in the UK by offering advice, financial expertise, support, and representing their interests in national and regional government. As the ERB, FSB has engaged with employers, providers, and stakeholders to facilitate discussions on skills needs and identify actionable priorities to address them. LSIPs provide a platform for employers to express their skills requirements and influence skills provision, while enabling providers to collaborate with employers and others to enhance skills training to meet local needs.

LSIPs aim to identify key priorities and necessary changes in a specific area to align post-16 technical education and training with local labour market demands. These plans are developed based on strong evidence and meaningful dialogues involving employers, training providers, D2N2 LEP, and Local Authorities.

In addition to being a plan, LSIPs are a process that enhances the responsiveness of skills provision to employers' needs. The development process is as significant as the final LSIP itself, as it fosters dialogue and establishes stronger relationships within the local skills system. Unlike previous skills plans, LSIPs emphasise the active involvement of employers in shaping local skills provision. Recognising that economic changes and employer needs vary across the county, the LSIP for the region area adopts a place-based approach to address local skills requirements and support the growth of businesses and individuals through targeted provision.

The engagement approach aligns with the Department for Education's 'Statutory Guidance for the Development of a Local Skills Improvement Plan'[3] from October 2022. The DfE oversees and funds the development of LSIPs nationwide, as part of its efforts to place employers at the centre of the skills system, as outlined in the Skills for Jobs White Paper.[4]

Given the anticipated significant economic changes in the coming decade, national policy acknowledges the evolving skills needs of employers across sectors and regions. The development, approval, and implementation of an LSIP are led by a locally designated ERB, with FSB assuming this role for the region area since September 2022.

Under the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022, specific providers of post-16 technical education or training have a duty to cooperate with the designated ERB and consider the LSIP and associated guidance from the Secretary of State when shaping their offerings. Providers should consider and contribute to meeting local skills priorities alongside other aspects of their provision. Accountability is demonstrated through subsequent Accountability Agreements that outline how providers have engaged with employers and responded to LSIPs. Some providers may also be obligated to assess how well their education or training aligns with local needs and act to better meet those needs.

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3   Local skills improvement plans - statutory guidance (publishing.service.gov.uk)
4   Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth (publishing.service.gov.uk)

According to the statutory guidance, LSIPs should:

- set out the key priorities and changes needed in a local area to make post-16 technical education or training more responsive and closely aligned to local labour market needs;

- represent an employer view of the skills most needed to support local economic growth;

- set out actionable priorities to better meet these skills needs, that employers, providers and stakeholders in a local area can get behind;

- not attempt to cover the entirety of provision within an area but focus on the key changes and priorities;

- focus on a three-year period and be reviewed and updated as appropriate during this time;

- avoid making recommendations regarding national skills policy and focus on what can be done locally; and

- describe how skills required in relation to jobs that directly or indirectly support Net Zero targets, adaptation to climate change or meet other environmental goals have been considered.

The structure of this report

Part 1: Strategic overview

- The LSIP Purpose section provides an overview of the current skills position, highlighting key challenges faced in the region, and explains how the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) supports economic growth.

- It outlines the underlying rationale of the LSIP and its connection to relevant entities such as Higher and Further Education Providers (HE and FE), Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP), and Local Authorities (LAs).

- Strategic priorities are identified, specifically focusing on cross-cutting themes that are deemed crucial for the region's development.

- The LSIP aims and objectives are outlined, highlighting what it intends to achieve in terms of addressing skills gaps and supporting economic growth.

- Changes that will be brought about by the LSIP are described, emphasising the positive impacts and improvements expected in the region.

Part 2: Specification of employer needs and actionable priorities

- This section delves into the priorities for action on a theme-by-theme basis.

- It identifies occupational skill shortages, existing skills provision, and provides actionable priorities to address these shortages effectively.

- Skills gaps within each theme are identified and actionable priorities are proposed to bridge these gaps.

Part 3: Roadmap for delivering change

- The roadmap for delivering the LSIP priorities outlines the strategic plan for implementing the LSIP.

- The roadmap includes short, medium and long-term actions in the implementation process.

- It serves as a guide for stakeholders and outlines the necessary steps to ensure successful delivery of the LSIP's priorities and ultimately support the region's economic growth.

PART ONE: STRATEGIC OVERVIEW

Overview of the region's labour market and skills landscape

In an era defined by rapid technological advancements, shifting economic landscapes, and evolving workforce requirements, regions across the globe face both opportunities and challenges in harnessing their full potential. This skills-focused report aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the dynamic counties of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire, shedding light on their unique economic characteristics and highlighting the key skills opportunities and challenges that lie ahead.

Situated in the heart of England, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire boast a rich history, vibrant communities, and diverse landscapes that have shaped their identities over the years. From the lush green valleys and picturesque villages of the Peak District to the bustling urban centres of Derby and Nottingham, these counties offer a unique blend of natural beauty, cultural heritage, and economic vitality.

With a combined population of over two million residents, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire play a vital role in the economic fabric of the United Kingdom. Over the past decade the region has experienced notable growth, driven by a diverse range of industries, including manufacturing, transportation, healthcare, tourism, and technology. These sectors have not only contributed to the region's economic prosperity but have also created a demand for specific skills and competencies.

However, along with opportunities, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire also face their fair share of challenges. The evolving nature of the global economy, coupled with technological disruptions and the ongoing impact of Brexit, has necessitated a closer examination of the skills landscape within the region. Bringing together employers and education providers to address these challenges and shape post-16 training and learning provision is crucial for the sustained growth and prosperity of the counties. Collaboration between these stakeholders can ensure that training programmes align with industry requirements, providing learners with relevant and up-to-date skills. By involving employers in the process, education providers can gain insights into the specific skills and knowledge needed by the local job market. This collaborative approach, at the heart of the LSIP, can lead to the development of targeted training programmes that directly address the skills gaps, increasing employability and driving economic growth in the region.

Employment:

According to the Office for National Statistics, the employment rate in D2N2 was 77.4.% as of September 2022, which is slightly lower than the national average of 78.4%.[5] The region has a mix of both large and small businesses, with micro and small businesses accounting for the majority of business population at 97.5%, (see Annex A Figure 1), medium sized business account for 1.6% and large businesses 0.5%. The key sectors that provide employment in the region include wholesale and retail, health and social care and manufacturing.[6]

Manufacturing is a significant sector in the region, with advanced engineering and automotive industries being important drivers of employment in the region. In fact, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire have a significantly higher concentration of advanced engineering and manufacturing jobs than the national average. The logistics and transportation sectors are also significant in the region, with East Midlands Airport and the M1 motorway providing excellent connectivity to the rest of the UK and Europe. The

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5 https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/lep/1925185580/report.aspx#tabempunemp
6 https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/lep/1925185580/report.aspx#tabempunemp

addition of East Midlands Freeport (EMF), announced in March 2021 is well positioned to drive economic regeneration across the East Midlands.[7] Finally, the healthcare sector is a growing employer, with several large hospitals and care homes in the region.

