



Accelerating digital transformation

South Yorkshire Local Skills Improvement Plan

2023 - 2026

LIFESTYLE, LEISURE AND CULTURE INSIGHTS FINDINGS PROVIDER RESPONSE

The lifestyle, leisure and culture sector is a vibrant and diverse part of South Yorkshire's economy, covering tourism, hospitality, heritage, creative industries, sports, and community cultural services. Providers and employers, led by Sheffield College and including RNN, Northern College, Barnsley College, and Sheffield Hallam University, met on 7 July 2025 to discuss the sector's emerging skills needs and priorities. This report summarises these insights and identifies opportunities for action by employers, providers, and policymakers.

1. CURRENT SKILLS

What are we doing now?

Employers in the sector have recognised the importance of power skills, particularly employability, communication, and customer service. These skills ensure that staff can engage effectively with clients, visitors, and the public, maintaining high-quality service standards across all subsectors. Digital adoption is increasingly important, with entry-level training covering basic IT literacy, cyber resilience, and introductory exposure to emerging technologies such as AI. Some organisations are beginning to integrate immersive classroom experiences and practical digital exercises to enhance skills acquisition.

Management and leadership skills are also a key focus. Employers emphasised the need for commercial awareness, coaching, and the ability to oversee customer engagement or support new products and services. Early leadership development is supported where possible, although uptake is constrained by costs and limited awareness of existing programmes. Apprenticeships are generally viewed positively, providing structured pathways into the sector. However, some employers noted gaps in understanding regarding the breadth of provision and the support available through apprenticeship frameworks.

Flexible and modular training is preferred, with CPD pathways designed to allow managers and staff to upskill without disrupting operational capacity. Employers are also engaging with education and training providers to develop careers pathways, including placements, internships, masterclasses, and short online content such as CV workshops or skills videos. These efforts help to bridge the gap between learning environments and workplace realities.

What more could policy makers and providers do?

There is a clear opportunity to improve awareness of existing provision and better coordinate the sector's training offer. Policymakers could facilitate initiatives to communicate the collective offer more clearly, particularly in areas such as digital literacy, cyber skills, and leadership development. Providers could expand flexible CPD opportunities and modular courses that allow employees to develop skills at times and in formats that suit their work schedules.

Additionally, there is potential for stronger collaboration between employers and education providers to integrate work readiness and employability skills into curricula. Apprenticeships could be promoted more effectively, including myth-busting campaigns and guidance on funding or eligibility, to increase uptake and understanding. Embedding coaching, mentoring, and experiential learning in early career pathways would also help to cultivate leadership skills and address gaps in supervisory capacity.

2. TRAINING PROVISION

What are we doing now?

The sector benefits from a range of training resources, including ADF-funded digital skills pathways at Northern College and the South Yorkshire immersive learning space network, which provides access to practical digital training across the region. The SY Apprenticeship Hub serves as a centralised information point for employers, offering guidance on available pathways, funding options, and training programmes.

Training covers technical competencies, digital skills, leadership development, and customer service. However, the visibility of these programmes is uneven, and smaller organisations often struggle to identify appropriate opportunities due to limited capacity or lack of awareness. Larger organisations with HR or training teams are better able to navigate the available provision, highlighting a need for more coordinated, accessible approaches.

What more could policy makers and providers do?

Policymakers and providers could enhance visibility of the collective training offer, ensuring that employers are fully aware of the support available. Flexible, modular, and online CPD programmes would allow staff to upskill without disruption, particularly in leadership, management, and digital skills. There is also scope to embed work readiness, employability, and customer service training more consistently into curricula and workforce development programmes. By creating a centralised, accessible source of information and promoting pathways clearly, employers would be better equipped to address skills gaps and invest in staff development effectively.

3. EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

What are we doing now?

Employers are actively contributing to workforce development through placements, internships, masterclasses, and careers talks. The SY Apprenticeship Hub and immersive learning spaces provide mechanisms for engagement, and some employers act as mentors or role models to inspire new entrants. However, engagement is often ad hoc, with contributions varying across the sector and limited coordination between providers and employers.

What more could policy makers and providers do?

Stronger structured engagement is needed to make participation easier and more impactful. Providers and policymakers could facilitate one-stop-shop sessions, both in-person and online, to allow employers to access guidance on apprenticeships, CPD, leadership, and digital skills training. A centralised directory of providers, courses, and contacts would help employers navigate options more effectively.

Employers could also be more formally involved as ambassadors or case studies, highlighting examples of skills development, mentoring, and progression pathways. Structured opportunities to contribute to curriculum design, career readiness, and work-based learning would ensure that education provision aligns closely with employer needs and sector demands.

4. FUTURE PRIORITIES

What are we doing now?

The sector is beginning to embed the right mix of technical, digital, and interpersonal skills. Flexible and modular provision is emerging, and employers are increasingly willing to engage in career pathway development, apprenticeships, and CPD. Early interventions to develop employability and leadership skills are underway in pockets, and digital adoption is gradually expanding across roles.

What more could policy makers and providers do?

Future priorities include embedding digital, cyber, and AI-related skills across the workforce and ensuring foundational literacy is accessible at all levels. Flexible CPD and leadership programmes will be essential to address gaps in middle management and supervisory roles. Employers and providers should continue to collaborate on early career interventions, including placements, internships, masterclasses, and online content to raise awareness of career pathways.

Strengthening visibility of the sector remains a key challenge. Targeted engagement initiatives that showcase real-world examples and success stories can help young people and new entrants understand the diversity of opportunities available. Ensuring that employer contributions are structured, supported, and widely communicated will help build a workforce that is skilled, flexible, and prepared for future growth.

Taken together, these measures offer a roadmap for South Yorkshire's lifestyle, leisure, and culture sector to build a resilient, inclusive, and skilled workforce, capable of sustaining growth, enhancing client and visitor experiences, and contributing to the region's economic and cultural vitality.