



Local Skills Improvement Plan

South Yorkshire Local Skills Improvement Plan

2023 - 2026

Manufacturing insights report findings – provider response

This short addendum summarises the response from South Yorkshire Manufacturing Providers' Task Force made up of local colleges, the AMRC Training Centre and Sheffield Hallam University. The group met once in March (virtually) and once in May 2025 at the AMRC training Centre 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: *They would like to share and learn from others in the area of high-performance leadership and organisational and people development.*

What are we doing now?

The AMRC training centre works with Brookes to deliver a contextualised [ILM level 3](#) certificate in leadership and management. Their degree apprenticeships have a thread of project management and leadership and apprentices benefit from sharing best practice in classrooms and shared projects.

SHU is offering a range of Degree Apprenticeships (DAs) that are relevant to the manufacturing sector including several engineering and management courses as well as digital courses that can be applied to the sector (digital adoption is a key skill required).

At the local colleges there is less provision, though Business Development leads from AMRC TC, RNN, Sheffield College and Barnsley hold quarterly meets to discuss best practice.

Independent providers offer process and operations manager apprenticeships at level 5, a natural route to manufacturing (which typically account for 70% of employers). It includes several leadership topics including customer engagement and quality management. There is also a 12-week leadership school bootcamp. They recently ran commercial courses to employees from different companies including a two-day exclusive course mastering production excellence aimed at managers. It included (a) Lean and Six Sigma techniques such as planning and scheduling production, measuring key performance indicators, and managing supplier performance and, on the second day, (b) inspiring leadership success (comprising the following units managing professional performance, understanding leadership department, styles, effective communication, building high performance teams, etc). There are other short courses on production planning and scheduling and another on advanced product quality planning. Providers like to work collaboratively with several employers and in partnership on course design.

It was noticed is a difference between project management and high-performance leadership training. Project management is focused on process control. High-performance leadership is more about: seizing opportunities and looking outwards, succession planning, foresight work and promoting leadership within their organizations e.g. from production to management or shop floor to team leader. These require different skills and training requirements.

What more could policy makers and providers do?

The wider AMRC works with SMEs on a variety of topics of interest such as sustainability, new technology etc. These could be more widely shared. Providers could develop a collaborative programme with a range of employers sharing their models of people development. This could involve collaborative programmes with learners from different companies using experts in the fields of both manufacturing and leadership.

SYCMA could fund the development of a collaborative programme where all providers are involved. Short online modular programmes and masterclasses using immersive spaces would be welcomed by employers. The immersive spaces could be used at various sites to bring employers together for instance offering collaborative bootcamps in manufacturing sectors of interest.

We should understand and respond to key leadership and organisational development needs for the sector, moving away from 'vanilla' learning targeting the longer-term needs from digital adoption to sustainability.

“I think we need to do more to engage with the universities to get those progression routes from our program at level 4-5 to level 6 or degree apprenticeships”. Independent training provider

We need a better learner route map e.g. so they could select a range of technical skills. For example, mixing an HNC degree with a bootcamp short course focusing on enlightened leadership. You could fund an enhanced apprenticeship programme to augment technical skills e.g. with employability or leadership skills or specialist knowledge. Research conducted by the AMRC has shown large employers wanted to add on what they called *wraparound care* to their apprenticeships e.g. using their levy funding to supplement the apprenticeship with units of leadership and management and other topics. One company is offering well-being bite sized modules to blend into apprenticeships e.g. on managing your own health and well-being, personal resilience etc.

SHU are looking at a tailored advanced manufacturing leadership masters' course. It is important that leadership training is contextualised. *“It needs to be relevant to forging, or electrical or mechanical, whatever the employer specialism is. It makes the training offer much more difficult because it is complex.”* HE Provider.

We should draw on exemplars like the NHS who have a fantastic leadership and management framework (see [here](#)).

Issue Two. Employers said. They would like to understand the provider offer much better so that local firms and inward investors can get a line of sight on provision.

What are we offering now?

The AMRC focuses specifically on manufacturing/engineering at levels 3, 4 and 6 - roadmaps could be developed to help companies understand the benefits based on skills and provision. The AMRC Training Centre offer guidance on provision directly to their own employer group. SHU offer a range of [Degree Apprenticeships](#) around electrical, mechanical, materials and rail engineering.

There are multiple access points to training but no one main area. Training offers tend to be provider led, siloed and not consistent.

One independent provider mentioned six HSE management standards for managing health in the workplace with a course directly aligned to that which also includes action planning. These resources could be shared. Mental health is one of the areas HSE are focusing on very strongly in the workplace. There is demand from employers for mental health promotion, mental health qualifications and referral links.

What more could policy makers and providers do?

A better SY Skills website would be helpful to promote provider offers more clearly (this is underway and being led by the SYMCA skills team). This will provide one central resource for all employers and learners to access and see what is available. Roadshows with all providers involved would be helpful to demonstrate the sectors' offer (building on the knowledge exchange experience of the events). A set of videos showcasing each of the providers would be good including independent training providers.