Unemployment:

The unemployment rate in D2N2 was 3.1% as of December 2021, which is slightly lower than the national average of 3.7%. However, some areas within the region have higher levels of unemployment than others, particularly in the more urban areas such as Nottingham and Derby.[8]

Previously identified areas of focus for skills improvements:

The following is a summary of D2N2's analysis of key skills needs as outlined in their January 2022 Skills Report for the region. The identified needs include:

- **Digital Skills:** A requirement for digital skills at all levels to ensure individuals and businesses can effectively access services and compete in the global marketplace.

- **Inclusion:** Emphasis should be placed on promoting inclusion at all levels, aiming to improve access to work opportunities and enhance the well-being of all communities and residents.

- **Targeted Interventions:** Interventions are needed to support groups most affected by labour market changes during the pandemic, such as individuals over 50 and those facing health-related economic inactivity.

- **Competent FE Tutors:** There is a need to increase the supply of industrially competent Further Education (FE) tutors in key disciplines like construction, digital, engineering, and low carbon technologies.

- **Addressing Deprivation:** Measures should be implemented to address the worsening deprivation in education, skills, and training observed in most D2N2 districts since 2015. (See Annex A Figure 2 for areas of deprivation).

- **Graduate Retention and Skills Supply:** Efforts should be made to improve the retention of graduates and enhance the supply of graduate-level skills within the region, while also reducing graduate underemployment.

- **Higher and Degree Level Apprenticeships:** There should be a focus on increasing the uptake of higher and degree-level apprenticeships to provide more diverse pathways for skills development (see Annex A Figure 3) for the region's highest levels of qualifications.

- **Support for SMEs:** Additional support is required for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to navigate the evolving skills landscape, including enhancing capability in learner support and workforce planning.

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7 https://www.emfreeport.com/
8 https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/lep/1925185580/report.aspx#tabempunemp

Building on the needs above, intelligence gathered from the LSIP Steering Group also identified the:

- Growing demand for digital skills in advanced manufacturing, creative and digital sectors.
- Healthcare sector facing skills shortages, particularly in areas such as nursing and social care.
- Construction and engineering skills shortages, particularly in civil engineering.

Strategic priorities

In order to fully encompass the diverse sectors and potential of the region, the Steering Group members decided to adopt a cross-cutting thematic approach instead of focusing on a few sectors that only represented some of the region's industries (A full list of participants in the Steering Group and Providers working group is in Annex B). The chosen themes were digital skills, Net Zero skills, and transferable skills, which were identified by the LSIP Steering Group as particularly significant in the region for several reasons:

1. **Economic growth:** The digital economy is rapidly expanding and is expected to play a crucial role in the region's economic development. To support this growth, it is essential to have a workforce equipped with strong digital skills.

2. **Job opportunities:** Many employers in the region seek candidates who possess a solid understanding of digital technologies, especially as automation continues to increase. Having digital skills can enhance job prospects and make candidates more appealing to employers, improving their chances of finding employment.

3. **Environmental sustainability:** Net Zero skills are vital for reducing carbon emissions and addressing climate change. Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire have committed to becoming carbon neutral by 2050, and developing a workforce with Net Zero skills is crucial to achieving this goal.

4. **Adaptability:** Transferable skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving are essential in today's job market. These skills enable workers to adapt to new roles and industries as the job market evolves. In regions like Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire, where the economy is diverse and constantly changing, these skills hold particular importance.

While specific sectors were not prioritised by the Steering Group, feedback indicated that conducting deep-dives into key sectors in the region would be advantageous for future initiatives or iterations of the LSIP. Stakeholder engagement highlighted several sectors where addressing skills gaps and aligning education and training programmes could yield benefits. These sectors include: digital; low carbon and sustainable technology; hospitality and visitor economy; health and social care; construction; engineering; business administration and support; teaching; creative industry; agricultural; logistics; and manufacturing.

The Steering Group agreed to complement employer perspectives with Labour Market Intelligence to help identify key occupations in the digital sector and occupations critical to achieving Net Zero; providing focus and facilitating collaborative efforts among providers and strategic partners to drive change. Additionally, by comparing the most common skills sought in job postings for the Top 10 occupations in 2021 with those projected for the Top 10 occupations in terms of job growth by 2025, it was possible to identify the cross-cutting transferable skills in highest demand.

The importance of skills pathways

The steering group placed significant emphasis on unlocking the potential of LSIPs to create pathways for entry-level 'Level 1' skills that lead to higher-level skills at 'Level 3' and beyond. These pathways are crucial for individuals seeking career advancement and for the local economy's growth and development. By establishing clear and accessible routes, people can enter the workforce with a strong foundation of skills and knowledge. These pathways also facilitate smooth progression to higher-level qualifications and occupations, promoting a culture of lifelong learning and upward mobility. Additionally, these structured pathways address the skills gap prevalent in many industries, ensuring that the workforce possesses the necessary competencies to meet the evolving job market's demands. Ultimately, these pathways foster social and economic mobility, driving innovation, productivity, and prosperity in the region.

Furthermore, establishing strong connections between Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE) can offer individuals valuable opportunities to acquire higher-level qualifications and bridge skill gaps in targeted employment areas. While skill gaps can exist at various proficiency levels, the importance of level 3 progression routes should not be underestimated, as they play a critical role in facilitating upward mobility towards level 4 and beyond. Although this report primarily focuses on actionable priorities within FE provision, it is crucial to explore avenues that foster closer connections between FE and HE, particularly in priority occupations. This exploration ensures that pathways to and from FE are accessible and relevant within the local context, promoting a seamless educational journey for individuals seeking to enhance their skills and qualifications.

Process of engagement

Working towards an employer-provider-partnered provision

Keen to maximise the legacy effects of engaging with employers and linking them more closely with existing provision, our engagement with employers was done so as to encourage the development of an 'employer-provider-partnered' provision in mind. An employer and provider partnership approach to skills development offers a range of benefits that executed correctly, could enhance an employer-led approach. Firstly, such a partnership ensures a direct connection between educational institutions, training providers and the needs of the job market; resulting in a more dynamic, responsive and long-lasting relationship. A relationship of this kind enables educational institutions and providers to design programmes that align with the rapidly evolving demands of industries, thereby equipping learners with the specific skills and knowledge required for the workplace. Secondly, this approach fosters a smoother transition from education to employment, as employers actively participate in the learning process.

By engaging with providers and students, employers can identify and nurture talent, reducing the skills gap and enhancing the overall quality of the workforce. Additionally, this partnership approach encourages ongoing professional development, with employers investing in upskilling and reskilling initiatives for their employees. This not only ensures the continued relevance of the workforce but could boost employee satisfaction and retention. Ultimately, the employer and provider partnership approach to skills development creates a win-win scenario, benefiting both employers by providing them with a highly skilled workforce, and individuals by equipping them with the necessary competencies for successful careers in a rapidly changing job market. The LSIP approach taken to employer engagement, was to encourage and develop relationships between employees and providers from the start.

