Local Skills Improvement Plan:

South Yorkshire Skills Accelerator

Contents

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We are place makers, taking a leadership role in developing our regional economies. We focus on creating real change and influencing the agenda to ensure the future success of our regions and nations. Creating the economic conditions to ensure our areas remain great places to live, work, study, invest and do business. Chambers across England have stepped forward to play their part in ensuring more people can train and retrain for new and emerging jobs in their local communities, working in conjunction with local FE institutions and other partners. Accredited Chambers are well placed to bring these coalitions together and, learning from the work of the Trailblazers, we believe LSIPs should be rapidly rolled out across the country.

Chambers:

- Are independent, impartial and part of a quality assured, accredited and not-for-profit national network
- Are business led and business focused. We work with micro, small, medium and large employers from the widest range of industry sectors
- Provide a business-centred view of in-demand and future skills needs to ensure that LSIPs focus on skills that will lead to good and sustainable employment opportunities
- Are rooted in local business communities, with strong local infrastructure. Our business advisers on the ground are already supporting employers with a broad range of business issues. Through these multiple touch points, Chambers are well placed to ensure all initiatives include a skills conversation with employers
- Have well-established relationships with economic partners and broader stakeholders - at a strategic and operational level - locally, regionally and nationally
- Have the flexibility to operate across varying geographical levels and locations
- Combine national and local working - affording efficiencies, the sharing of best practice and the identification of national and regional trends alongside local, unique variances in skills demand.

This **Trailblazer Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) for South Yorkshire** has been produced by Doncaster Chamber, one of eight employer representative bodies testing an employer-led approach to skills planning. This will help the Department of Education (DfE) determine how best to rollout LSIPs across the country. It is DfE's intention that the employer voice articulated in this plan should help inform the decisions of local skills providers and inform relevant future funding bids. This LSIP will be a starting point for any future LSIP produced under a national roll out of the programme.

MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

The South Yorkshire (SY) Skills Accelerator is putting business engagement at the heart of the sub-regional skills agenda. It is facilitated by those involved in the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) and the Strategic Development Fund (SDF). It brings together businesses, skills providers, local government and the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA). It aims to create an agile and responsive skills system. As one of only eight trailblazer regions, this is South Yorkshire's opportunity to build the best skills system in the UK. This is the LSIP for South Yorkshire. It closely follows the Department for Education (DfE) guidance highlighting key local priorities for the area.

The plan, formed around five substantive themes, recommends:

- A series of practical but ambitious measures resulting in an easy to find, co-ordinated, and accessible skills system for all.
- Taking the initiative with a more proactive approach to 'employer engagement' with actions to ensure employers actively inform learning design and delivery.
- A series of transformative measures to make skills and training provision more responsive to employer needs.
- Celebrating success, building on good practice and activating employer learning in terms of reach and depth. This will raise the profile of what the SY Accelerator partners do and ensure good practice does not operate in isolated pockets.
- Promoting better pathways to employment resulting in a more inclusive SY workforce. This includes measures to improve the prosperity of those at the very margins of the workforce.

The Skills Accelerator Board wanted the recommendations within the SY LSIP to be bold, incisive and well-informed. This has created a series of 46 recommendations covering five significant themes. Measures recommended include changes to funding and a potentially far-reaching tax change that could incentivise more employers to engage in skills provision in coming years. Other new measures are proposed such as an Apprenticeship Hub, a new 'Investors in Young People' initiative, last mile work readiness Bootcamps and a Festival of Learning. The simplification of the mechanisms to engage with employers is needed and is addressed. Enhancements to existing arrangements including the Apprenticeship Levy, the Adult Education Budget and the Careers Hub are also proposed. Links to primary education could be improved for the latter for instance.

Many areas are highlighted where the local skills system has fallen short for instance in terms of provision (digital skills, technical training, arts and culture cuts), but also with respect to supporting the needs of all learners (ex-offenders, people with disabilities) and employers (micros for instance). Innovative approaches are suggested to engage hard to reach employers, pilot innovative approaches to recruitment and childcare and to working with employers to inform learning with subject-matter expertise.

The approach aims to work with the rich range of providers including the independent sector and universities and employers in SY to find mutually beneficial solutions and enhance connections between them. This includes proposals for co-location, anchor employers and secondments. In short, the report focuses on working collaboratively to make the system work better and give partners more independence to improve SY skills from the perspective of the employer, the learner and the employee and the provider.

STRATEGIC OVERVIEW

This Trailblazer will improve the quality of the skills debate in SY (this is already happening) and stimulate demand for skills investment. It will be achieved by mutual collaborations between stakeholders and businesses. The LSIP allows SY to build on existing, successful business and education partnerships to drive change and business growth. The economic data paints a stark and sometimes painful picture of the sub-region's performance though there are some latent strengths to build on.

Some diverse and insightful comments were received on the draft plan, as well as complacent and contradictory views too. Some sector groups are frustrated and would like some radical change within the system, others are broadly happy with the status quo. Many areas of common ground have been identified, but the development of plan did highlight some polarized views.

The strategic overview is discussed in more detail in chapter one of the plan. This plan builds on the current national policy emphasis for our skills system to become increasingly focused on the role employers can play in shaping and delivering the skills agenda. The LSIP intersects with a range of sub-regional and national strategies and plans as well as the work of the Skills Advisory Network (SAN). It is driven by a need for collaboration and skills provision to be local and employer led. It is recommended later that some of the various skills boards and networks are merged to have a better joined up approach to skills planning. The private and independent providers need to be more heavily involved in skills discussions and there could be more collaboration with the universities on employer engagement.

The key challenges for the sub-region are below average productivity and educational and labour market inequalities. With an economic activity rate of 77%, all four local authority areas are below the national average. The area is home to 267,000 economically inactive individuals (23%) ranking the 10th lowest performing area out of 38 LEP areas, with a high incidence of long-term health conditions. Additionally, 30% of working households claim in work benefits, compared to a national average of 24%. SY is home to 49,020 local businesses, 90% of which are micro businesses (employing fewer than 9 people). It has a low business density and a lower-than-average business start-up rate.

The LSIP board believes that investment in skills and training will result in more prosperous lives and help to address the key challenges identified within this plan - productivity, pay, social mobility and the high number of people with low or no qualifications.

This investment also has the potential to build on the strengths within the SY region. For instance, SY has a higher-than-average number of workers with NVQ qualifications across all levels and key sectors where there is likely to be exciting growth including digital, specialised construction, low carbon, and advanced manufacturing and rail engineering. SY has examples of world class education and training delivery for instance within our universities.

Innovative local partnerships including the proposed Institute of Technology and other new initiatives such as the Ownership Hub, will help to encourage businesses to think about their futures. Building entrepreneurial skills will help bring more businesses into employee ownership increasing inclusion, productivity and driving growth.

The LSIP in SY has a distinctive offer. It is employer driven and led by all three Chambers in the sub-region in close liaison with sub-regional partners including FE, HE and independent and private providers and SY MCA.

THE PROCESS OF ENGAGEMENT

A range of activities were undertaken to support the development of this LSIP which are listed in Section 1.3. They included the establishment of a Skills Accelerator Board, a desk-based review of relevant documents including skills strategy and policy and extensive data analysis, which is publicly available on the https://sy-skillsaccelerator.co.uk/ website.

The Centre of Regional Economic and Social Research (CRESR) at Sheffield Hallam University carried out data analysis (available here) to inform the LSIP. The analysis covered: contextual and demographic data; labour market insights; economic projections; and education and skills data at the national, regional and local levels.

The three SY Chambers leading this plan engaged with 8,458 SY businesses in 2020 employing 310,332 staff. Their reach is considerable. Over 568 employers were consulted directly for the LSIP and bodies who represent many more through commissioned activity (see later). For instance, the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) represents 1,000 employers in SY alone. In addition, the Chambers included half a dozen skills questions in their quarterly survey (351). A more in-depth targeted survey was also undertaken with 148 SY employers by telephone (100) and online (148) to investigate current engagements with the skills system, opportunities for future engagements and employers' current and future skills needs. Two employer engagement workshops were held to digest some of the emerging findings with 69 attendees in total, a short film of the second event held at the Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre is available here. Both workshops provided the space to have detailed conversations with stakeholders and check and refine the LSIP's emerging findings, themes, and actions.

Crucially, the Chambers commissioned seven employer and employee organisations including the Trades Union Congress (TUC) to create sector specific case-studies and offer skills engagement insights based on the views of their membership cohort. This ensured that our LSIP engaged with a wide range of employers and representative bodies and not simply Chamber members. The TUC in Yorkshire and the Humber represents over six hundred thousand working people. The team worked hard to get to parts of the sub-regional economy that do not always get consulted. Numerous individual discussions with employers and employer representative bodies in the sub-region were also undertaken as well as a piece of work led by Barnsley and Rotherham Chamber specifically to explore the requirements of micro businesses.

The engagement methodology was discussed at the Skills Accelerator Board and designed specifically to touch a broad range of SY employers including the hard to reach, using a range of methods. It ensured that employers were kept updated on progress and opportunities to engage through the development of the SY Skills Accelerator website and through stakeholder social media channels. Partners and stakeholders worked closely throughout the process seeking their feedback at every stage of the plan's development. Challenge and open discussion has been encouraged at the Board in a truly collaborative approach. These discussions have directly informed the recommendations and there has been extensive feedback and subsequent refinement of these.

Engagement methodologies have involved a wide range of employers and the LSIP process has awoken latent interest amongst employers who are looking for this LSIP to be the start of genuine change within the system. Some employers reported a malaise with previous forms of engagement and that they had seen similar initiatives before and things hadn't changed. The employer base genuinely wants a degree of influence over the system and it is imperative that the momentum is maintained and processes are supportive of this. Good outcomes will come from creating the right frameworks and environments to facilitate communication and change. The recommendations were designed to lead to the skills improvement outcomes sought by employers.

CURRENT AND FUTURE SKILLS NEEDS FOR SOUTH YORKSHIRE

The available data and evidence indicate that on most measures of skills demand and supply SY is below the national average.[1] Employers across a range of sectors in SY identified numerous current and future skills needs, which are detailed in chapter two. Broadly, these relate to employability, technical, digital, and basic skills.

In construction there is an acute shortage of skilled workers across all site trades and in construction management, with a growing requirement for skills in low carbon manufacturing. A number of drivers are stimulating demand for technical skills including net zero and digital transformation.

A range of technical skills are often missing from the current workforce with a number of industries facing distinct challenges. For example, manufacturing has an aging workforce and engineering has a low number of women in the industry. The growth in transport and logistics in SY has created a skills gap which will continue as the industry expands with the growth in internet commerce during the pandemic. Employers raised more general concerns about the future skills gaps with jobs affected by automation and the importance of a balanced economy in recognition of the value of jobs such as hairdressing or fork-lift drivers. A series of fiscal, practical and consultative measures have been recommended to stimulate and animate local employers to address these concerns raised.

Employability skills were lacking in many roles and industries across SY. For example, communication, collaboration, problem solving, adaptability and resilience are some of the skills SY employers believe are important for their workforce to be effective today. Yet, employers struggled to recruit staff with these skills. Graduates and apprentices often lacked the employability skills required to be successful in the workplace which places an additional burden on employers, that they are often not properly resourced to fulfil. This burden, evidence shows, is most acutely felt by small employers. Employers consulted highlighted the degree to which they consider core skills to be an issue for both potential new recruits and those already in work and the fact these were changing to include competencies such as communication, adaptability, resilience, collaboration, and critical thinking. One of the measures proposed later on is a 'last mile' Bootcamp with a focus on work readiness and commerciality.