We should incentivise companies who collaborate for instance via higher levels of support through skills bank or the creation of a fund to promote collaborative skills development.

For inward investment we should use case studies to highlight high-quality high-impact leadership and skills development across the sub-region. These should be openly available and given high exposure building on the Chambers Knowledge Case series. We should publicly share more content about delivery models via websites etc. There should be clear signposting to events that can 'de-bunk' the myths around Degree Apprenticeships allowing providers to highlight the return on investment (RoI) that apprentices deliver.

We need to ensure that flexible options are offered to SMEs. It is a huge challenge for the sector.

“There’s a raft of employers out there hearing words like net zero and green steel and sticking the head in the sand but want help and don’t know where to ask, and we don’t have their opinion”

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 early career employees mentor a more senior or experienced colleague. This allows senior leaders to learn from younger employees' perspectives and experiences, for instance innovative technologies, social trends, or insights into the workplace. We need to consider how we make this accessible. We need to collaborate, and providers should offer a catalogue of short, sharp modular training that learners can access. We should hide the wiring from employers and offer a genuine community of learning which could offer toolkits and podcasts on a range of topics from well-being to net zero.

Issue Three. Employers said. *Employers are asking for flexible, bespoke support, and modular provision.*

What are we offering now?

Enhanced apprenticeships and commercial programmes. For instance, the AMRC Training Centre launched an Enhanced Apprenticeship programme in February 2025. That said, there is limited provision in the CPD space as there has not been the aggregated and sustained demand from local employers historically.

What more could policy makers and providers do?

Reduce the bureaucracy around funding for providers and set up a bank of delivery resources (learning materials and staff) that can be used by all providers involving companies including those providing manufacturing equipment etc.

We should agree the 'burning platform' themes that employers need i.e. where change is required and gain commitment from them for any training that is developed. This will allow providers to develop the business case to initiate CPD programmes and take them to market. Employers could also 'try before they buy' new modules aimed at manufacturers. That would give providers some confidence they would be commercially viable. A pilot around leadership and management with a focus on well-being is suggested. It could be tested in a workshop format with employers.

Issue 4. Employer said. There was an appetite for an understanding of how employers are promoting well-being in the workplace and employee experience.

What are we offering now?

This is high on everyone's agenda. This differs between organisations and is much more structured in larger establishments. That said, some smaller organisations have agility and flexibility to implement high impact measures.

SHU has recently carried out a piece of work on this subject, but there still more to learn. It also has research capabilities in the area (see [here](#)) which could be mobilised to promote workplace and employee well-being.

There is a South Yorkshire Skills Expo 2025 aimed at helping businesses unlock talent, upskill their workforces, and boost productivity. It includes an Advanced Manufacturing Employer Forum to help discuss and shape the future of manufacturing.

What more could policy makers and providers do?

We need the employer voice here. Also, we need to consider how employers can enhance their own organisational cultures. These set the tone for well-being and employee experience. If we promote management and leadership then a good employee experience will be a bi-product. A more joined approach to this subject allowing CPD learning to be developed (and paid for) would be well received.

SMEs do not always have the same infrastructure such as people development departments so this could be supported by SYMCA.

Have we missed anything? For instance, a golden thread of our discussion was celebrating, promoting, and sharing SY excellence with a view to informing the work of others.

As noted earlier it would be good to have high impact case studies from providers and respected companies describing what they have achieved as a result of training e.g. examples of HNC and HNC students becoming team leaders or apprenticeships specialising in new areas. Shared videos, case studies and roadshows are an effective and useful way of celebrating success. Collaboration is important. We need to create a less competitive environment. Setting a standard collectively for leadership programmes applicable to manufacturing would be a real step forward. A framework for excellence in leadership in manufacturing which is agreed / available to providers as a cornerstone. This would then set the expectations of employers.

The creation of an industry partnership between education providers (SHU have a dedicated Educational Partnership team) could help deliver the findings of this report. An Employer Advisory Board around support aimed primarily at SME businesses but supported by larger employer partners who can influence the benefits of apprenticeship provision could be influential.

In Sweden, their innovation agency highlights sector / FE engagement e.g. their chief lecturer in engineering at a university is also the head of design at Volvo engineering, which happens to be adjacent to the university. Building on this experience we need to make our sector ambassadors more visible and promote future leaders and facilitate meaningful encounters with the younger generation. There should be more promotion and celebration of success within the sector in IAG and careers material. A SY manufacturing video is suggested featuring manufacturing engineers talking about training. This should feature provider links with a roadshow with employers across the sub-region to highlight the offer. The messages must be right e.g. “I did it in the region, and I work and earn in the region.”

Course promotion material could have a clearer line of sight to successful careers and descriptions of how their subjects such as maths are important.

“More clarity around what is engineering and how you become an engineer to go work in manufacturing, in that would be a really nice area to focus on invest.” FE Provider.