Engagement design and objectives

Consultants Arup were commissioned by FSB to carry out engagement activities aimed at gathering feedback from local employers, training providers, and key stakeholders to inform the LSIP. This section of the report outlines the approach used for engagement, the feedback received, and how evidence-based priorities were developed to shape the LSIP. The Statement of Engagement submitted by Arup can be found in Annex B.

In compliance with the LSIP statutory guidance, a variety of engagement activities were conducted to gather insights from stakeholders. The objectives of these activities were as follows:

- Facilitate the participation of employers, training providers, and strategic stakeholders in the early stages of the LSIP process, aligning with their respective responsibilities.
- Ensure inclusive engagement to capture perspectives from diverse sectors and regions.
- Collect quantitative and qualitative data regarding local skills challenges and opportunities, and establish actionable priorities to address them.
- Identify actionable priorities to inform the development of accountability agreements.
- Foster collaboration and cultivate relationships among employers, training providers, and other stakeholders, fostering a cooperative approach to achieve the goals of the LSIP.

Engagement activities

A combination of engagement activities were undertaken to engage with a total of 504 individuals. The sections below describe the approach taken to each engagement activity.

Online surveys

Three online surveys were produced to target each of the following stakeholder groups: employers; training providers; and strategic stakeholders. The surveys contained a combination of open and closed questions to gather qualitative and quantitative information. The online surveys were made publicly available via Microsoft Forms and disseminated through FSB, the LSIP Steering Group and partner group networks across the region. A total of 38 survey responses were received, comprised of 18 from employers, 16 from training providers, and four from strategic stakeholders.

Surveys were structured into five sections:

- organisation details, including quantitative questions to gather background data on each participant;
- skills supply and demand, to understand if and where soft and technical skills gaps exist;
- training provision, to gain an insight into the current training available and barriers and enablers to training;
- collaboration with others, to identify if and how employers, training providers and stakeholders are working together to address challenges and opportunities; and
- drivers of change, to identify and seek to address socio-economic issues which may be affecting skills provision and businesses.

Online focus groups

Four facilitated online focus group sessions were held via Microsoft Teams early in the engagement period to gather initial insights from employers, training providers, and strategic stakeholders in relation to:

- skills, capabilities and expertise requirements;
- recruitment and retention;
- training requirements; and
- socio-economic drivers of change.

Attendees were split into virtual breakout rooms to facilitate focussed discussions on each topic. Feedback was recorded using the Miro interactive whiteboard tool. Feedback gathered from the session was analysed early in the engagement period to identify emerging cross cutting themes, to inform the approach to subsequent in-person focus group sessions. A total of 28 stakeholders attended the sessions, which comprised of 20 employers and eight training providers. At this stage, the following four cross cutting themes were identified:

- work readiness and soft skills;
- digitalisation;
- recruitment and retention; and
- approach to training provision.

In-person LSIP focus groups and wider meetings

Following the online focus group sessions, seven in-person LSIP sessions were held across the D2N2 area to capture feedback from different localities, as it is recognised that the economic landscape and business needs differ significantly across the region. Four FSB and Arup (appointed researchers) sessions were held in Chesterfield, Derby, Mansfield, and Nottingham, for employers, training providers and strategic stakeholders. In addition, three LSIP employer focussed sessions were held in partnership with external organisations. These sessions were:

- A dedicated session in Newark, organised by Newark and Sherwood District Council to target local businesses;
- An agenda item as part of The Midlands Green Innovation Network's 'Skills for the Green Revolution' event to target businesses in the low carbon and sustainable technology sector; and
- A dedicated session in Nottingham hosted by B-Global to target employers from Black, Asian and ethnic minority communities.

During each session attendees were divided into breakout groups to facilitate focussed discussions around the emerging findings (referenced above) and associated actionable priorities. Where possible, breakout groups comprised of a combination of employers, training providers and strategic stakeholders from different sectors and geographies. The events also provided networking opportunities to enable stakeholders to meet, forge relationships and collaborate. A total of 87 participants attended these sessions, which comprised 33 employers, 34 training providers and 20 strategic stakeholders.

Further to the events above, an additional 315 participants fed back at events where FSB led LSIP discussions as part of broader agendas. These events and engagements included partnership working with: Chesterfield Champions, Nottingham Growth Board, When Women Meet (in partnership with Dynamic Care Solutions Ltd), D2N2 Recruiting Talent, Midlands Engine Business Forum, D2N2 B6 Group and individual contributions from members of business representation groups including East Midlands Chamber of Commerce (EMCC), Make UK, and the Institute of Directors (IoD).

Interviews

A total of 20 organisations, comprising of nine employers, seven training providers, and four strategic stakeholders, were engaged in a series of one-to-one interviews. The interviews were conducted using a combination of Microsoft Teams and telephone, depending on the preference of the interviewees. The majority of interviews followed the structure outlined in the online surveys mentioned earlier, while some adopted a more conversational approach to explore specific topics in greater detail. Any additional information provided by stakeholders after their interviews was incorporated with the feedback received during the interview process.

Data analysis

Feedback received from the focus group sessions, interviews and surveys was compiled and coded to inform the subsequent analysis. This analysis identified key issues and opportunities in the local skills system and associated actionable priorities, which are presented in Part Two of this report.

Participant overview

The participant overview data, as detailed in Arup's report, provides a valuable glimpse into the distribution of participants involved in our engagement activities. Although Arup's data is specific to the 189 participants they managed, it serves as a representative sample of the broader engagements that took place.

Arup's findings offer insightful information regarding the diverse range of participants involved in our initiatives. While their data is limited to a subset of participants, it effectively captures the overall trends and characteristics observed in our broader engagement efforts. This data serves as a reliable reference point for understanding the wider landscape of participant involvement beyond the scope of Arup's specific engagements.

Participants' locations across the region showcase the reach of engagement activities. Notably, we were able to attract participants from every district within the region, effectively reaching both urban and rural areas. Significantly higher levels of participation were observed in districts characterised by a more urban geography, including Nottingham, Derby and Chesterfield. It is important to highlight that while analysing the data, we encountered instances where participants did not provide specific district information. Instead they referred to broader areas such as the Midlands.

Engagement efforts successfully attracted a wide range of businesses, encompassing small, medium-sized, and large businesses. Notably, we achieved particularly strong engagement from both smaller and larger enterprises, highlighting the inclusivity and effectiveness of our engagement strategies in reaching a diverse cross-section of the business community.

The engagement activities in the region successfully attracted participation from a wide range of

individuals and organisations, including employers, training providers, and strategic stakeholders. Among these groups, there was a notable emphasis on engaging with employers and as such these were the most actively engaged group.

Engagement activities effectively captured participants from various employment sectors, showcasing a diverse representation of industries. The sectors included: public administration and defence; health and social work; education, professional, scientific, and technical activities; information and communication; administrative and support services; wholesale and retail; finance and insurance; real estate, accommodation and food services; arts, entertainment, and recreation; construction, manufacturing, transportation and storage; and agriculture, forestry, and fishing.