Basic English and Maths skills are essential in the workforce. Improvements in the skills of young people flowing into the workforce are a priority and some progress has been made, most notably in Barnsley. However, lower levels of achievement and the erosion of skills over time means that poor basic skills are an issue among the stock of people already in the workforce. This presents problems when people try to move jobs or when change happens in the workplace such as the need to reskill or upskill to adapt

[1] Sheffield City Region Local Skills Report June 2021, p9

to new technology. Despite the prioritisation of adult basic skills through statutory entitlements, adult participation in basic skills is in decline. SY employers rated 50% of their workforce with a low level of basic skills and concern was raised that this lower level in basic skills was holding back the sub-region. The gap in basic skills highlights the need to consider the labour market in its entirety and not solely focus on high-skilled jobs. The MCA in its Local Skills Report (June 2021, p28) notes that a key issue in Barnsley, Rotherham and Doncaster is progression from no and entry/Level 1 qualifications to Level 2 (and higher). The Skills Advisory Network (SAN) is keen to explore the reasons for these inequalities and to understand how to encourage people with lower-level qualifications to progress further as this would reduce the gap between the three Local Authorities and England.

Broader dispositions often termed as 'soft' or 'non-cognitive' skills such as innovation, leadership, and entrepreneurism are also key factors in driving business productivity and profitability. SY employers desire innovation and leadership skills but have found these skills hard to recruit for. Good leadership from employers is essential to creating an inclusive 'learning culture' which supports employee development and innovations within the business. Employers explained if there is a failure in leadership it can constrain current and future skills development.

Both qualitative and quantitative data collected for this plan highlights the need for increased levels of digital skills within the SY workforce. The digital skills landscape is complicated and fast paced, and many employers struggle with the potential for its application within their industry. It covers both technical and non-technical skills, and the sector recognises that there is an opportunity to embrace a more diverse workforce.

SY businesses need digital skills now and for the future. They need to harness Artificial Intelligence (AI) in manufacturing as one such case in point. However, there are challenges as many employers lack a full understanding of digital skills, capabilities and applications and therefore struggle to access and utilise these skills or upskill their workforce. The matter is particularly pressing as over half of SY employers believe their reliance on digital skills will significantly increase in the next five years.

The need for significant upskilling across the board as well as bespoke training for industry specific digital requirements is therefore paramount, to ensure businesses keep pace with technological advances. This is why the LSIP proposes industry placements for teaching staff and education leaders including some covering higher level digital skills.

WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE AND WHY? WHAT ARE THE HEADLINE RECOMMENDATIONS?

The SY Accelerator Roadmap is structured around the five themes that have emerged from the data and literature review, workshop activities and intelligence received from employers and stakeholders.

THEME ONE: NAVIGATION

Chapter Three explores the changes needed to create a responsive SY skills system. Theme One of the SY Accelerator Roadmap offers several recommendations to enhance 'navigation' which will result in an easy to find, co-ordinated, and accessible SY skills system for all. The skills system will be easier to navigate, and less complex and time consuming with clear points of entry. This theme proposes a skills ecosystem which is truly collaborative and delivers high-quality provision led by the needs of business. The measures proposed will drive increased employer and learner engagement and support and stimulate further demand.

The first recommendation is to audit existing skills portals and brokerage services with a view to significantly improving their quality, reach and user friendliness. If there is a need for a new or evolved portal, it should have a focus on rapidity and ease of use by micro businesses and SMEs. A collective approach based on a shared narrative and 'no wrong doors' approach is recommended rather than a publicly funded 'impartial' but detached brokerage model that, over time, has proven to be ineffective. A new Apprenticeship Hub is proposed to help attract new talent and to facilitate businesses accessing young people who will be part of their future pool of talent. The hub will host a large-scale annual apprenticeship event to celebrate success and inform and advise businesses and learners alike. Finally, under this theme, a new service is proposed that will allow SY's residents to identify training and development opportunities that they can access.

THEME TWO: PROACTIVE EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

By strengthening the employer voice, the SY Accelerator will help to drive change where it is most needed through 'proactive employer engagement' and more a customer service approach. Conversations between employers and skills providers will improve, with wider and more extensive engagement. Both providers and employers will be able to articulate and understand business needs and the skills offer. Employers will be encouraged to build and maintain relationships with skills providers and promote the benefits to businesses of skills engagement. SY businesses want to be more involved in the skills system. For instance, one in five employers (19.3%) in the survey said they would like to see their employees be involved in curriculum design for specific subjects and courses. An identical proportion already are engaging, so there are some notable examples, but there is desire to at least double activity from existing levels. Business engagement is difficult and takes time, money and expertise; it must be properly resourced. This plan recommends putting interventions in place that support the development of the sub-region's collective 'SY business engagement team'.

Under this theme referrals will be stimulated through regular workshops with business facing colleagues and a bank of anchor employers will be mobilised to mentor SMEs. The momentum gained will be built on gathering more and deeper insights from the family of business organisations engaged in the LSIP and well as mechanisms to facilitate a stronger employer voice including companies representing foundational industries. It is recommended unspent Apprenticeship Levy funds are published annually to demonstrate the resources available to simulate further activity. A new 'how to guide' for business is recommended in relation to the recruitment, retention, and development of staff.

To really stimulate business engagement, tax support in the form of credits or allowances need to be introduced by National Government. New mechanisms are proposed to ensure a stronger employer voice to add value rather than duplicate or disrupt what is already in place. The core employers and their Advisory Boards' views will help shape the provider offer. A programme of short courses is recommended for middle leaders to promote people management in the sub-region's priority sectors.

THEME THREE: RESPONSIVE PROVISION

Theme Three notes that employers require provision that delivers what they want, when and where they want it. Theme three of the plan will identify key areas where this will be achieved. Stakeholders acknowledge that SY could be better at stimulating employer demand for learning in SY and celebrating success. More agility will be developed in the skills system and funding will be needed to match this ambition. Employers will be able to receive more modular, flexible, and, not always formally accredited, training to meet their changing skills needs. Employers want to collaborate more with skills providers in delivery and recognise the significant role they can play.

The recommendations will help overcome increasing difficulties faced in attracting, retaining and motivating the teaching workforce needed to deliver high quality further and higher education – especially in more technical courses including STEAM and digital subjects.

The recommendations, which are quite extensive and potentially far reaching for this theme, are designed to bring curricula and programme design closer to the world of work and ensure leaders play a significant role in creating a 'learning culture'.

It is recommended that BTECs are preserved to meet the technical education needs of many of the sub-region's STEAM based employers. Quarterly events will be introduced to brief providers on the evolving needs of the private sector. A commitment is recommended to enable providers to publicly commit to rapid response times and customer service standards. More emphasis is placed on supporting and promoting the sub-region's private training companies with the Adult Education Budget nuanced to prioritise providers from within the sub-region.

Greater emphasis on short courses and bite-sized learning supported by a system of micro-badging and credentialing is proposed. Infrastructure wise, the capacity of the MCA's skills team should be boosted and more opportunities for co-location explored encouraged. This LSIP is fully inclusive of private providers and the higher education sector.

The plan will be robust and informed by a real time skills data system. It places a much greater emphasis on working with small and micro businesses at the policy design stage. Finally, it will ensure there is sufficient support for people considering self-employment or starting a business as a career option.

THEME FOUR: CELEBRATING SUCCESS

The recommendations here include a 'Festival of Learning' and South Yorkshire Skills and Education Awards to promote SY as a county with superb career opportunities and a commitment to delivering better outcomes for businesses and communities. The latter will highlight and spotlight best practice in the sub-region – including great work that is taking place in UTCs, Further Education, Higher Education, and the private provider market. A new 'Investors in Young People' is proposed to help businesses access emerging talent and promote themselves to labour market entrants as employers of choice. Innovative approaches from businesses will be encouraged. Finally, it is recommended that the MCA and local authorities engage in conversation about the prioritisation of long-term plans and financial model behind successful existing and previous programmes to ensure they are preserved and developed. Examples include Get Up To Speed, Opportunities Doncaster Live, CAFÉ, Code Make Win, and Code4000. There are many others.

THEME FIVE: PROMOTING BETTER PATHWAYS

SY has a very imbalanced workforce. The gap between the wealthiest areas like Fulwood in Sheffield and the poorest like Eastwood in Rotherham could not be starker. This geographic disparity has implications for more deprived areas, which suffer from poor social mobility, lower income, employment, and access to services. Women, people from Minority Ethnic groups and/or working-class backgrounds, and those with disabilities need to be better represented in many sectors. There are several initiatives across SY attempting to address inequalities and these should be built upon. Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance needs to be improved for people of all ages, to ensure informed decisions can be made. Work experience and the opportunities for people to participate need to be improved to help people better understand career pathways. There is an appetite to promote more accessible pathways to employment resulting in a more inclusive SY workforce.

A new approach to skills planning is proposed to ensure there are better pathways to skills, talent and training. A new Board is suggested (by merging two existing fora) including a good range of providers and led by the private sector. It is recommended that damaging cuts to arts and physical education are reversed and that these pathways are promoted so that the skills coveted by employers such as creativity, problem solving, team working, and performing under pressure are not lost. One recommendation will make it easier for employers to engage with the region's prisons and offenders and to create better pathways for former Forces workers to ensure that those leaving the criminal justice system and the Forces are better supported into new roles.

It is recommended that greater emphasis is placed on linking business to primary education and that the scope of the Careers Hub is supported to further engage with the primary sector. This will better showcase the breadth of career opportunities and help challenge systemic challenges about a lack of diversity in certain sectors. 'Last mile' Bootcamps for graduates are proposed with a focus on work readiness and commerciality to help those nearing graduation prepare for the world of work and to reduce the burden on SME employers.

An Apprenticeship Network is suggested to help with the professional development and peer support of individuals who are undertaking or have completed an apprenticeship. It is recommended that childcare funding is increased and significantly simplified to maximise the talents of parents. Finally, it is proposed that pilots are introduced that would enable more women to access work in priority sectors and support employees to remain in work and succeed.

1. STRATEGIC OVERVIEW

This chapter provides the objectives and strategic context for SY's Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP). As the research has unfolded the original plans have developed and changed to meet local business needs. The LSIP complements existing regional and national strategies to enable the development of an employer led skills system which meets the needs of local people, places, and businesses. Employer engagement has been at the heart of the LSIP both in terms of its development and delivery.

1.1. FOCUS AND OBJECTIVES

Key Message: This trailblazer will improve the quality of skills debate in SY and stimulate demand for skills investment and will be supported by the SY Skills Accelerator Board. The LSIP allows SY to build on existing, successful business and education partnerships to drive change and business growth.

This Trailblazer Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) for SY has been produced collectively by the Doncaster, Sheffield, and Barnsley & Rotherham Chambers of Commerce working with the SY Colleges - a collaboration consisting of The Sheffield College, Barnsley College, DN Colleges Group, RNN Group, and the University of Sheffield AMRC Training Centre, Northern College and the two Sheffield Universities as well as private and independent training providers.

The LSIP's development and drafting process has been inclusive, recognising that the skills ecosystem is rich and diverse in addition to further education colleges includes private and independent training providers and universities. These providers have been engaged throughout the process (Section 5.3 has a full list of board members).

It is DfE's intention that the employer voice articulated in this plan should help inform the decisions of local skills providers and inform relevant future funding bids. SY is committed to make this work and see the role of the SY Skills Accelerator Board as being the 'collectors of evidence' and making best endeavours to work collegiately with partners to enhance the existing system. The LSIP vision is to:

Place business engagement at the heart of the sub-regional skills response to increase productivity and maximise economic impact.

The mission is to achieve the following outcomes as part of the SY Skills Accelerator trailblazer project:

1. Identify the digital skills requirements to support future success and growth of industry across SY.
2. Understand how SY can enhance existing skills strategies with qualitative insights sourced from the sub-region's employers, including those that are harder to reach or do not always engage.
3. Identify removable barriers in the adult workforce skills system that prevent talent development.

As part of this, SY will:

- Create a shared understanding of the barriers to engagement and a joined-up and innovative action plan to address these. This includes linking into existing systems and structures including the Skills Advisory Network and SYMCA's Education, Skills and Employability Thematic Board and the wider work of the SY Chambers and the SY Colleges. Theme One of the Roadmap focuses on better navigation and a more seamless ecosystem.

