



Local Skills Improvement Plan

South Yorkshire Local Skills Improvement Plan

2023 - 2026

Construction insights report findings – provider response

This short addendum summarises the response from South Yorkshire Construction Providers' Task Force made up of local colleges and Sheffield Hallam University. The group met twice in March and April 2025 to discuss the above report findings and the implications for future provision. This paper summarises the key issues identified and their response to employers.

Issue One. Employers said: *What are we doing to raise awareness of apprenticeships, training opportunities and pathways beyond the usual suspects e.g. with smaller firms?*

What are we doing now?

A mix of approaches is currently adopted at SHU including websites, social media advertising and marketing campaigns, prospectuses and employer guides. These are combined with internal and external events and cold calling/emails via the business development team and regular employer forums. SHU have a business gateway. Some colleges employ subject specific business development managers and CRM/account management approaches i.e. tailored approaches in preference to cold calling.

One partner attended local Chamber of Commerce events, networked extensively and attended sector specific expo's regionally and nationally to promote their apprenticeship offer. SHU ran a 'Let's Talk Degree Apprenticeship' event in February 2025 aimed primarily at employers who were new to apprenticeships. This was well publicised through their corporate marketing channels. This may become a regular event at set points throughout the year.

What more could policy makers and providers do?

Curriculum teams are very good at securing repeat business but more needs to be done to engage new businesses. There is an appetite to run promotional events for the sector via chambers, consider newsletters or advertising in local builders' merchants/trade magazines, and even TV advertising (like the Teach in FE campaign). Collaborative online careers fairs were also suggested. Formats need to be simple to that they are easily digestible and understandable for SMEs and not all will be linked promoted solely via social media.

Some SMEs struggle to offer the range of work needed for apprenticeships or meet the time commitments required. They aren't sure what support is available, where to go or what wrap around support could or should be included in apprenticeship provision. Providers need to be more visible and actively engage SMEs, answer CPD needs, and ensure upskilling offers are worthwhile. The SY Apprenticeship Hub should be a key anchor point. Providers are good at offering short courses and apprenticeships and less so intermediate upskilling where there is a perceived gap.

Issue Two. Employers said: *What flexible options are available for employers eg CPD in emerging technologies, modular provision?*

What are we offering now?

At present SHU don't offer modular provision. There has been some interest from employers for some modules to be standalone however currently they are not able to have this as an option. Colleges also offer very little. Space challenges make flexible delivery and alternative models challenging. One college also haven't found much success with online provision for construction and finding a suitable time is difficult.

One provider offers a training need analysis for all employers during the first point of contact. Employer engagement officers keep in regular contact with employers and assist them in accessing any funding or training required, such as CSCS updates, Gas Safe training, introducing AI and how it will assist on the day to day running of the business. There is some AEB delivery on shorter digital and AI courses.

What more could policy makers and providers do?

The college's new immersive spaces could be used for modular delivery. There was a call to change levy funding to support upskilling. There needs to be more flexibility in delivery modules e.g. day release and six-week block release options rather than purely long-term courses. We need to ensure that flexible options are offered to SMEs.

A collaborative approach would work well, with delivery at different SY locations, and a mix of online, face to face, and immersive room provision. Reverse mentoring should be considered where junior employees mentor a more senior or experienced colleague, allowing senior leaders to learn from younger employees' perspectives and experiences, particularly regarding new technologies, social trends, or insights into the workplace. We need to consider how we make this accessible.

Issue Three. Employers said. What guidance is available on upskilling and adapting to new industry regulations and technologies eg green skills such as retrofit, digitisation and AI?

What are we offering now?

Short courses on green skills currently being offered for unemployed/ employed learners by one provider but uptake hasn't been huge as its more of an introductory course for the industry. Digitisation and AI need to be tackled but it can be difficult to get the correct audience engaged as some SMEs have avoided technology for most of working career.