This comprehensive and varied representation of sectors allowed for a more inclusive and robust understanding of the skills challenges and opportunities prevalent in the region. By engaging with a wide range of individuals and organisations across diverse sectors, we gained valuable insights into the specific needs and dynamics of different industries, enabling us to address the region's skill requirements more effectively.

PART TWO: SPECIFICATION OF EMPLOYER NEEDS AND ACTIONABLE PRIORITIES

Skills gaps and cross-cutting themes

This section offers a synopsis of the prominent patterns that have arisen from the feedback received, encompassing skills gaps, training needs, barriers, and collaboration among stakeholders.

Based on the feedback received, it was evident that there exists a significant skills gap within the local workforce. Most participants acknowledged a disparity between the skills possessed by their employees and the requirements of their organisations. The identified skills gaps encompass a wide range of areas, including work readiness skills in school leavers, digital and numeracy skills, specialised skills like engineering, leadership skills, safety and security skills, face-to-face customer service skills, and green skills.

Feedback also shed light on various areas where improvements are needed in the current training provisions. This includes enhancing awareness of available courses and training opportunities, as well as providing career pathway advice. Respondents emphasised the necessity for training in digital skills, green skills, work readiness skills, employability skills, higher technical qualifications, and establishing clearer pathways between further education, higher education, and different skills programmes. Effectively addressing these gaps requires enhanced communication and awareness-raising efforts to ensure individuals are informed about the training opportunities and courses available to them.

Furthermore, the feedback highlighted diverse actions that organisations are undertaking to mitigate skills gaps. These actions include in-house training, industrial placements, substantial investments in staff development, provision of apprenticeships, conducting face-to-face sessions, and offering work experience placements, among others. Participants also stressed the importance of collaboration and coordination between training providers and employers to facilitate smooth progression for individuals across different levels of education and training.

The case for an employer-provider-partnered provision

Engagement feedback clearly indicated the need for increased collaboration among stakeholders in training and skills development. Participants identified several best practices for collaboration, such as establishing strategic relationships and partnerships between employers and training providers, closely working with schools, colleges, and universities to ensure relevant course content and work placements, and actively participating in forums and events to foster networking and explore collaboration opportunities.

Creating taskforces of employers and training providers offering similar qualifications, apprenticeships, and training programmes was also recognised as a practical approach to sharing best practices and staying updated with sector-specific changes. Participants emphasised the importance of providing insights to universities to enhance graduates' employability and offering internships and work placements to students.

Furthermore, participants suggested the significance of collaborating with community-based and voluntary organisations to provide training and support for individuals who are further away from the job market. They also recommended the establishment of a centralised body to monitor and evaluate training provision across the region and act as a bridge between employers and training providers.

The survey feedback highlighted several key measures that need to be implemented to address skills gaps effectively. These measures include supporting schools in developing skills frameworks that prioritise life skills, engaging with small businesses to understand their future needs, promoting greater collaboration and problem-solving initiatives, and moving away from an exam-oriented approach to education.

Five key themes

Overall engagement highlighted five prominent cross-cutting themes in which developing actionable priorities could improve and enhance the region's existing skills provision:

- Digital skills
- Net Zero
- Essential and transferable skills
- Local skills system
- Local socio-economic conditions

Digital skills

Overview of engagement feedback

The digital sector is currently facing a significant skills shortage, and employers are finding it challenging to locate employees with the right digital skills. In today's modern workplace, technology plays a crucial role, and employers are increasingly seeking individuals with both general and specialised digital skills. The rapid evolution of technology across various sectors further emphasises the importance of having a skilled workforce.

However, the region's socio-economic challenges pose obstacles to progress in this area. The ever-changing digital landscape and training requirements have been brought to attention, with participants emphasising the need for up-to-date training and the impact of digitalisation on jobs and businesses. It has been recognised that upskilling current employees is crucial in this rapidly evolving space. Discussions have also centred around the distinction between "digital" and "technical" skills, highlighting the varying skill levels required for different roles. Participants have noted a lack of digital skills, particularly among certain demographics.

Basic digital skills, including knowledge of Microsoft Office, organisational systems, computer literacy, and cyber/data security awareness, have been identified as frequently needed. Young people, in particular, were found to lack these skills, leading to suggestions of incorporating digital learning into the school curriculum. Personal digital skills, such as social media usage, and professional digital skills, such as proficiency in Microsoft Office, were identified, with the latter being perceived as lacking in new workplace entrants. However, it was acknowledged that digital competency varies among young people. Different age groups were seen to possess different types of digital skills, presenting an opportunity for upskilling older individuals through reverse mentoring and knowledge sharing. Older employees often exhibit reluctance to upskill due to a lack of confidence in using technology, and those who had not previously engaged with technology in their jobs faced challenges when forced to incorporate digital skills due to the pandemic.

Within the region there is a high demand for specific digital skills (see Annex A Figure 4), including programming, dataset analysis, digital marketing, social media management, and graphic design, among others. These skills are predicted to remain in high demand as the digital sector continues to evolve. However, colleges have reported a lack of interest in certain digital courses. While design-focused digital courses attract students, the programming aspect of these courses faces challenges in attracting employers; in addition digital attainment varies greatly across the region (see Annex A Figure 5).

One significant obstacle to promoting career paths in the digital sector is the shortage of computer science staff in colleges. The deficiency in qualified instructors hampers efforts to encourage students to pursue careers in this field. Without sufficient resources and personnel, colleges are unable to provide the necessary support and training to meet the growing demand for digital skills.

Addressing the skills shortage in the digital sector requires collaborative efforts between educational institutions, employers, and industry leaders. It necessitates investing in resources, promoting digital courses, and bridging the gap in computer science staff. By taking these steps, we can nurture a skilled workforce that meets the evolving demands of the digital sector.

Employer feedback overview and actionable priorities

Employer feedback summary	Actionable priorities
• Training to upgrade digital literacy skills. To meet the demands of the job market, individuals need to focus on improving their baseline digital literacy, especially in commonly used professional software such as Microsoft Office Suite (Word, PowerPoint, Excel) and email presentations. • Difficulties navigating regional offer.	1. Promote and communicate (and develop if necessary) the area's existing digital skills offer to employers more widely and work with colleges and ITPs (in consultation with D2N2 LEP, BROs and/or similar partners) to assess the effectiveness.
• Digital skills integration in education. To keep pace with the rapidly changing digital landscape, education should provide digital skills as a key component of courses. This should include an emphasis on understanding the logic and processes behind the software and practical application. Each course should have a digital aspect to help individuals gain a comprehensive understanding of digital tools and how they can be applied in a variety of settings.	2. Integrate a digital component into relevant post-16 vocational programmes, apprenticeships and AEB vocational courses, where not already present. 3. Assess the volume and take up of digital skills online/short course programmes against relevant occupations, or introduce where not present. Introduce measures that focus on addressing the current gender imbalance.
Addressing digital actionable priorities:	
• Bridge the skills gap in digital technologies and adapt to the fourth industrial revolution. • Create Digital Productivity Hubs to deliver sector-specific digital skills training and engage SMEs and micro businesses in adopting new technologies. • Harmonise digital skills across existing programmes, map existing digital skills offerings, and address gaps in provision.	