- Improve the quality of skills debate in SY and stimulate demand for skills investment in the sub-region. Theme Two of The Roadmap calls for 'proactive employer engagement'.
- Work with colleges, higher education and training providers as one team to respond to the needs of businesses creating solutions which add value to our workforce enhancing and embedding collaboration across business and the skills sector. Theme Three of the Roadmap proposes new solutions.
- Use new and existing data and research to underpin the plan and validate the findings and assumptions. As part of this study, an independent research partner Kada Research was commissioned in association with Sheffield Hallam University to work alongside the LSIP client team and inform thinking using current and emerging evidence. The development of the ecosystem will be underpinned by intelligence; offering an analytical resource and data led insight into the supply, demand and performance of the skills sector across SY.
- Celebrate good practice and amplify existing research. Theme Four of the Roadmap is dedicated to this.
- Work with local as well as national partners to ensure local success meets national policy.
- Co-develop a skills ecosystem that benefits businesses and harnesses the expertise and talent of providers.
- Finally Theme Five is about promoting much better pathways into skills and employment.

Originally, the LSIP intended to focus on STEAM industries and digital skills, as well as support for SMEs, which make up the majority of SY businesses. Through engagements with businesses and stakeholders there was a desire to shift the focus of the LSIP to the broader skills ecosystem. The LSIP is not centred on one sector or set of skills, but a holistic vision of skills within the economy.

Digital skills are a current and future challenge for all SY businesses, yet employers told us digital skills mean different things to different people – it is not one digital offer that is required. SMEs play a significant role in the SY economy and the LSIP aims to support them by making skills provision easier to navigate, making it more flexible and inclusive. The SY LSIP promotes the good practice already in place sub-regionally and will creates a culture for the skills ecosystem to thrive for the benefit of people, places, and businesses.

A highly experienced LSIP delivery team of senior Chamber and College representatives was established to work with the SY Skills Accelerator Board who were identified for their expertise and strategic relationships across the sub-region. Delivery was co-ordinated across three core workstreams.

- Research.
- Business Engagement.
- Skills Response.

Research underpins the LSIP approach and a range of activities have been undertaken including.

- Qualitative evidence gathering with deep insights from stakeholders representing the full skills spectrum including providers (HE/FE, independent and private) and representative bodies.
- Sector specific data collection.
- Deep dives and round table events.

The LSIP builds upon the existing work of the SYMCA and Skills Advisory Network (SAN) which identified the major skills challenges for the sub-region (see Section 1.3). The SAN is SYMCA's version of Skills Advisory Panel (SAPs). Skills Advisory Panels (SAPs) were established to deal with local skills shortages and ensure that providers deliver the skills required by employers.

The LSIP will deliver a sub-regional response, aligned to local priorities informed by sub-regional opportunities and challenges.

1.2. STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Key Message: This plan builds on the current national policy emphasis for the skills system to become increasingly focused on the role employers can play in shaping and delivering the skills agenda. The LSIP intersects with a range of sub-regional and national strategies and plans and the work of the Skills Advisory Network (SAN) and is driven by a need for skills provision to be local and employer led. The key challenges are below average productivity and the impacts of education and labour market inequalities.

NATIONAL CONTEXT: SKILLS FOR JOBS

Over the last two decades, the skills system has become increasingly focused on the role employers can play in shaping and delivering the skills agenda, most notably through apprenticeships (Gamblin and Hogarth, 2016). The employer centred principles which underpin the apprenticeship system have now been extended by the Government who have reinforced their commitment to an employer led skills system across post-16 technical education.

A British Chambers of Commerce (2021) report, based upon an 18-month in-depth study, found:

> *Now, more than ever before, businesses need an agile skills system that helps them to continuously train and develop their workforce in response to the evolving business environment. A skills-led recovery will support business to innovate, and be more productive and competitive, but everyone in the workplace must be included in the transformation journey.*

The Skills for Jobs White Paper (2021) announced a raft of new and expanded policies within the skills system, with the aim to build a workforce with the technical skills for the future, to boost productivity and safeguard jobs. Major developments include:

- Improving and expanding existing technical education (apprenticeships and traineeships) and introducing T-Levels which offer a mixture of work experience (20%) and training (80%), the reverse of apprenticeships.
- English, maths, and digital skills support to improve the basic skills of adults.
- A National Skills Fund providing £2.5 billion to reskill and upskill adults.
- A flexible lifetimes skills guarantee with access from 2025 to a lifelong loan for four years post-eighteen education.

- Investment in the estates and facilities of colleges so they can deliver the high-quality training required.
- The piloting Local Skills Improvement Plans to meet local labour needs via the collaboration of employers, skills providers and other stakeholders.
- Strategic Development Funding to implement local programmes in response to the Local Skills Improvement Plan.

The focus on employment will, it is anticipated, provide the UK with a skills system able to meet labour market needs and to simplify the overly complex system.

SY STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The LSIP intersects with a range of sub-regional and national strategies and plans. The plan is driven by a need for skills provision to be local and employer led. The Skills Advisory Network (SAN) is SY's Skills Advisory Panel (SAP) which feeds into the national Skills and Productivity Board (SPB) through the development of Local Skills Reports. The reports are based upon robust local evidence to identify strengths and weaknesses (and gaps) in the local skills system and develop recommendations on how the SAN can address these locally. The South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority[2] (SYMCA) has strategic oversight of the SAN as it fits within existing MCA governance structures acting in an advisory capacity.

The SAN aims to improve the connections between employers and skills providers in SY to improve productivity and grow the local economy. The Local Skills Report (2021) identified a range of skills needs for SY and raised important issues surrounding the lack of consistent and detailed labour market information at a sub-regional and local level. The report highlighted the challenges for SY in terms of below average productivity and the impacts of inequalities within the sub-region surrounding education and labour market participation. The SAN have aligned its work with sub-regional priorities as outlined in the Strategic Economic Plan and Renewal Action Plan.

The Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) outlines the sub-region's economic plan (2021-2041) to drive growth, inclusion and sustainability for the benefit of all citizens. SY aims for a stronger, greener, and fairer economy with a more holistic focus on productivity as opposed to GVA. In line with this holistic focus the plan details how to improve the health and wellbeing of SY residents, as the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the connections between health and wealth. The plan describes the SY Innovation Ecosystem which includes communities, capital and finance, business, Government (local, sub-regional and national), and the skills system. The ecosystem collaborates to transform SY and create an innovative, inclusive, sustainable economy which can dynamically respond to the needs of tomorrow and protect and improve the lives of today. The SEP outlines how change needs to occur on the supply and demand side of skills to make positive differences. It identifies a series of areas for action relevant for providers of skills, education and training and how employers can influence and benefits from changes.

The Renewal Action Plan (RAP) published in 2020 details how SY will respond to the impacts of Covid-19 on local people, places and businesses and aligns with the SAP. The plan detailed immediate relief over the first 18 months and longer-term support after the first 18 months. The ambitious aims will create

[2] The SYMCA is the rebranded Sheffield City Region Mayoral Combined Authority and includes the Sheffield City Region Local Enterprise Partnership.

a stronger, greener, and fairer SY focused on economic and social renewal. The Covid-19 pandemic hit SY hard and with certain communities and businesses more adversely affected. The RAP seeks to address those inequalities. The plan details measures to improve skills and employability across the workforce such as upskilling and apprenticeship support.

LSIP: ADDING VALUE WITH A TRULY EMPLOYER LED ROADMAP

The LSIP is complementary to existing strategies and plans in SY and is a distinctive proposition as it is employer driven and led by all three sub-regional Chambers. The LSIP adds value to the SAN by providing an evidenced employer led plan. It will support the SAN in delivering supply and demand data for local skills identified as lacking. It aligns with the SAN in its focus on creating a responsive skills ecosystem and one which works for all businesses in the sub-region from digital to manufacturing. The Renewal Action Plan complements the LSIP with its holistic focus on employability for example by increasing resilience and mental health support in the workforce. The pandemic has exemplified this issue.

In supporting existing strategies, the LSIP provides a tangible road map to instil employer engagement in the skills system and improve how providers and employers collaborate. It emphasises concerns raised by other strategies but from the perspective of the employer. This employer focus has provided new evidence and solutions to the challenges SY faces. Notably, it builds on the good practices and celebrates the sub-region's successes whilst also offering new measures such as in supporting the development of a new Institute of Technology.

LOCAL CONTEXT

Key Message: Productivity, pay and social mobility and people with no qualifications are key challenges faced by the sub-region. Investment in skills and training will result in more prosperous lives. There are also strengths to build on. For instance, SY has world class examples of education and training delivery and some key sectors where there is likely to be some exciting growth digital, specialised construction, low carbon, and advanced manufacturing.

The Local Skills Report (2021) investigated skills in SY and identified current priority areas to ensure that everyone in SY can access the education and skills that they need to gain worthwhile work and to support business, inclusion and growth. The key findings are below and supplemented with additional data analysis (see here for details). In terms of key challenges:

- SY has a population of 1.4m and consists of four largely urban boroughs; Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham, and Sheffield. 900,000 residents are of working age. It is estimated that over the next 20 years more individuals will leave the workforce than enter it (-27,500).
- With an economic activity rate of 77%, all four areas are below the national average. The area is home to 267,000 economically inactive individuals (23%) ranking the 10th lowest performing area out of 38 LEP areas, with a high incidence of long-term health conditions. The area suffers from above average levels of unemployment. There are particularly high levels of unemployment amongst young people, those from Minority Ethnic backgrounds and those with disabilities. Additionally, 30% of working households claim in work benefits, compared to a national average of 24%.

- SY is home to 49,020 local businesses, 9 out of 10 are micro businesses employing less than 9 people. It has a low business density and a lower-than-average business start-up rate.
- SY has a lower proportion of high skilled jobs (44% compared to the England average of 48%). It faces high levels of deprivation on education, skills and training indicators. DfE Working Futures data shows there will be a sharp increase in the qualification levels needed by employees. SY has a low skills equilibrium, with an economy based on low value added, low skill and low wage jobs. Investment in skills and training will result in more prosperous lives.
- SY is below the national average for most skills supply measures within formal schooling. For example, at KS4 young people in SY have a lower Attainment 8 score than the national average. However, there are variations across the sub-region with Rotherham and Sheffield closer to the average.
- SY has lower productivity levels than the England average and other MCAs. This is despite the sub-region's productivity rate growing at a comparable level to the UK since 2014. The Gross Valued Added (GVA) for hours worked in SY is £28.30 compared to the national average of £35.70 (ONS, 2020).
- The sub-region has below average pay levels and a high level of low skilled low paid work. The Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (2021) shows the average SY weekly wage is £568.50 compared to the national average of £613.30. Barnsley has the lowest weekly wage in the sub-region at £536.40 compared to Sheffield £590.50.
- One third of the SY workforce is employed in the four sectors most strongly associated with in-work poverty and low wages: wholesale and retail, accommodation and food, administrative and support services, and residential care.
- Women, ethnic minorities, and disabled people face acute challenges within SY's labour market as do certain local areas. The Social Mobility Index (2020), which considers where children grow up and their opportunities in adulthood, notes Barnsley and Doncaster are 'cold spots' for social mobility.
- At 6.8%, SY has a higher-than-average number of people aged 16 – 64 with no qualifications (Annual Population Survey, 2020).
- Against a backdrop of falling apprentice numbers, the pandemic has further reduced the level of apprentices, with only 4330 starts in 2020/21, although there has been an increase locally in higher level apprenticeships. In 2018/19 there were 10,530 apprenticeship starts in SY (Department for Education, 2020).

There are some sub-regional labour market strengths to build on:

- SY has world class examples of education and training delivery. There are 63,800 students at the Sheffield Universities in 2020/21. SY colleges are some of the largest college providers of apprenticeships in the country. Prior to Covid DN College Group were the 5th largest in the country and the largest Levy funded provider.
- Depending on where they live in SY, young people are more likely to go to a Russell Group University (Sheffield) or an apprenticeship (Barnsley). SY has a higher-than-average number of workers with NVQ qualifications across all levels. For example, 42.8% have a NVQ4+ compared to a national average of 37%. This changes within the sub-region, Sheffield has 56.1% of workers with NVQ4+ compared to 28.8% in Doncaster (Annual Population Survey, 2020).