SY GSAP in South Yorkshire refers to the Green Skills Advisory Panel (GSAP) is a network that connects businesses, industry professionals, training providers, policymakers, and advocates in green construction and skills. It aims to support the development of a green workforce in South Yorkshire. Short courses are offered through AEB funding. Carbon literacy and MMC has been included within apprenticeship provision. SHU are holding a joint event with Innovation Network South Yorkshire on 'AI: Demystifying the hype, realising the potential'.

What more could policy makers and providers do?

Policymakers should work with employers to undertake technical skills mapping that identifies where there are gaps between existing workforce capabilities and future needs. This will allow training providers to focus on relevant emerging technologies and regulatory changes.

Colleges could work more closely and share best practice on green skills and retrofit as at some colleges as information is sparse in some areas.

As industries transform, offering short, targeted funded certifications or micro-credentials related to retrofit, AI, and digital skills would make it easier for employees to adapt quickly and remain competitive in the job market. Governments and industry bodies could standardize these credentials to ensure they are recognized and valued. We need to keep track of changes and innovations in digital adoption.

SY Providers Network could compile a directory of specialists and invite them in to colleges to offer training. Providers could then cascade this information to employers. Construction SMEs are generally looking for the 'here and now' and not necessarily upskilling for 2030 or 2040. Some shorter goals and initiatives (and funding) to support the transition to net zero for traditional trades would be welcome. Transition funding could help nervous employers move into green skills.

Issue 4. Employer said. How can employers get more engaged (Industry Partnerships & Advisory Boards, Cross-college collaboration on masterclasses and employer engagement activities)?

What are we offering now?

One provider offers academies designed to engage employers within education more and provide learners with an environment relevant to their field of study and career ambition. Open events are held during evenings and weekends, employer surveys are conducted and the college undertakes best practice visits. Providers participate in online SY working groups and offer account management support or a business gateway for employers and provide delivery within workplaces.

Employers are invited to various events throughout the year to engage with SHU and the apprenticeship offer, such as its annual HAD (Higher Degree and Apprenticeship) recruitment fair and other careers fairs. Promotion of more specific provision or requirements is undertaken through meetings/events as well as reacting to enquiries received through business gateway leads.

What more could policy makers and providers do?

Providers are working in silos due to fear of losing employers/learners to other providers. One provider thought employer engagement was disjointed with different activities for T Levels and apprenticeships for instance. Sector based activities would be useful. The lack of vacancies across the board in apprenticeships suggests employers are nervous with the current economic climate.

Innovation hubs would be a good mechanism for employers to engage with green technologies and seek advice and experiment with new training and flexible provision. This would work for green and digital technologies, but it would be helpful to have a financial incentive or transition funding to support modular and hybrid delivery. It would be good if there was more support for providers outside 16-18 study programmes ie for non-regulated funding.

Providers should invite employers to inform apprenticeship standards and delivery models at a time to suit them, as opposed to during the working day as SME's find it difficult to attend.

More open events, workshops, and 'show and tell' opportunities would be good. We should increase wage subsidies or tax relief for employers offering apprenticeships, especially SMEs and provide completion bonuses to encourage retention. It would be useful if we could allow large employers to transfer more of their unused apprenticeship levy funds to smaller businesses. Simplifying funding applications and reporting requirements, particularly for SMEs, would be helpful to reduce bureaucracy. It would be beneficial to offer bite-sized, stackable apprenticeship modules that allow employers to gradually build their workforce's skills and create campaigns showcasing ROI case studies on how apprenticeships boost productivity and reduce recruitment costs.

SHU would be open to running a joint 'Lets Talk Degree Apprenticeships' type event? SHU previously ran an Employer Advisory Board for Construction, this has paused due to staff changes but is looking to be re-launched within the new school of Engineering and Built Environment. The senior leadership team attend several boards/groups at a more strategic level and SHU are members of several organisations such as Sheffield Property Association – which, it was acknowledged, could be used more.