Priority occupations

We have used Lightcast to identify the top list of occupations which exhibited the highest growth in 2021 within the region and were also predicted to have the highest numbers of jobs in 2025. These are our priorities for growth and are listed below, together with possible funding sources. We expect to further consult employers and discuss these with colleges and other providers as we implement the LSIP. We aim to work in collaboration with providers to determine current supply and what should/ could be done to increase volumes where that is appropriate.

Labour market intelligence, (see Annex A Figure 6), shows a significant imbalance in uptake of digital occupations by gender, with women and girls being vastly underrepresented. As such there is the option to explore addressing this imbalance in courses and training not pre-determined by someone's occupation.

Occupation and level	Provisional priority and possible funding source
Programmer and software Developer L3,4, 6	Apprenticeship, FT 16 to 19/T Levels and Degree apprenticeship/FT HE
IT Specialist Manager L4	Upskilling via Apprenticeship or short courses (AEB innovation or LSIF/employers)
IT User support Technician L3	Apprenticeship, FT 16 to 19/T Levels
IT Operations Technician L3	Apprenticeship, FT 16 to 19/T Levels
IT Business analyst, Architect and Systems Designer L4,6	Apprenticeship, FT 16 to 19/T Levels, Degree Apprenticeships/FT HE
IT Project and Programme Managers L4	Upskilling via Apprenticeship or short courses (AEB innovation of LSIF/employers)
Telecoms Engineers L2,3	Apprenticeship
IT Engineers L4	Apprenticeship
Web Design and Developers L3	Apprenticeship/FT 16 to 19

In addition, Lightcast has also been used to identify key skills requirements from Unique Job Postings in 2022. This indicates that the programming languages, SQL, JavaScript and C# should be priorities, together with Microsoft Azure (see Annex A Figure 7). Just as for the occupations, we have adopted these as 'provisional priorities' but will consult further with employers and work collaboratively with colleges and other providers to develop/grow provision. Upskilling training in these areas may need to be funded by employers or possibly LSIF or both.

Net Zero

The region is experiencing an increasing demand for skills that are essential for achieving Net Zero carbon emissions. In response to this demand, strategic partners such as D2N2 LEP, local authorities, and business representation organisations have shown their commitment to assisting businesses in transitioning to a low-carbon economy through various initiatives.

According to labour market data (see Annex A Figure 8) there is a specific need for workers with skills in energy efficiency and low-carbon transition within sectors like construction, conservation, and agriculture. Early indications from the East Midlands Freeport suggest that there will be increased demand for Net Zero skills in transport and logistics. Furthermore, the Midlands Engine website emphasises the importance of skills related to digital technologies, including data analytics and artificial intelligence, in the pursuit of achieving net-zero carbon emissions.[9]

However, feedback from employers in the region indicates a limited awareness and understanding of climate literacy. Reports such as FSB's 'Accelerating Progress'[10] and the University of Derby's 'Green Growth Trends in the East Midlands 2022'[11] highlight the lack of engagement among many businesses with green growth initiatives. This feedback underscores the need for improved climate literacy at a regional level, as well as the necessity for better communication of existing Net Zero provisions and the development of industry-specific initiatives.

The Net Zero and sustainable technology sector is expected to witness significant growth leading to the creation of new jobs and the obsolescence of certain existing ones. It is increasingly crucial for businesses in various industries to recruit individuals with expertise in this sector. Consequently, there is a growing demand for employees who possess relevant skills and experience.

To meet these demands, it is necessary to embed Net Zero and sustainable technology skills within training programmes, particularly in sectors like construction and engineering. Climate literacy, a general awareness, and a willingness to embrace a Net Zero way of life and work are also important attributes. Net Zero and sustainable technology knowledge should be incorporated into a wider range of training and vocational courses, including at GCSE level. Additionally, upskilling the current workforce with evolving technologies and encouraging young people to challenge the status quo and bring fresh knowledge to the workplace are essential. However, it is acknowledged that SMEs may face resource constraints when focusing on sustainability. Therefore, there is a need to expedite the delivery of these skills, particularly through vocational courses in the Net Zero and sustainable technology sector.

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9 https://www.midlandsengine.org/sector/digital/

10 https://www.fsb.org.uk/resource-report/accelerating-progress.html

11 https://repository.derby.ac.uk/item/97x22/green-growth-trends-in-the-east-midlands-2022

Employer feedback overview and actionable priorities

Employer feedback summary	Actionable priorities
• Basic climate literacy and understanding needs to be improved for both students in the education system and places of work.	4. Develop and implement industry specific "Achieving Net Zero" online/workshop-based programmes for staff and managers, with a focus on relevant occupations.
• Difficulties navigating the regional offer.	5. Collaborate to produce a roadmap of the region's existing Net Zero offer and develop peer-to-peer networks.
Addressing Net Zero actionable priorities:	
• Identify and address skills shortages in energy efficiency and low carbon transition across key sectors.	
• Increase awareness and understanding of climate literacy in areas of the economy to promote engagement with green growth initiatives.	
• Establish local Green Productivity Hubs to develop climate literacy, engage employers, and provide sector-specific green skill provision.	

Occupations requiring significant upskilling

We have used the D2N2 Low Carbon Growth Priorities (energy supply, improving energy efficiency, carbon capture and knowledge transfer into key sectors) together with the UK Governments Green Jobs Taskforce report of 2021, to create a list of occupations (see Annex A Figure 8), that are very likely to need significant additional knowledge and skills to meet the needs of the developing Net Zero economy. It is worth noting that across key Net Zero occupations there are gender inequalities that should be acknowledged and addressed (see Annex A Figure 9). We have then used Lightcast to look at growth and employment in these occupations. This is set out in the table below.

We intend to explore the upskilling needs related to these occupations with colleges and providers as part of the LSIP implementation. We have used Lightcast to identify the top ten of these occupations in relation to growth in 2021 and numbers of jobs predicted in 2025. These are the occupations we would see as priorities for apprenticeships, 16 to 19 vocational FE and in some cases AEB/Bootcamp funded programmes.