- The sub-region has a large provision of FE delivering post 16 and adult learning and high quality AEB providers.
- Young people in SY are more likely to enter apprenticeships and employment over FE. Nationally young Minority Ethnic Groups and women are more likely to enter FE than their peers. For instance 53% of Barnsley College's 9,786 students in 2020/21 were female and 7% from Minority Ethnic groups. In addition, 23% consider themselves to have a learning difficulty or disability.
- Key sectors in SY include healthcare, retail, manufacturing, and education. Growth sectors for the sub-region from 2020-21 include energy and water, manufacturing, construction and logistics and transport (Annual Population Survey, 2021). Areas for future growth include digital, specialised construction, low carbon, rail engineering and advanced manufacturing. The SEP identifies similar growth sectors (advanced manufacturing, construction, transport, engineering, health and digital).

1.3. AN OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS OF ENGAGEMENT

Key Message: A range of activities were undertaken to develop the LSIP including the formation of a SY Skills Accelerator Board, a desk review, data analysis, and an employer survey. The Chambers included skills questions in their quarterly survey and four employer and stakeholder engagement workshops were held. The Chambers commissioned seven employer organisations to create sector specific case-studies based on their own business engagements. Individual discussions with employers and employer representative bodies in the sub-region were undertaken and a piece of work with micro employers led by Barnsley and Rotherham Chamber to explore their requirements.

A range of activities were undertaken to develop the LSIP which are listed below (more detail can be found in the annex).

- Representatives from a range of sectors including the employers AESSEAL, Polypipe, Twinkl, and Gripple provided letters of support and helped shaped early thinking.
- The Skills Accelerator Board formed to support the development of the LSIP, a full list of members appears in Section 5.3.
- A desk review explored existing quantitative and qualitative evidence surrounding employer engagement with the skills system. Five themes were identified which were used to shape engagements with local employers.
- The Centre of Regional Economic and Social Research (CRESR) carried out data analysis (available here) to inform the LSIP. The analysis covered: contextual and demographic; labour market; economic projections; education; and skills, at national, regional and local levels.
- 568 employers were consulted directly and many more through employer organisations (see later), using the following approaches.
    - The Chambers included skills questions in their quarterly survey (351 responses).
    - A more in-depth targeted survey was undertaken with 148 SY employers (telephone and online) to investigate current engagements with the skills system, opportunities for future engagements and employers' current and future skills needs.
    - Two employer engagement workshops with 69 attendees in total. The first tested emerging findings with stakeholders, drilled down on issues they faced engaging with the skills system and asked what actions they could do to improve employer

engagement. The second workshop discussed potential LSIP themes and actions. A short film of this event held at the Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre is available here. Both workshops provided the space to have detailed conversations with stakeholders and check and refine the LSIP's emerging findings, themes, and actions.

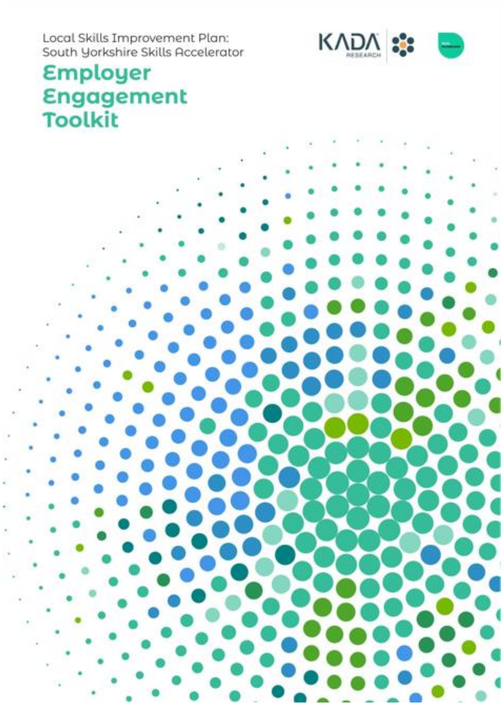
- Two workshops with strategic stakeholders in SY to explore the LSIP opportunities, challenges, and actions at a national and local level.
- The three SY Chambers involved in the development of the LSIP engaged with 8,458 SY businesses in 2020 employing 310,332 staff.
- The Chambers commissioned seven employer organisations to create sector specific case-studies based on their own business engagements. This allowed Chambers to reach businesses outside their current networks and create new fruitful relationships. For instance:
    - The Construction Industry Training Board spoke to 21 construction employers in SY and represent 1,000 SY employers. Via the CITB the Civil Engineering Contractors Association: CECA spoke to four local employers and the Finish & Interiors Sector (FIS) were consulted.
    - The Home Builders Federation spoke to 20 companies operating within the SY.
    - Sheffield Digital has some 70 individual members and 80 local tech firm members these include some major players such as WANdisco, Zoo, TES, TuoS IT Services, SkyBet, and Sumo.
    - Medilink represents 24 members in SY.
    - The TUC in Yorkshire and the Humber represents over 600,000 working people.
- Numerous individual discussions with employers and employer representative bodies in the sub-region including a piece of work led by Barnsley & Rotherham Chamber to explore micro business requirements (with 17 businesses).

2. SPECIFICATION OF EMPLOYER SKILLS NEEDS

This chapter details the current and future skills needs of SY employers based upon several engagement activities and evidence received. The detail for current sectoral needs is covered in Annex Two. The LSIP covers a range of industries and skills needs to reflect the sub-regional economy and to understand where skills needs meet and diverge.

2.1. EMPLOYER NEEDS STATEMENT

This Section considers the current and future skill needs of SY businesses drawn from feedback from a number of employer and employee bodies who were commissioned to respond through case studies to the published employer engagement toolkit and is supported by evidence collected through the finding / outcomes of a series of regional employer and stakeholder workshops. Their reach is summarised earlier in Section 1.3.



These commissioned responses add significant value to the SY LSIP, not only due to the wide employer and employee reach of the selected organisations, but also for the challenging and diverse views they presented in their responses. Responses were received from:

1. Medilink.
2. Sheffield Digital.
3. The Construction Industry Training Board.
4. The Homebuilders Federation.
5. TUC (Yorkshire and Humber).
6. Confederation of British Industry.
7. SY Manufacturing Forum.

Reports and engagements were also undertaken by the LSIP team with the Institute of Engineering Technology (IET). The detailed findings appear in Annex Two.

2.2. UNDERPINNING EVIDENCE

This Section considers the un-met current and future skills needs for SY.

DIGITAL SKILLS

Key Message: SY businesses need digital skills now and for the future such as using AI in manufacturing. There are challenges as many employers lack a full understanding of digital skills, capabilities and applications and therefore struggle to access and utilise these skills or upskill their workforce. Over half of SY employers believed their reliance on digital skills would significantly increase in the next five years. There needs to be significant upskilling across the board and bespoke training for industry specific digital requirements to ensure businesses keep pace with technological advances.

Digital skills are an area of concern for employers at a regional and national level which cuts across industry sectors as '30% of skill-shortage vacancies were caused at least in part by a lack of digital skills' (Employer Skills Survey, 2020). The requirement for digital skills in work is almost universal, roles which require digital skills pay more, and are in high demand with 82% of online job adverts requiring digital skills (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, 2019). Notably, the report suggested gaining specific digital skills reduces the risks associated with automation and aides career progression.

In SY, 74% of employers surveyed believed digital skills were important for their current and future workforce to be effective. Yet, there were concerns from employers about the current levels of digital skills.

> *But there's a huge skill shortage from our perspective. And I would question if the digital skills that we talked about are the right sorts of digital skills, for the direction of travel of where business is going. This is not just about word processing, and simple, light digital skills. I think basic digital skills is something different now to what it used to be. But I think it's still viewed as what it used to be, and we need to elevate it all up a little bit more.*

SY MCA noted that the current statutory entitlement that supports development of basic digital skills through Adult Education Budget funded activity does not go far enough or evolve fast enough to keep up with what industry needs.

Qualitative evidence from employers demonstrated the difficulties with the simplified version of 'digital skills' which did not accurately reflect the demands of the workplace, or the skill set of employees. The framing of digital skills often obscured the broad and complex nature of this area and how it manifests itself across industries from manufacturing to media.

An further exploration of digital skills is required to understand its vast nature and its current and potential application across industries as currently employers were lacking this knowledge. There is a clear demand for digital skills for all employers with the basic level increasing as technology advances. For example, in the manufacturing sector, a large industry in SY, which many are thriving in terms of using advanced digital technologies some lack the understanding to do so or how to communicate this need with skills providers. The SY MCA have identified advanced engineering and manufacturing as important growth areas for the sub-region.

> *When you talk to some manufacturers, they will always refer to 'Oh, yeah, we need digital skills we need AI. We've heard about the Internet of Things' without fully necessarily understanding what all that means.*

Employers lack the digital knowledge to ask about and implement advanced technologies into their businesses. The SY Manufacturers Forum highlight that there is a definite 'fear factor' within leadership of small businesses around not knowing or understanding what is coming next in this space. Due to this, employers questioned statistics gathered from SY businesses which found 56% of employers strongly agreed their workforce had the basic digital skills, and 34% for advanced digital skills, to meet business needs. As it was suggested employers did not fully understand digital skills.

> *We're just doing a lot of work introducing the Made Smarter Initiative for all Yorkshire and talking to companies, that's all about introducing digital and automation and robotics into manufacturing processes. And it's very quickly becoming apparent that the companies don't have the digital skills… They don't know what they don't know. So, the first thing is teaching them what they don't know and then they can start looking at how they can develop their skills in those areas, particularly in digital areas.*

Therefore, upskilling is needed at a management level to understand how digital skills can be applied within businesses. A SY skills advisor suggested this lack of understanding within management could cause the digital skills of staff not to be utilised and employees with the digital skills lack the skills and position to advocate for their application: "*…they haven't got the leadership or the strategic framework in order to really gain that potential*". The successful implementation of digital skills intersects with other skills around leadership, communication, and talent management.

Employers explained the pace of technological advancement meant digital skills provision is often out of date at time of delivery: "*there are all sorts of lags in the skill system, that means what you're buying, is what the Government thought was important 2,3,5 years ago*".

For SY businesses, the impact of Covid-19 has accelerated the use and demands of digital skills.

> *But even companies that were looking at things like automation before COVID, or they thought that it was far away, they have started to think differently about their businesses. So that's changed the way we have to look in terms of investment in the future. So, whilst our employers will always want the traditional engineering skills and it is right that they have that, they are wanting to move at pace in terms of automated systems for productivity.*

In industries such as engineering, the accelerated shift to digital technologies has caused an increase in the need for current and future skills in new technologies such as AI.

53% of SY employees surveyed for this report felt their reliance on digital skills would significantly increase over the next five years. Data from the 2019 Employer Skills Survey supports this, it shows in SY nearly a third of employers felt basic and advanced digital skills would need developing over the next year. Similarly, for advanced digital skills 37% of Sheffield employers reported the need for development over the year compared to 24% in Doncaster.

Stakeholders thought young people needed equipping with the right digital skills for employment.

> *The digital skills are something that we find is missing when we [rail industry] come to recruit young people.*

Skills providers (schools, colleges and universities) need to improve the curriculum to reflect the current and future digital skills needs. The recommendations suggest work experience for providers with digital companies. One stakeholder wondered whether it would be feasible to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with a large tech company such as Microsoft to upskill HE/FE in coding for instance..

In response to current digital skills needs, SY employers have been creating in-house academies to upskill their workforce as new employees do not have the skills required. One employer explained "*we've just started to create our own Academy to grow our own because we can't get the skills through that we need and the work that we do is not going to go away; we rely on it more and more*". The difficulties in recruiting staff with basic and advanced digital skills is supported by statistics from the (Employer Skills Survey, 2019).

Statistics show the digital skills needs for SY will increase significantly over the next five years and unless the digital gaps are addressed the challenges will grow for employers with some already struggling with recruitment.

Good Practice in SY: SY has a history of good work in promoting and increasing digital skills with programmes such as Café (Coding as a Family Experience), Code Make Win, DigiFest, and the Digital Champions programme. For example Sheffield based Sero Ltd designed an innovative coding competition for 9-19 year-olds, funded by Sheffield City Council and supported by tech sector employers over a period of three years. It shifted to a model based on experience to a competition for 5-16 year-olds focused on apps and game development.

TECHNICAL SKILLS

Key message: A range of technical skills are missing from the current workforce and young people are not receiving the education which match the demands of industry. Some industries face distinct challenges for example manufacturing has an aging workforce and engineering has a low proportion of women in the industry. The growth in transport and logistics in SY coupled with long term national demographic trends have created a skills gap which will continue as the industry expands with the growth in internet commerce during the pandemic. Employers raised more general concerns about the future skills gaps with jobs affected by automation and the importance of a balanced economy in recognition of the value of jobs such as those in the foundational economy.

Currently, half of employers rated their workforce's technical skills as high. 72% of all SY employers surveyed reported technical or sector specific skills as important for their current and future workforce. The Employer Skills Survey (2019) found 73% of SY employers struggled to recruit candidates with the right technical or practical skills, lower than the England average (84%).

There are specific challenges with an aging workforce as the example from manufacturing indicates it can cause current and future skills gaps as the knowledge leaves with the employees who retire.

The engineering sector has a particular challenge with attracting women into the industry, they currently make up only 14.5% of the workforce (Engineering UK, 2021). One employer reflected there are fewer females with Physics A Levels which is a key requirement to study engineering at University to overcome these skills gap the company was working with local universities to support female engineering undergraduates.

SY has a large and growing transport and logistics industry with recent inward investment into new facilities within the sub-region. For example in Doncaster it accounts for 9% of employment and significant increases are expected in this industry over the next decade (Lifelong Learning Commission, 2022).

> *We need a massive push in this sub-region for transport and logistics, but it's not covered [through current skills provision].*

Stakeholders reflected that there is sometimes a mis-match between the availability of publicly funded skills provision and the immediate needs of employers seeking to take on accredited staff. One skills advisor explained *"None of the funding packages that we generally work with offer key skills that people can get jobs with, such as a forklift licence or a CSCs card"*. The SY MCA noted that key issue here is not about skills, but about who covers essential business costs such as licences to practice. Traditionally, AEB is not used to cover these costs because they are viewed as essential business costs.

The digital sector faced challenges in specific roles.

> *In Yorkshire we need thousands more digital software developers by 2024. The University of Sheffield, for instance, are teaching 60 a year, Sheffield Hallam is doing something similar, colleges will do some something similar.*

Access to skilled software engineers is a blockage for technology businesses across SY.

> *One of the biggest issues for Sheffield is that we either do not have, or are not perceived to have, as large a Tech sector as some other cities, so from a candidate and an investor perspective this is likely to have an effect on them considering the city as a viable option.*

There was clear support from SY employers to provide work experience to young people; 39% reported providing work experience and placements and 25% wanted to do more of this. However, employers reported skills gaps in apprentices which made providing placements more challenging and costly.

> *...because a big part of it is mentoring when offering placements, often these smaller employers will struggle to be able to provide that level of support themselves*

Employers reflected on the challenges for smaller businesses to engage with apprenticeships and other forms of work placements. The skills gaps of the apprentice and small employer intersect and consequently providing a placement becomes untenable. ONS Data (2021) found 88% of businesses in SY are micro (0 – 9 employees) and 9.5% are small (10 – 49), thus the ability of smaller businesses to engage with apprentices is important. There is a need for better understanding about the support available to smaller employers to take on an apprentice.

The recruitment of potential apprentices has been difficult as a local skills provider explained:

> *Since September, we have had many vacancies. And our biggest issue is no applicants, or a tiny number of applicants, and really poor quality. We're all finding the same across the sub-region that, for level two, level three, that's the biggest issue, absolutely poor quality or complete lack of applicants.*

The low numbers or low quality of potential applicants results in technical skills gaps for employers which impacts current and future talent pipelines. FE providers in SY were organising a joint 'myth busting' marketing campaign around apprenticeships in response to the large number of vacancies. Some stakeholders would like to see an Apprenticeship Hub for SY.

Stakeholders reflected on how Covid-19 had changed the perceptions of industries and roles with a greater appreciation for what was perceived as low skilled work and how this would impact on current technical skills needs for example in health, beauty and social care.

> *Not everyone goes to University, not everyone goes for those big hitter jobs. We need a multitude of skills across the whole piece and it's the value that you add to someone's life that gives them that respect in themselves to become an asset to society. So, we need the street cleaners, we need the forklift licence holders.*

The wide range of technical skills required across SY need to be considered with a more holistic understanding of the value and benefits of work. Pay is a factor too; some jobs may be lower skilled but they should not exacerbate low pay levels.

The impact of automation will impact future skills needs and change the nature of industry. Employers explained it was important to consider those occupations which could not be replaced by AI and how this would impact the perception of low/high skilled work and technical skills.

EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS / CORE / SOFT SKILLS

Key message: Employability skills were lacking in many roles and industries across SY. For example, communication, collaboration, problem solving, adaptability and resilience are the skills SY employers believe are important for their workforce to be effective. Yet, employers struggled to recruit staff with adequate employability skills. Graduates and apprentices often lacked the employability skills required to be successful in the workplace which placed a burden on employers. Employers also identified a need to support young people more holistically to build resilience and adaptability in the workforce.

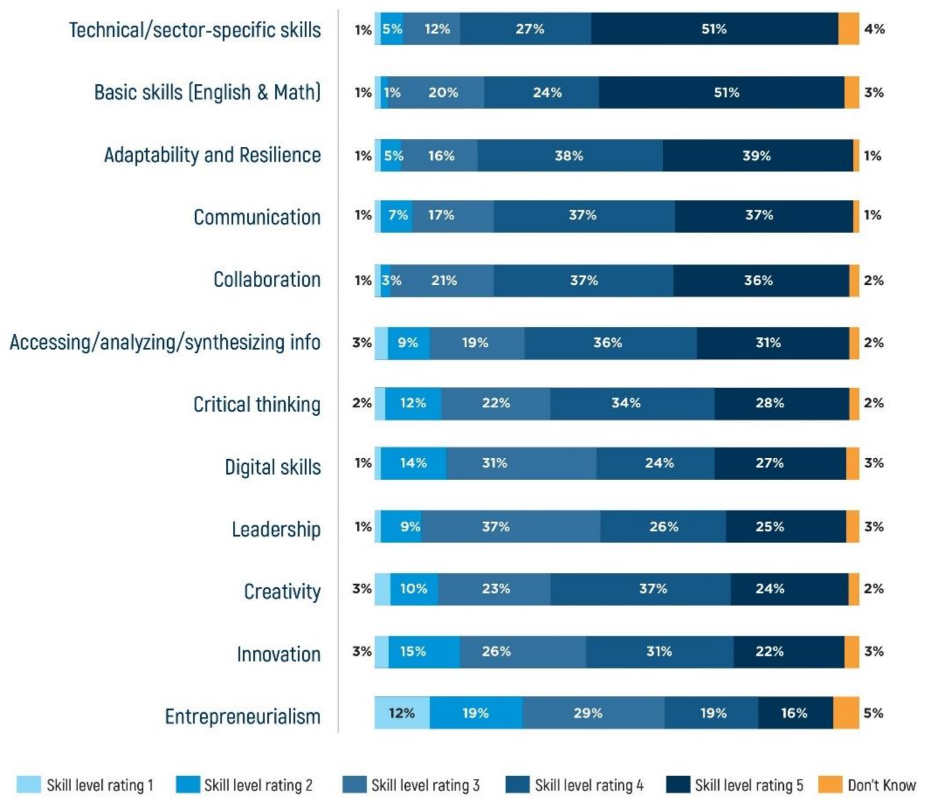
Employability or soft skills covers a wide range of abilities which make people more 'employable' such as communication, problem solving, team-working, adaptability, and resilience. Employability can also include attitudes and behaviours. The skills are important across all forms and industries of work and employers in SY felt there were gaps in the current workforce.

Survey data from SY employers shows the importance of employability skills in their current and future workforce. The following were viewed as important:

- Communication (90% of employers)
- Adaptability and Resilience (84% of employers)
- Collaboration (74% of employers)
- Critical thinking (74% of employers)
- Accessing, analysing, and synthesising information (63% of employers

When asked to rate their current workforce's skill level against the same measures, critical thinking and accessing, analysing, and synthesising information were also ranked at lower levels compared to communication and adaptability and resilience. Technical/sector specific skills and basic skills were considered the strong suits with 51% of businesses rating their current workforce skill level at 5 for both measures.

Employer rating of workforce current skill level (1 being the lowest and 5 the highest)



Source: Kada Employer LSIP Survey 2022 (n=148)

Despite their importance, employers commented on the low levels of employability skills within new recruits and for some members of their current workforce.

> *The softer workplace skills employers refer to are more in relation to building resilience and problem solving within employees.*
>
> *We have also seen in the talent space, that candidate professionalism is a lot lower as well and I think that's to do with socialisation and an impact of a lack of work experience.*

The impacts of Covid-19 have highlighted the importance of employability skills to employers, particularly resilience and adaptability. There have been less opportunities for work experience during the pandemic and more generally to build their employability skills within education.

Employers also raised concerns about the lack of soft skills University graduates possess which results in the business needing to upskill and mentor new employees.

> *A lot of students leaving University that do not have the soft skills, they're not particularly necessarily good at engaging and working in the same environment.*

The gaps noted by employers included communication, presentation skills, teamwork, marketing or sales, and client management. This was discussed across a range of sectors including digital and engineering. Employers noted how the demands of work in industry had changed recently and that there were expected industry skills combined with broader skills set such as marketing and collaboration.

A similar concern was raised by employers who offer apprenticeships who reported a lack of soft skills in their apprentices who would like their teams to develop the skills to actively listen, adapt communication to the audience, and respond with clarity and respect. Currently, employers attempt to fill these skills gaps with mentoring in the workplace.

Pastoral support can improve qualities such as adaptability and resilience in apprentices which are two key skills requirements for employers in SY. It ensures their wellbeing is considered and more holistic support is provided for those young people who require it.

One employer reflected on where technical and employability skills meet:

> *…so around digital upskilling, as opposed what we would call softer skills, which I think were called workplace skills. So, people being able to work in a team, being able to communicate, and where the balance was between the two.*

Currently, employers felt the balance between technical and employability skills was not right. For digital roles, employers explained there is a lack of employability skills within University courses which makes the transition for graduates into employment difficult as they often lack the communication and collaboration skills required.

Other employers explained there were challenges with motivation and attitudes to work which made recruitment challenging, one example was given from a call-centre who had over thirty vacancies throughout the year for entry-level roles. This says as much about the quality of the jobs on offer as skills gaps.

> *In terms of the roles that we are looking for quite high-volume, entry-level living wage, paid jobs. We have got our in-house training teams here that can provide people with the skills that they need to be better at this kind of work. I would say, the bit that is missing, or is a big challenge for us is attitudes to work and the desire to work at times.*

Thus, the behaviour and motivation of current and potential staff can be a challenge and cause difficulties as vacancies persist. Statistical evidence (Employer Skills Survey, 2019) supports this, as although in the minority, a significant 14% of employers in SY reported the main reason for a hard-to-fill vacancy was the 'low number of applicants with the required attitude, motivation or personality'.

Notably, there is a gap in employability skills across companies from entry level to management: *"Skills are definitely needed, right from employability skills at the bottom end through to the higher level"*.

Good Practice in SY: RISE is an innovative, award-winning and unique business support initiative that connects small and medium sized businesses across the Sheffield Mayoral Combined Authority with talented, hard-working graduates. It focusses on enabling business growth and retaining graduate talent within the sub-regional economy; bringing together growing small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) with suitably qualified graduates who match specific business needs; enabling them to overcome barriers and develop the knowledge to become successful graduate employers.

The Sheffield College and Sheffield Chamber of Commerce have launched the Business and Enterprise Academy, open to all students it offers an interactive an engaging programme of activities to support students to develop their employability skills. Each month features a different employability theme and a supporting workshop delivered by a local employer.

Sheffield Chamber Business and Enterprise Academy is equipping students with the skills that businesses need. A Partnership with Sheffield College, the academy offers all students across the curriculum the opportunity to be mentored by Sheffield Chamber of Commerce members. Its primary aim is to help young people acquire the employability skills they need to be successful in the workplace and introduce them to the brilliant career opportunities available in the Sheffield area. Specialist speakers can also visit the college to provide an insight into a particular industry or role.