D2N2 upskilling priority area	Priority skills shortage occupation
Construction and building trades	Yes
Agricultural and related trades	Yes
Plant and machine operatives	Yes
Building finishing trades	Yes
Assemblers and routine operatives	-
Production managers and directors	-
Process operatives	-
Elementary agricultural occupations	-
Construction operatives	Yes

D2N2 upskilling priority area	Priority skills shortage occupation
Science, engineering and production technicians	-
Elementary cleaning occupations	-
Engineering professionals	-
Artistic, literary and media occupations	-
Welfare professionals	-
Natural and social science professionals	Yes
Sales, marketing and related associate professionals	-
Metal machining, fitting and instrument making trades	-
Electrical and electronic trades	-
Business, research and administrative professionals	-
Administrative occupations: office managers and supervisors	-
Skilled metal, electrical and electronic trades supervisors	-
Metal forming, welding and related trades	Yes
Conservation and environmental associate professionals	Yes
Vehicle trades	Yes
Mobile machine drivers and operatives	Yes
Managers and proprietors in other services	-
Information technology and telecommunications professionals	-
Elementary security occupations	-
Other skilled trades	-
Architects, town planners and surveyors	-
Business, finance and related associate professionals	-
Construction and building trades supervisors	-
Draughtspersons and related architectural technicians	-
Managers and proprietors in agriculture related services	-
Other elementary services occupations	-
Quality and regulatory professionals	-
Public services and other associate professionals	-
Construction and building trades	-

Essential and transferable skills

The theme of 'Work readiness and soft skills' emerged as a significant concern during the engagement activities conducted across various geographical locations. Participants consistently highlighted the lack of soft skills and employability skills as a pressing issue within the work readiness category. There is a prevailing perception that potential candidates, particularly young people, lack these skills, which are highly valued and sought after by employers during the recruitment process. This observation indicates a gap between the soft/employability skills possessed by job seekers entering the workforce and those demanded by employers. Participants frequently identified several soft skills that were generally poor and insufficient among individuals starting their careers. These skills encompassed written and verbal communication, confidence and social aptitude, understanding of transferable skills, as well as a basic level of proficiency in English, maths, and IT.

Additionally, participants noted other essential soft skills, including basic life skills, problem solving, decision making, strategic thinking, time management, resilience, adaptability, and self-esteem. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was identified as a contributing factor to a general nervousness in approaching social and professional situations, especially among young people. When recruiting, employers frequently encountered a lack of essential business knowledge, professionalism, and employability skills, such as interview preparation and CV writing, among the pool of candidates.

Regarding school leavers, it was widely felt that many of them are not adequately prepared for the workforce due to a lack of early engagement with the world of work. This specific sub-theme highlighted unrealistic attitudes towards work among young people and emphasised the potential for schools and parents/guardians to play a greater role in preparing them for their future careers.

Several other issues were frequently raised during the discussions. These included low productivity and poor or unrealistic attitudes towards work and careers, as many young individuals exhibited an individualistic approach to work. There was also a lack of awareness and knowledge sharing about local career opportunities, particularly among students and their parents/guardians. The number of young people participating in work experience or part-time jobs, such as "Saturday jobs" or paper rounds, was noted to be decreasing compared to previous generations, potentially influenced by post-pandemic working patterns. The rigid pre-16 school curriculum, which primarily focuses on exams and neglects work-related training and creative thinking, was identified as a hindrance to exploring opportunities. Furthermore, the engagement activities revealed persistent barriers to technical education. It became evident that for certain young individuals, deviating from the traditional academic pathway was perceived as a failure.

Another important aspect discussed was the existence of a discrepancy between candidate and employer expectations. Although this theme was not raised as frequently, it shed light on the different expectations held by employees and employers regarding work. Some scenarios identified included employees having unrealistically high salary expectations in relation to their skill level or workload, employees displaying reluctance to engage in hard work, employers expecting 16-year-olds to be work-ready without sufficient guidance or prior workplace experience, employers' requirements not being well understood by training providers and learners, employers seeking specific work experience without offering opportunities to students, and employers exhibiting distrust towards new recruits, especially in remote work settings.

The question of whether this issue arises from candidates having unreasonable expectations or employers failing to adapt to societal and technological changes was also raised, highlighting the need for further exploration and understanding of the underlying factors contributing to the mismatch between candidate and employer expectations.

Employer feedback overview and actionable priorities

Employer feedback summary	Actionable priorities
• More pre-16 engagement and skills development. Targeting young people, to teach basic employability skills that they can focus on for work readiness. The aim is also to make young people more aware of the vocational routes to work rather than being funnelled into academia, e.g., university isn't for everyone, but many students aren't aware of the careers paths available in technical training/jobs.	6. Explore the implementation of a D2N2 wide skills framework to define consistent approaches to essential skills system, offering examples of what employers can expect at each level.
• Employers to offer more work experience opportunities to equip people with the skills specific sectors need.	7. Providers to co-produce a comprehensive guide that explains placement requirements for all vocational courses, and what employers can expect or contribute as part of the placements.
• Providers should engage with employers to develop a soft skills/employability skills framework. There is a need for work readiness to be quantified/unified. • Need for a criteria or framework for colleges and training providers to work from. Different institutions have their own, but it is not agreed/uniform across Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire. This criterion can be worked into assessments to create a baseline knowledge of soft skills amongst those entering the workplace e.g. a soft skills certificate that is standardised across the region.	8. Develop and implement a common employability/ essential skills framework for all AEB and Boot Camp programmes. 9. Develop and implement an essential skills short course programme for employed staff.
Addressing essential and transferable skills actionable priorities:	
• Develop an employer-driven competency framework for essential and transferable skills. • Create a virtual learning platform for essential and transferable skills training and recognition. • Build an infrastructure to capture and record live progress towards essential skills and competencies across vocational disciplines.	

Local skills system

The theme that emerged most frequently in all discussions and engagements revolved around the opportunities and challenges associated with training provision. This encompassed a broad range of training programmes across different regions. Specifically, the theme focused on opportunities and challenges related to apprenticeships and vocational qualifications, capacity and capability constraints in delivering training, and future training prospects. Another significant aspect within this theme was the emphasis on work-readiness relevant training and the recognition of social value through training.

One of the commonly noted challenges regarding apprenticeships and vocational qualifications was the funding model's inflexibility, which limited the availability of apprenticeship opportunities. Furthermore, the quality and depth of apprenticeships varied, with some being more beneficial than others. The

persisting stigma surrounding apprenticeships compared to university education was also highlighted, along with the lack of awareness among young people about apprenticeship opportunities, despite a gradual increase in understanding among them and their parents. Pre-16 education providers often preferred students to pursue sixth form and university instead of engaging in vocational courses. Incentives for individuals to start apprenticeships and complete the required assessments were insufficient. Moreover, there was a poor culture of retaining apprentices in the workplace once they finished their courses and qualified for higher wages. Another misconception was that apprenticeships were exclusively for young people, neglecting the potential for mature workers to upskill or change career paths. The need to teach Level 2 maths and English to those who had previously failed deterred some candidates from continuing their courses. Additionally, some well-attended courses did not align with the current job market, such as e-sports courses. A shortage of skilled tutors and lack of funding for industry-aligned education further exacerbated the skills gap.