Prior to the pandemic, AESSEAL, a Rotherham based global manufacturing company, engaged with five thousand school children annually about manufacturing and engineering. The company has invested £200,000 in building a tree walk at its headquarters in Rotherham by planting trees around the factory and creating an outside classroom for young people and visitors. The purpose of the tree walk is to engage with young people and link the space with their education. The tree walk includes habitats for wildlife such as hedgehogs and bees, and feeds into the company's net zero drive.

BASIC SKILLS

Key message: Basic English and Maths skills are essential in the workforce, yet adult engagement in basic skills learning is in decline. SY employers rated 50% of their workforce with a high level of basic skills and concern was raised the level of basic skills was 'holding back' the sub-region. The gap in basic skills highlights the need to consider the labour market in its entirety and not solely focus on high-skilled jobs.

Numeracy (using maths in everyday life), English (reading, writing and speaking) and ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) are basic skills. It is estimated nine million working age adults lack one or both these skills (over 25% of the working age population). Notably, over five million of those who lack basic skills are employed (Learning and Work Institute, 2020). Subsequently, people struggle to complete tasks in the day-to-day life and at work. Yet, adult participation in basic skills has seen a 60% reduction in the last decade (Adult Participation in Learning Survey, 2021).

75% of SY employers surveyed believed basic English and Maths skills were important to the effectiveness of their current and future workforce. Employers rated 50% of the basic skills of their current workforce as low. Statistics (Employer Skills Survey, 2019) show basic skills are difficult to obtain in 25% of job applications in SY. There are variations across the sub-region with Rotherham reporting the highest figure (37%) and Barnsley the lowest (9%).

> *Essential skills, English, Maths and ESOL, despite being funded previously continue to be an issue. Self-identifying this need can be a problem where a learning culture is not embedded. This is an area where unions, in particular union learning representatives (ULRs), as trusted colleagues, can support learners in the workplace. ULRs support, develop and improve the learning cultures within the workplace. They raise awareness of the value of learning and organise and support courses in the workplace. IT was noted that SY MCA is funding a ULR worker for SY.*

It can be difficult for businesses to see the lack of basic skills in a worker as they often employ strategies to hide this issue such as task-avoidance, re-checking tasks and relying on co-workers (Learning and Work Institute, 2020). Therefore, the rating by employers of their basic skills should be considered within this context.

Low levels of basic skills are problematic as it impacts on individuals, businesses, and the UK:

- People with low basic skills lack confidence and can struggle to adapt to workplace changes. They are at a higher risk of lower wages, limited career progression and losing their job to automation (Booth, 2017; Learning and Work Institute, 2020).
- Businesses are impacted by low basic skills as it reduces employee performance and subsequently the businesses performance and profitability.
- Low basic skills impacts at a national level due to lower productivity (Booth, 2017).

Concerningly, the Adult Participation in Learning Survey found only 40% of adults were aware of the free basic skills courses, reducing to 33% for those who left education at sixteen with no qualifications. The report explored factors which would motivate learners to participate in basic skills courses:

- Flexibility of learning to fit around existing commitments (19%)
- Online learning (19%)
- Close location (16%)
- Understanding the personal benefits of learning (15%)
- Online with option of in-person support (14%)

However, 40% of respondents stated none of the motivations listed would encourage them to participate in a basic skills course. This suggests, the survey notes (p40), that there is a need to proactively promote the benefits of English and Maths learning, particularly for adults who have not recently engaged in learning or who lack formal qualifications.

SY MCA has highlighted the need to raise the level of English and Maths skills among both school leavers and the adult population and will include this as a focal point for development of its skills strategy. A key issue in Barnsley, Rotherham and Doncaster is progression from no and Entry/Level 1 qualifications to Level 2 (and higher). The Skills Advisory Network is keen to explore the reasons for these inequalities and to understand how to encourage people with lower-level qualifications to progress further as this would reduce the gap between the three Local authorities and England.

It is crucial the SY workforce has the basic skills it requires not only for the benefit to employers but employees themselves as English and Maths are needed in all areas of life. Unless action is taken, the gap in basic skills will continue and with the decline in participation in basic skills courses over the last decade; this gap could grow.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP, LEADERSHIP, AND INNOVATION

Key message: Innovation, leadership, and entrepreneurism are important factors in driving business productivity and profitability. SY employers desire innovation and leadership skills but have found these skills hard to recruit for. Good leadership from employers is essential to creating an inclusive ‘learning culture’ which supports employee development and innovations within the business. Employers explained if there is a failure in leadership it can constrain current and future skill development.

Entrepreneurship, leadership, and innovation are important skills across sectors and are often crucial to a business's productivity and profitability. In SY, employers surveyed believed the following was important to the effectiveness of their current and future workforce:

- Innovation (68%)
- Leadership (65%)
- Entrepreneurialism (34%)

These were some of the lowest scoring types of skills employers of SY thought important for their workforce. Employers also gave their workforce lower ratings in these skills than many of the other skills explored:

- Innovation: low skilled in 18% of current workforce
- Creativity: low skilled in 13% of current workforce
- Leadership: low skilled in 10% of current workforce
- Entrepreneurialism: low skilled in 31% of current workforce

Innovation and creativity are important for generating new ideas and driving change within organisations, one employer explaining they were struggling to recruit people with these skills and had subsequently developed in-house training.

> *From our perspective, that there is an extreme skill shortage across the business, because what we do is something so new and so modern.*

Such qualities and the inter-disciplinary knowledge base STEAM provides will be a crucial factor in producing the workforce needed to achieve the future laid out in the UK's 2021 Innovation Strategy.

Nesta (2016) found businesses which use both arts and STEM skills outperform those using only arts or science skills: 'There is evidence that the broader the set of skills a firm uses, the higher its level of innovative performance and future growth'. The report showed the combination of arts and STEM skills in businesses produced higher employment and sales growth and are more likely to commercialise 'radical innovations'.

Quantitative data (Employer Skills Survey, 2019) shows 44% of employers in SY have difficulties finding applicants with management and leadership skills. This is comparable with the England average. There are large variations within the sub-region with Doncaster reporting the lowest figure (27%) and Barnsley the highest (81%).

Leadership skills are important for creating a positive work culture and one in which learning is promoted.

> *…it's incumbent on businesses to do more to develop those learning cultures. And I think, when we talk about skills, we often reflect on the employees in an organisation and don't talk much about leadership and management.*

For employees to develop new skills a continuous 'learning culture' is required in the workplace which supports regular professional development in an open, holistic, and inclusive way. Employers reflected how poor leadership can create cultures which do not motivate staff to train or allow the business to develop its technological abilities particularly when the leaders lack the understanding of the benefits to change.

Is there a risk that these business leaders run looking for skills that backup their own perceptions, and are always too afraid to upskill in things that challenge their thought process, but will benefit, not only business today, but definitely future leaders that are coming through?

Leadership (or a failure of) can impact current skills needs and those of the future, therefore it is important employers have the leadership skills required to address un-met skills needs currently and create the right leadership and learning frameworks for the future.

You've got to have a strategy in place for that to really be impactful and worthwhile.

Most SY employers surveyed were interested in receiving mentoring in the future to help provide skills development to their workforce and would like support and guidance on how to make work placements more worthwhile. This could be a role within the proposed bodies like the Apprenticeship Hub and/or the proposed Institute of Technology.

Whilst entrepreneurialism was seen as of low importance by employers in SY, it was suggested that improving entrepreneurial thinking in the workforce could be a benefit across industries:

And I think if we can see more people thinking more in an entrepreneurial way about maybe setting up their own business, as well as coming into business that will be a shift in mindset for our next generation as well.

Although not identified by many employers as an unmet skills need, an increase in entrepreneurism could produce a wider behavioural shift.

Employers noted the difficulties in accessing the innovation and leadership skills they required. There are also challenges with ensuring employers have the leadership skills to create the 'learning culture' for the business to adapt and thrive so that future employee development is not stifled.

Good Practice in SY: Opportunities Doncaster Live 22 was held on the 10th of March 2022 at Doncaster Racecourse during National Careers Week. It gave over 3,500 students the chance to meet professionals from a variety of roles and industries and get advice on how to kick start their career. Students gain a wealth of information on local opportunities and further study options. Featuring over 100 exhibitors, live interactive talks from local businesses, wrap around careers and jobs resources, and a bespoke Interactive Primary/SEND hub. The event aimed to Engage, Educate and Inspire young people to consider and pursue career pathways they might not have considered. This year's theme was Challenging Barriers and Stereotypes, and featured Q&A panels with inspiring individuals who have challenged stereotypes or barriers to achieve their career goals, including BBC Young Apprentice Winner, Ashley Porter-Exley.

The Get Up To Speed festival in Sheffield which promotes STEM to young people by bringing them together with businesses and inventors to see innovative and exciting inventions. This allows young people to learn about the industry and businesses to engage with the future generation of workers.

Sheffield College in partnership with Sheffield Chamber have developed a business StartUp programme. It offers aspiring entrepreneurs the chance to develop their skills through business building workshops delivered by local professionals and inspiring leaders.

SY was the first mayoral sub-region to partner with the Ownership Hub, which targets business founders at the start-up stage to consider forming worker cooperatives / employee ownership models, leading to better inclusion, innovation and increased collaboration.

3. WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE AND WHY?

The Chapter looks at three key aspects. First Section 3.1 looks at the changes that are needed in provision to better meet employer skills needs. It considers high level strengths, weaknesses, barriers, and opportunities. Section 3.2 reviews evidence of barriers around supply, demand, and utilisation of skills that stand in the way of a more responsive skills system. The Chapter concludes (Section 3.3) with a review of lessons from the SDF Pilot.

3.1. CHANGES IN PROVISION TO BETTER MEET EMPLOYER SKILLS NEEDS.

Key Change: Theme One of the SY Skills Accelerator Roadmap offers a range of measures to enhance 'navigation' which will result in an easy to find, co-ordinated, and accessible portal to the SY skills ecosystem.

This will require the following changes: further investment in the sub-region's business engagement resource. Better systems leadership is needed to ensure the provider ecosystem and skills organisations work better together and are informed by real world intelligence and a single shared skills narrative. Stakeholders at the LSIP ideation sessions wanted enhanced visibility of existing performance indicators around skills participation and acquisition. Much data is collected already and feedback received suggests there is no shortage of data and KPIs but the application and use of intelligence could be improved. For instance, the current Institute of Technology bid approved by the Department of Education (DfE) to develop and expand the offer at level 4 and 5 for employers; was developed by Further Education Colleges and HEIs on robust local market intelligence and employer engagement, and supported by DfE, Chambers, local authorities, the LEP and the SY MCA.

A new commitment (from stakeholders and providers) to employers is recommended so they publicly commit to rapid response times and customer service standards. The following is recommended:

- A SY skills portal review and recommendation to demystify / simplify the skills system and enable employers and individuals to access the 'single' right door. This will be linked to an enhanced portal and a service offering user friendly, non-technical access point that will direct an employer/business through the system and will enable proactive/responsive discussions.
- A SY Apprenticeship Hub is introduced and promoted by a large-scale annual apprenticeship event.

There are several areas of good practice to build on in terms of joining up the ecosystem and collaboration. The proposed Institute of Technology consists of two Colleges, SHU and the AMRC and hopefully will add others. The legal formation and model ensures partners work together collaboratively on curriculum development and planning, the pedagogical approach (including employability content), employer engagement (with productive and meaningful conversations), staffing (especially roles that are hard to fill).

Key Change: By strengthening the employer voice the SY Skills Accelerator will help to drive change where it is most needed through a 'proactive employer engagement' (Theme Two).

Dialogue between employers needs to improve and expand further and enable a broader reach. Skills and sector and advisory boards will be energised so that employers in different localities are actively informing learning design and delivery – new Trailblazer Groups will be convened too. The mobilisation of diverse employer representative organisations will deepen and extend the reach of employer engagement activity. It will make it easier for smaller and harder to reach SY employers to engage in skills and training. The employer survey showed employers were willing to engage so Theme Two of SY Skills Accelerator Roadmap is about harnessing employers' resources and potential. The Chambers can help here too by using employer intelligence on skills needs to keep skills training relevant and inform commissioning.