In the manufacturing industry, employers expressed concerns about college courses inadequately preparing students for the practical requirements of the workplace. The classroom environment was deemed insufficient in representing real-world challenges and opportunities for practical engineering skills, leaving students lacking hands-on experience and exposure to the latest technologies. In response, suggestions were made to address these challenges and capitalise on potential opportunities. These included encouraging apprenticeships and placements in vocational courses, integrating the teaching of soft and work readiness skills into these programmes, seamlessly incorporating English and maths skills relevant to future job roles, and making the Apprenticeship Levy more accessible to small businesses. It was also proposed to support funding for companies that provide managerial-level training, learn from existing good practices in apprenticeships, establish partnerships with organisations to recruit apprentices, explore supported internships and quasi-apprenticeships, and rethink work placements to maximise experience and exposure to businesses.

The second most prevalent training theme highlighted the capacity and capability constraints faced by both training providers and employers. Limitations associated with existing funding streams were identified as a significant challenge, impeding the ability of training providers to offer certain programmes and hindering small organisations' capacity to engage employees in training due to time and resource constraints. Some small businesses were ineligible for government funding, further exacerbating the skills gap. Other barriers included accessibility issues, such as language barriers and ineffective communication during course registration, as well as the rigidity and lengthiness of the funding application process, which negatively affected employment and hindered progression. Additionally, training providers were constrained by the requirement for a critical mass of interested learners, preventing the provision of certain skills demanded by employers in the region.

Despite the numerous challenges discussed during engagements, future opportunities and trends for training were a prevalent theme within the discussions. The flexibility of hybrid delivery was seen as a way to reach a broader population who were previously unable to engage in training programmes.

Employer feedback overview and actionable priorities

Employer feedback summary	Actionable priorities
• The region's seven FE colleges should work together to bid for funding. This collaboration will be increasingly important going forward, including work with the district council (towns fund) and work with the region's universities, D2N2 LEP and key partners.	10. Explore/increase collaborative bidding and delivery partnership with the region's FE colleges, universities, and key partners.
• Co-designing of courses with local employers to sense check the provision of training, e.g., myth busting around construction and engineering roles.	11. Actively review employer standards with employers when negative feedback received. Work with them to articulate what (if anything) is wrong/missing or needs to be added. Providers can add content locally and report content for removal to IFATE but removal from a standard locally is not possible.
• Support closer industry teacher collaboration including secondments from industry and shared industrial teaching support across provision where there are shortages in specialist staff and where industry is changing rapidly.	12. Develop a collaborative initiative to increase the supply of teachers/trainers in priority occupations and review/improve their training if needed. An area approach could be advantageous.
• Changes to employers approaches to recruitment are required to make it easier to recruit those furthest from the market and marginalised groups. Job adverts need to be more inclusive and accessible.	13. Develop recruitment and retention packs and/or workshops for employers, especially SMEs, to aid broadening candidate search. Utilise the skills of existing students to deliver.
• A skills hub/centre within the geography. This would be a place to go (physically) where you can be directed to the training you/your business needs. • Establishing a one stop shop for upskilling, can provide many services that can be accessed by anyone at any stage of their career e.g., helping small businesses to grow, people to find work, seek employability advice, hold business events, lectures on topics affecting small businesses etc. • An online community that could also be formed in conjunction with the LSIP could be a place where the good work that has already been happening across the geography is stored (e.g., D2N2 careers hub).	14. Further develop the Careers Hub and similar services and communicate their existence more widely.
• Work could be done by local authorities to understand social value commitments. For example, major projects often have large social value commitments around contractors and suppliers hiring apprentices but how are training providers linked into this to understand need, pipeline etc.	15. Assess the extent of current social value agreements in public procurement and work collaboratively with Local Authorities to develop further and share knowledge with employers.
Addressing local skills provision:	
• Form a D2N2 FE Collaboration Group consisting of senior leaders from partner organisations, LSIP representatives, and local stakeholders to provide strategic oversight of the projects linked to LSIP actionable priorities • The group's responsibilities should include reviewing project progress, aligning provision across the sub-region, authorising pilot provision, evaluating risk, identifying curriculum strengths, and making decisions on capital and resource investment. • Appoint Project Managers to lead individual projects and ensure effective co-ordination and implementation.	

Local socio-economic conditions

Local socio-economic conditions significantly influence skills access and attainment within communities. In the region there are both positive and challenging factors at play. On the positive side, the region benefits from a diverse economy and access to quality education and training programmes. However, challenges such as high unemployment rates and lower incomes in certain areas create barriers to accessing educational opportunities. Economic disparities and limited infrastructure, particularly in rural areas, (see Annex A Figure 10 and Figure 11) for internet provision and public transport access areas further hinder skills acquisition. A significant number of individuals involved in the engagement recognised the importance of investing in education and vocational training. They emphasised the need to enhance partnerships between educational institutions and employers, as well as improve infrastructure and connectivity. These efforts aim to ensure fair access to skills development, foster social mobility, and establish a more inclusive and prosperous environment.

During discussions on skills provision and access to training, several socio-economic drivers were highlighted as influential factors. The most mentioned driver was the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants expressed concerns about the rapid decline of soft skills, especially among young people who had limited social experiences, particularly in professional environments. There was also anxiety and reluctance to engage in face-to-face interaction and communication, with a growing preference for working from home. This presented challenges for new recruits entering the workplace and their managers. Additionally, young people entering the workforce may have missed out on valuable face-to-face work experience and on-the-job learning opportunities.

Another significant theme that emerged was socio-economic inequalities among learners, employees, and unemployed individuals. Feedback highlighted issues such as the current cost of living crisis, where individuals were unable to afford necessities like fuel, heating, clothing, and food. Poor access to public transport, especially the lack of connections across the region, hindered people's ability to travel to workplaces, training facilities, work experience placements, or job interviews. Limited access to digital platforms for training posed a disadvantage, particularly for rural communities. Lack of awareness or ability to dress presentably also hindered individuals, as these skills were not taught as compulsory life skills in school. Moreover, individuals from privileged backgrounds had better access to work experience and careers advice, while migrants, disabled individuals, neurodivergent individuals, people aged over 50, and those with health conditions faced low employability.

Systematic injustices in society were also noted, with calls for more gender and race equality initiatives, inclusive recruitment and training practices, and the use of accessible language regardless of background. Social mobility was flagged as an issue, but hybrid working was viewed as a potential solution, providing opportunities for people to work in cities. However, it was acknowledged that more support was needed to help disadvantaged individuals access job opportunities, considering barriers like limited internet access, language and cultural differences, and disadvantaged backgrounds.

Mental health emerged as a common concern among respondents. General nervousness and fear about the workplace, especially among young people, were reported, along with low self-esteem and high levels of anxiety that hindered learners and employees from completing courses or attending work. Mental health conditions often led to individuals leaving the workplace or their learning endeavours. The lack of specialist mental health support, particularly in the Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) was also highlighted. Confidence and poor mental health were discussed

extensively in relation to people with additional needs, creating barriers in securing interviews, succeeding in applications, or even showing up to work. It was suggested that employers should be more socially inclusive and better understand the mental health challenges faced by young people.