Key Change: Employers require provision that delivers what employers require and – as far as possible - when and where they want it (Theme Four of the plan will identify key areas where this will be achieved).

Stakeholders at the LSIP ideation sessions would like to see a 'just in time approach to skills'. This will require new forms of bespoke learning. SY will respond with greater agility that simply is not feasible under many current Government funded skills programmes. Bespoke training and new ways of learning will be developed including proof of concept and bespoke provision. The areas where there is a need to develop, grow and expand specific areas of provision are as follows; Industry 4.0, Digital skills and Construction e.g., zero carbon skills as well as new provision for microbusinesses including appropriate bite sized CDP and more flexible provision. The priorities fit well with the key sectors of potential identified in the Local Skills Report (p12):

- Digital including advanced manufacturing tech, edtech, mobility tech and creative & cultural tech
- Low carbon
- Advanced manufacturing
- Specialised construction and infrastructure.

Key Change: Stakeholders acknowledge that SY is not as good as it might be at stimulating employer demand for learning and celebrating success. This formed the basis of Theme Four in the SY LSIP.

Sector groups and stakeholders would like to showcase and promote success stories and initiatives in SY and learn from, and build on, what it already has. Stakeholders at the Ideation session would like greater awareness raising around the benefits of skills provision and apprenticeships. The Roadmap will also help demonstrate SY employers are serious about building a learning culture and will be encouraging leadership development in this area. Larger businesses will commit to mentoring smaller businesses in all sectors including foundation industries. Demand from employers for learning and stakeholders will be activated with more industry practitioner participation in FE delivery. It is recommended to:

- Support FE institutions to
    - recruit and retain staff through pilot activity to target older workers with industry experience. Help FE sector to reach these individuals.
    - harness the talent of the current workforce in becoming dual professionals and in delivering the training requirements of both prescribed and non-prescribed programmes.
- Increase opportunities for 'coal face' programmes and work shadowing within industry for FE staff with practitioner support programmes opening businesses to trainers/provider staff so that they can remain relevant and up to date.

Key Change: SY have a very imbalanced workforce. The gap between the wealthiest areas like Fulwood in Sheffield and the poorest like Eastwood in Rotherham could not be starker. There is an appetite to promote better pathways to employment resulting in a more inclusive SY workforce, the fifth and final Theme of the plan.

Analysis conducted by the Centre for Regional, Economic and Social Research (CRESR) at Sheffield Hallam University for this plan shows that many groups are marginalised from the workforce. This manifests itself in a lower employment rate (70.8%) than the sub-region (73.5%) or England (74.7%). Increasing the employment rate to the sub-regional level would result in another 24,000 people in employment.

The ideation[24] sessions noted the need to retrain more adults (Kickstart has proved useful in helping young people into work). There remain significant challenges to address the barriers faced by women in securing equivalent employment outcomes to men. 60% of the additional 47,000 jobs created between 2010-2019 in Sheffield alone were taken by men, compared to a national picture where 55% of new jobs were secured by women. CRESR's labour market and skills analysis shows there are two social mobility 'cold spots' in SY in Barnsley and Doncaster (Social Mobility Index, 2020). SY has a large volume of prisons in Doncaster and a lack of initiatives currently in situ to link prisons, offenders and employers. The gap between Ethnic Minorities and disabled[24] people's economic activity rates relative to their comparator groups is higher in SY than nationally (Local Skills Report, p11). There are recommendations around diversity and stimulating employer participation in outreach programmes such as work with schools and careers fairs.

There are some key areas of workforce resilience where SY lags behind the regional and national picture (Employer Skills Survey 2019). This includes team working and managing others and managing and motivating other staff as well as people and person skills and self-management skills. SY also has a legacy of being employees in traditional business. By encouraging the next generation of entrepreneurs SY business density and productivity rates will improve. Extend to scope of the Careers Hub to engage more frequently with primary schools will help reach pupils earlier.

It is recommended that the delivery of some of the skills coveted by employers, such as creativity, problem solving, team working, and performing under pressure to ensure these skills are embedded across all SY businesses regardless of size.

CURRENT STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF CURRENT PROVISION AND BARRIERS IN RESPONDING AGILELY TO EMPLOYER SKILLS NEEDS

Strengths	Weaknesses and Barriers	Opportunities
• Rich provider base including two major universities, Five FE colleges, a diverse range of Independent Training Providers, specialist providers such as AMRC, careers hubs and devolved Government funding. One college alone has five business development staff who work with employers for all training needs including referring and signposting to other providers. The average business with employers in generated sales/funding each year is over £7m, with over 2,500 learners. • An appetite from SY employers to engage more with schools, colleges and universities. The employer resource could be tapped into more proactively and the reach of providers deepen. • There are many initiatives that could be scaled up across the sub-region such as the Skills Bank and there are many good stories waiting to be told. • The proposed Institute of Technology and Ownership Hub, the breadth of skills fora and groups and the experience in working together. • A highly skilled workforce – 43% with NVQL4+ (2020) compared to 37% in England (Annual Population Survey).	• Too many providers working in silos making the ecosystem confusing. The full offer is not always easily articulated, understood or effectively communicated. Provider offers are shaped by Government funding rather than business need. The difficulty of actually accessing funding for the types of provision employers require. • It's not easy for employers to identify the right training when needed. Real time employer' needs intelligence is patchy. • Providers are blamed for skills deficiencies but there is more that employers could contribute to learning. • Employers lack the resources (time and people) to engage in skills development even though they have the desire to do so. • There is not much interdisciplinary learning, employer challenges, exploratory proof of concept or bite sized provision. • Low productivity levels indicate employers could do more to develop a learning culture and lead change in employment and skills. • SY has 72,000 workless individuals (16.3% compared to 13.0% in England). • Workforce marginalisation and a lack of diversity is stifling innovation, creativity and productivity. The economic activity rate of Ethnic Minorities is lower than the national average (61% in SY compared to 72%).[4] • Disabled people are twice as likely to be unemployed (6% compared to 3%), economically inactive (41% compared to	• Trailblazer status and the development of the LSIP provides an excellent opportunity to influence national skills policy. • Utilising local expertise there is an opportunity to refine SY networks and boards to work more efficiently and effectively to deliver LSIP priorities. • There is a genuine appetite from suppliers to work together on improvement priorities and enhancing existing networks to make it easy for businesses to access training. • Activating/investing in existing employer engagement capacity offering independent advice and a business commitment underpinned by data, produced by the skills partners. Perhaps building on the Skills Hub model. • The development of sector specific discussions, industrial liaison groups and sectoral networks. • Encouraging companies to donate materials and technology and support teaching and CPD. • Developing new provision and promoting co-design in the following areas: Industry 4.0, Digital and Construction e.g., zero carbon skills. • Project based learning, the integration of soft skills and self-employment. • Showcasing good practice/success stories through digital media and changing perceptions of industry. • Larger businesses mentoring smaller businesses in all sectors including foundation industries. • Special measures to encourage new entrants, re-entrants or 're-skillers' starting with focus on women in rail and

[4] Sheffield City Region Local Skills Report, June 2021, p9

• There are four sectors with potential that have exhibited recent growth: digital[3], low carbon, advanced manufacturing and specialised construction and infrastructure.	17%), and less likely to be in employment (53% compared to 80%).[5] The gap is greatest in Rotherham and Sheffield. • Women are more likely to work in sectors and occupations characterised by low pay – here average full time female pay is £8.32 per hour compared to £9.20 per hour for men. • Patchy informed careers advice with pockets of good practice but no universal employer offer.	advanced manufacturing. The SY ESF Pathways programme is funded until 2023. • Bootcamps and more 'reactionary programmes to alleviate skills gaps.

[3] Key niches identified by Sheffield Digital include advanced manufacturing tech, edtech, mobility tech and creative & cultural tech.
[5] Op. Cit p5-6.

3.2. EVIDENCE THE BARRIERS AROUND SUPPLY, DEMAND, AND UTILISATION OF SKILLS THAT STAND IN THE WAY OF A MORE RESPONSIVE SKILLS SYSTEM

This Section outlines the barriers to a more responsive skills system across SY utilising data and research collected using a range of methodologies and sources. The evidence has been structured into the five themes documented throughout this plan in line with the Roadmap priorities which follow.

THEME ONE: NAVIGATION

Key message: The skills system is difficult to navigate due to its complexity, level of bureaucracy and unclear points of entry. This makes engaging with it time consuming, which over half of employers in the skills survey reported as a significant barrier. Employers want a skills ecosystem which is co-ordinated, accessible and delivers high-quality provision led by the needs of business. Information about and into the skills system needs to improve. Funding needs to match up with local demands from learners and employers.

Complexity. The skills landscape is complicated and difficult for employers and stakeholders to navigate, and for providers and intermediaries to articulate and explain. The LSIP drafting team have been met with some defensiveness from providers that they have effective employer engagement arrangements in place but the survey evidence suggests that is not always the case and there is an appetite for employers to engage more which is not being met. The plethora of programmes and projects both national and local with different criteria including funding, eligibility, longevity, and purposes means the system is unwieldly for employers.

> *The system is considered to be confused, often crowded and competitive, laden with a range of acronyms, branding and skills 'jargon'.*

The result is a college and University sector where the operating models often start with compliance with the mesh of accountabilities, not with delivering the right outcomes for the learner. The lack of clarity regarding access points and levels of bureaucracy (22% of respondents were dissatisfied with levels of bureaucracy) often makes accessing skills provision difficult and time consuming with 51% of employers reporting time to engage as a significant barrier. Employers feel the burden to navigate the system is 'on them' and articulate the need for simplification and support. This is particularly the case for small employers.

> *Research indicates that employers find the funding landscape difficult to navigate in terms of understanding where to find funding and what they might be entitled to. They also say that the process for accessing funding is overly bureaucratic. Whilst others simply do not have the skills to complete the application process.*

Many programmes and projects compete and are not designed to joined up or be complementary, leading to duplication and difficulties in developing consistent progression routes through the system. For example, employers highlighted instances of individuals undertaking FE technical courses in construction, followed by apprenticeship programmes to gain 'real world' experience with the candidate simply 'redoing' previous learning.

There was strong agreement on clarifying / simplifying the system for local employers, with improvements necessary in how to co-ordinate, communicate and promote the skills system.

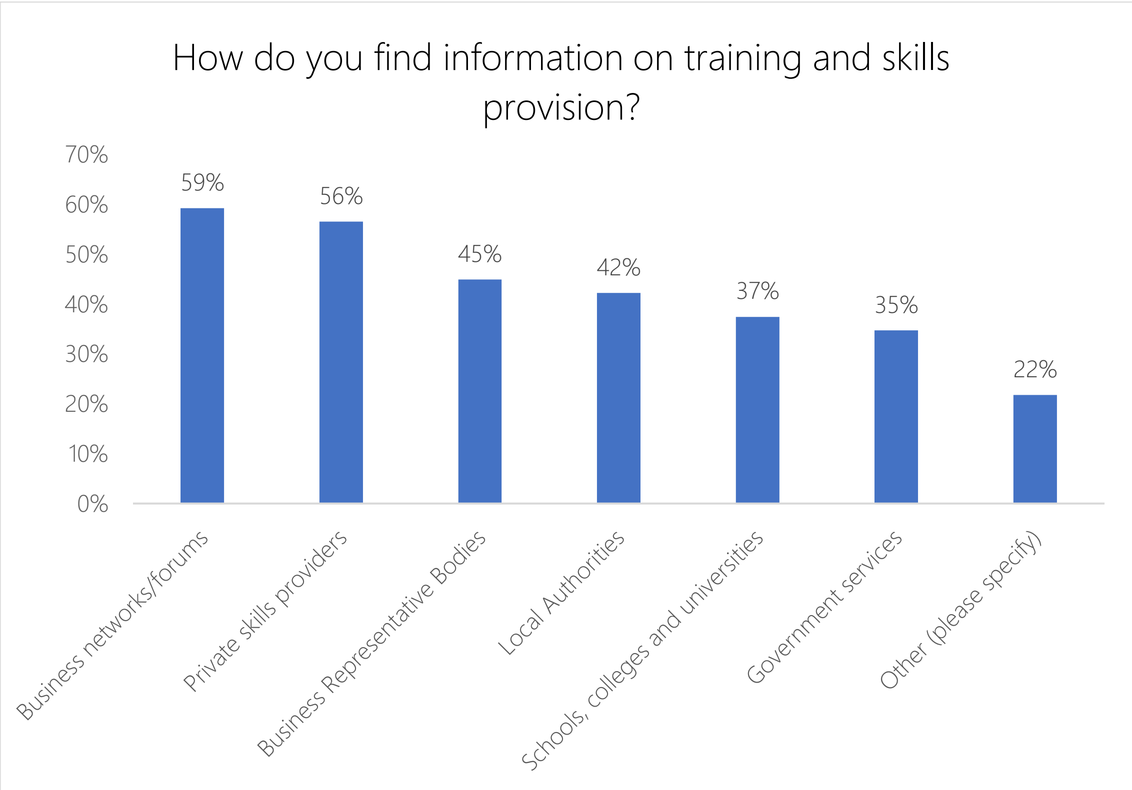
Employers can find understanding and navigating the skills landscape confusing and knowing what is available including funding. As time is very precious it all needs to be made clearer.