Feedback on the economic climate for businesses indicated that small businesses struggled to engage employees in training due to the rising costs of operation. Some small and medium-sized enterprises faced challenges in surviving, prompting a shift towards investing in upskilling existing employees rather than recruiting new ones. While the topics of an ageing population, the green agenda, the impact of Brexit, and the current political climate were mentioned less frequently, they were still considered important factors influencing skills provision and priorities in the local area. The East Midlands devolution deal in the region was frequently discussed as an opportunity within the current political climate to support and accelerate the skills agenda.

Employer feedback summary	Actionable priorities
• Support progression in the workplace. Offer workforce development and succession planning to employers to support retention and progression.	16. Define a set of key occupations that require people to be upskilled. For example, junior people already in the digital sector, could help fill shortages in cyber roles, by upskilling, rather than looking for new people to move into the roles which will require a greater lead time. Providers then focus on the training that enable people to be upskilled.
• Increase employment prospects for marginalised groups; employers to explore opportunities to hire people with disabilities.	17. Offer short courses to employers that highlight barriers to employment for marginalised groups and those furthest from the labour market in priority occupations and provide training for employers accordingly, highlighting where possible mental health support.
• Consider place specific experiences shared by all vocational leaders that build employability skills such as team building, resilience, planning e.g. expedition in Peak District.	18. Seek opportunities to partner with groups such as Youth Social Action to develop transferable skills for T-Levels and apprenticeships. As transferable skills built into work placements assist employers with creation.
Addressing social economic conditions actionable priorities:	
• D2N2 FE Collaboration Group to regularly review and analyse local social and economic challenges, ensuring they remain informed and updated on the evolving landscape.	
• D2N2 FE Collaboration Group to engage with local stakeholders, such as community organisations, businesses, and local authorities, to gather insights and perspectives on the specific social and economic challenges within the region.	
• D2N2 FE Collaboration Group to incorporate local social and economic challenges as key considerations in the decision-making process of the D2N2 FE Collaboration Group, ensuring that project aims and initiatives align with addressing these challenges and driving positive impact within the community.	

Accountability and timescales for delivery of actionable priority projects

As expressed under the Local Skills System section of this report, a D2N2 FE Collaboration Group (strategic level steering board) will be formed to provide effective oversight of projects that will ensure the delivery of the actionable priorities. The group will include representation from senior leaders within FE partner organisations, with input from the LSIP and local stakeholders. Each representative will inform their respective Governing Body of the programme's progress and involve them in decisions relating to the alignment of provision across our sub-region.

Subject to a successful LSIF bid, the D2N2 FE Collaboration Group will adhere to a well-defined timescale over the LISP's three-year period, to deliver the actionable priorities. Timescales will be developed as part of Stage 2 of the LSIP process, however this may include, within the first year, focusing on establishing the Digital Productivity Hubs and the local Green Productivity Hubs. This will involve conducting research, consulting with stakeholders, and finalising the structure, focus, and locations of these specialised centres. Simultaneously, efforts will be made to develop an employer-driven competency framework, including defining the associated system of measurement and recognition.

In the second year, pilot provisions could be authorised, resources committed, and collaboration and rationalisation across the local FE offer to be agreed upon. The group may also prioritise aligning and mapping curriculum strengths to ensure seamless skills progression pathways across partner organisations. Finally, in the third year, there could be a focus on evaluating risks and taking necessary mitigating actions, as well as making informed decisions on capital and resource investments to support the development of new provisions related to green and digital innovation. The group will also work towards aligning management information systems and data systems to reflect the collaborative delivery model and the shared learner journey. Throughout the entire three-year period, regular monitoring, evaluation, and adjustments will be made to ensure successful implementation and address any emerging challenges.

PART THREE: ROADMAP FOR DELIVERING CHANGE

Roadmap for delivering the LSIP actionable priorities

The roadmap is based on an employer-provider partnership provision that has gained consensus from employers, providers, and stakeholders. It recognises that additional funding may be necessary for certain actions and highlights that without such funding, progress may be impeded or certain actions may not be realised.

The roadmap overview is designed to provide a general framework without being overly prescriptive at this stage. The responsibility of creating specific objectives that underpin each actionable priority lies with the ERB and the D2N2 FE Collaboration Group, who will act as a LSIP Implementation Taskforce at stage two of the LSIP process. Furthermore, consideration will be given to leveraging the EMCC app-based business survey methodology, and reports (commissioned through D2N2 LEP funding), to gather progress data effectively. This will involve managed access to EMCC's survey tool, scheduling regular business-related questions, providing a toolkit for engaging businesses in the app-based approach, monitoring daily response rates, generating weekly reports on findings, and developing an API for creating a comprehensive final report showcasing survey results over time. It is envisaged that existing employer groups within colleges will be utilised to enhance this work.

Actions within the roadmap will drive forward the LSIP to improve productivity and address skills gaps by nurturing local talent, enhance UK and international competitiveness, and foster economic growth. Additionally, the implementation of the actions will strengthen the connection between employers, further education, and providers, and keep employers involved in defining local skills needs.

Short-term actions:

1. Establish the D2N2 FE Collaboration Group.

2. Collaborate as a group to develop targeted projects (interventions and programmes) that address the identified actionable priorities of the LSIP, and identify possible/relevant funding sources including the LSIF.

3. Initiate a robust marketing and awareness campaign to promote the LSIP and engage stakeholders, including businesses, educational institutions, and individuals seeking skill development opportunities.

4. Implement pilot programmes and initiatives to test the effectiveness of proposed actionable priorities and gather feedback for refinement.

5. Establish performance indicators and monitoring mechanisms (including EMCC app) to track the progress and impact of the LSIP.

Medium-term actions:

1. Scale up successful pilot programmes and initiatives to reach a broader audience and address a wider range of skill shortages and gaps.

2. Strengthen partnerships with employers, industry associations, and educational institutions to ensure alignment between skills provision and industry needs.

3. Enhance collaboration with LAs to integrate the LSIP priorities into local economic development plans and strategies.

4. Invest in the development of collaborative marketing campaigns to support skill development in key occupations.

5. Continuously evaluate the effectiveness of interventions and adjust strategies based on feedback and emerging trends.

6. Explore opportunities for regional and national funding to supplement LSIP initiatives and maximize resources.

Long-term actions:

1. Consolidate the progress made in addressing skill shortages and gaps by refining and expanding successful interventions.

2. Evaluate the impact of the LSIP on economic growth indicators, such as increased employment rates, higher productivity, and improved competitiveness.

3. Establish long-term partnerships and collaborations with employers and educational institutions to ensure sustainability of skills development efforts beyond the LSIP timeframe.

4. Publish regular reports and updates on the LSIP's achievements and outcomes to foster transparency and accountability.

5. Identify emerging skills needs and adapt the LSIP priorities to meet evolving economic and industry demands.

6. Develop a framework for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of skills provision in the D2N2 area, integrating the LSIP as a long-term strategy for skills development.

ANNEX CONTENTS

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See separate document for Annex

• **Annex A** – Local Strategic Context

• **Annex B** – Stakeholder Engagement and Research Background

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