The major issue surrounding funding is knowing what, where and when it can be accessed, there are so many separate initiatives, national, regional, sector based, topic based such as digital, environmental etc. that it is difficult for anyone to know what is out there and current. Ideally there needs to be a service available for employers, employer representatives, training organisations etc. to be able to access to find this out.

Co-ordination. There was a desire to simplify and clarify the roles and responsibilities of numerous groups, networks and boards in the local employment and skills space enhancing collaboration and visibility. The recommendations suggest simplification of existing arrangements.

Employers and stakeholders are clear that SY has examples of skills good practice to build on. Employers emphasised the need to further develop these while co-ordinating the system better to make the ecosystem work for business, minimising silo working and promoting easily accessible and understood information relating to the SY skills offer.

This co-ordination would allow for a smoother offer of provision making access easier and minimise the 'wrong door' effect which frustrates employers, with 23% reporting they were not sure how to contact institutions and employers outlining that they used disparate and multiple methodologies to find information relating to skills provision.



Service to Business. In terms of the service to business the following suggestions were made:

- Improve customer service including the information and level of account management businesses can expect when accessing the skills system, ensuring increased consistency.

- Enhance the quality of service employers receive both digitally and in person through improved online information, account management / brokerage and advisory services, including the development of skills strategies and employer learning cultures.
- Learn from existing services and draw on good practice through better leadership within the skills system.

It was claimed that enhanced and co-ordinated services would maximise engagement particularly from micro and small employers and those who see the system does not currently effectively support, through a more targeted and proactive outreach.

> *There are probably at least 25,000 businesses in SY that none of us are talking to, and we need to get to them. [Skills Accelerator Workshop Discussion]*

It is recommended that the reach and talents of the sub-region's collective business engagement workforce is maximised, and more businesses are engaged in the skills ecosystem.

Skills Funding. Employers recognise that providers are responding to national and regional skills policy and funding methodologies for particular programmes and that this drives behaviours. In totality, FE funding is focussed heavily upon providing skills for young people and those who are unemployed. The recent focus on upskilling the existing work force through an additional emphasis on lifelong learning and skills for continuous employment is welcome as it will enhance relationships between providers and employers and stimulate co-design of delivery.

> *The big providers are responding to funding, the regulatory and funding backdrop is what drives behaviour. And it is difficult to move away from that. And that is where the bureaucracy comes from. That is where the jargon comes from.*

SY partners have the knowledge and capacity to manage an increased devolved skills pot, and its needs to build central Government's confidence in this, to apply for further devolved funding which can be used to meet local learner and employer demand. Current funding is provided through a mix of regionally devolved funding and funding for regional delivery of national programmes coming from ESFA/DfE and DWP. Some legacy ESF programmes are still being delivered. The MCA will lead the conversation about the long-term plans and financial model behind future programmes for the sub-region to ensure local needs are determined and funded locally.

> *Due to the complexity of funding, it is incredibly difficult to 'simplify and clarify' the offer. We are now subject to the requirement to tender for most funding streams and to a broad range of funding streams which make the offer to employers difficult to translate. This includes the adult education budget, Bootcamps, apprenticeships, European funding, and community renewal fund. [Feedback received on this plan from FE Principal]*

> *Increases in the flexibility of how funding can be accessed and used, such as opportunities to utilise and share unspent Apprenticeship Levy funding to support employers to upskill mentors, or to raise awareness / generate additional demand through additional apprenticeship ambassadors. Additional tax relief, in the form of a skills rebate system, where employers receive credits for the time they spend working with schools, mentoring students, supporting universities and the FE sector would all stimulate additional engagement. [Skills Accelerator Workshop]*

THEME TWO: PROACTIVE APPROACH TO ENGAGING EMPLOYERS

Key message: Conversations between employers and skills providers need to improve with wider engagement to reach a broader market. Both providers and employers need to be able to articulate and understand business needs and the skills offer. Employers struggle to build and maintain relationships with skills providers due to a lack of time or resource. Yet, statistical evidence shows SY businesses do want to be more involved in the skills system. More promotion of the benefits to business of skills engagement is needed. SY has great examples of employer engagement in the skills system to build on.

Across SY, there are over 49,020 local business units and education providers including colleges and universities currently engage with over 16% (8,000 employers) of these. The recommendations within the LSIP will broaden this reach.

> *Engaging with micro and small employers is the largest challenge providers face. This included the number of businesses and the return on investment as the volume of businesses who actually engage and take up training is very low due to key reasons such as the ability to release staff and the cost of training where no funding is available [Feedback received on this plan from FE Principal]*

There is room to improve communication between employers, intermediaries, and providers to bring demand and supply increasingly closer together. Although the FE sector works with a wide range of employers the resounding feedback is that it is time for a deeper form of engagement which involves employers in supporting the design and delivery of provision. Employers within groups such as the FSB and Chambers are not in competition with each other for training, sometimes the opposite where scale is an advantage. However, groups of training providers are by admission in competition with each other. So, an impartial dialogue or intermediary may be needed to provide the best result for the employers' training needs.

Consultees would like to see an ecosystem in which it is natural for businesses and educational providers to engage and work together. A 'Referral protocol' or agreement between providers was suggested to ensure that the best training option goes to the employer rather than something off the shelf that 'will do'.

It was important that existing provider client relationships are business critical and should not be disrupted with new brokers targeting existing customers. The emphasis needs to be on targeting employers not already engaged within the skills system.

> *If brokers target providers existing customers, this would impact on business, partnerships and existing customer relationships, and our Ofsted, ESFA and other funding requirements. [Feedback received on this plan from FE Principal]*

All providers have their own websites, and any central routing would need to be objective and focused on sub-regional priorities. The sheer range of qualifications, short courses and bespoke provision which changes throughout the year is daunting and meaning the development and maintenance of a new central 'library' website of this overall offer would be challenging and resource intensive. Jointly funded navigation systems (if appropriate) were preferrable to publicly funded 'impartial' brokerage models that, over time, have proven to be ineffective.

There is a desire to minimise employer frustration with the current sales and funding led approach to skills and training with a shift to impartial support focused on business growth, with the 'wiring' hidden from view. This is the approach taken in the SY MCA Skills Bank offer. Employers do not have the time to commit to engage in regular or occasional employer forums and one college reported seeing a high turnover in employers due to operational pressures. This needs incentivising to maintain engagement and support. (See recommendations).

Most providers already have some form of Employer Forum in place; recommendations contained in this report are designed to add value to these by stimulating demand and encourage more employers to discuss and develop new curriculum and help meet their needs.

Communication: Providers and employers need to engage in a more meaningful / comprehensive dialogue, through sector specific discussions, Industry Liaison Groups and Sector Networks designed to overcome barriers around resource, time, language, and terminology. Employers currently do not always feel listened to and that they can influence the system and the provision on offer. The recommendations are designed to maximise the reach and talents of the sub-region's collective business engagement workforce and enhance collaboration within the ecosystem. Through anchor employers, those involved in this plan, tax measures, new collaboration infrastructure (the proposed Institute of Technology) and other measures will encourage more employers to engage proactively in the skills system and to invest in workforce development.

Building Relationships. The building of working relationships with employers / employer representative bodies is essential, but time consuming and labour intensive. It is crucial, but more difficult to build relationships with micro and small business. There is an opportunity to increase the role of intermediaries, including Chambers to make use of existing trusted relationships. Employers require fewer but more meaningful contact points and want the funding / programme wiring to be hidden, leading to the presentation of clear transparent skills options. This might include what is free to employers, what's covered by the Levy and what would need to be funded by a business.

> *There are difficulties for SMEs who lack the access and influence to shape local skills provisions which causes damages to businesses and regional economies.*

There is evidence that employers do want to be more proactively involved. Approximately 30% of respondents indicated that their planned level of engagement will increase with schools, colleges and universities over the next year, whilst 19% indicate that they would like to be involved in programme design and 17% in programme delivery.

The Business Benefits: Intermediaries / providers need to be able to describe and give clarity on the individual and business benefits of skills acquisition. Engaging with the system is not without cost, therefore it is crucial to ensure it is viable and worthwhile, with clear returns on investment.

Evidence shows that employers are willing to engage and view the introduction of the Skills Accelerator work as a major step forward in employer involvement in the system. They understand that they will need to provide time and investment to become increasingly involved in the long term practical strategic steps which will make a real difference to the SY economy.

Articulation of Business Needs. It is essential for dialogue to be truly two-way to ensure communication of local skills needs. A lack of up-to-date labour market information and sector knowledge can hinder relationships and cloud the employers view of the adequacy and ability of the system to meet their needs.

Government (national, regional, local), industry bodies alongside employers and their representative bodies need to become increasingly adept at articulating need and then focus upon generating sustained demand for that provision. Improvements to data regarding supply and demand will allow for better interrogation of the system by employers allowing them to inform, support and challenge provision. Employers highlight that there are currently not robust processes across SY to map both the supply and demand of skills provision by locality and sector. A real time skills data system is recommended within the Roadmap.

Working Together: There are examples across SY of providers and employers and industry bodies working together to design curriculum (Sheffield College working with the NHS to develop bespoke programmes supported by employer practitioners) and the Homebuilders Federation supporting colleges by upskilling lecturers and tutors in the latest industry standard bricklaying techniques. Developing partnerships between employers and providers would improve provision for instance through co-design, potentially backfill FE skills and staffing gaps and improve the supply of materials and technology through donations and/or employer sponsorship. The Skills Accelerator employer survey indicates that 19% of respondents currently or are prepared to provide I.T. digital or technical equipment.

> *We need to be much more serious about co-design. The UTC have found employers more than willing to contribute to the curriculum (digital and engineering). The biggest gains we have seen is where the technical elements of the curriculum are delivered as a partnership by teacher and employer.*
>
> *The University of Sheffield AMRC Technology Centre has an industry advisory board that works hand in hand with the team to develop the curriculum.*

THEME THREE: RESPONSIVE PROVISION

Key message: More agility is needed in the skills system and funding should support this. Employers want provision to be more modular, flexible, and not always formally accredited to meet their changing skills needs. Employers find collaborating with skills providers in delivery difficult but recognise the important role they can play within this. Skills providers are struggling to recruit and retain staff particularly in STEAM and digital subjects. Curriculums and programme design does not always align with the world of work and results in skills gaps particularly in soft skills. Leaders play a significant role in creating a 'learning culture' which promotes continuous skill development and allows employees to 'push up'.

There are a wide range of providers / provider types delivering technical skills across SY and responsiveness will differ amongst them, with smaller niche providers often the most agile. Training provider offers are understandably shaped by national funding requirements rather than employer need. AEB funding is exceptionally low for short bespoke training which impacts on viability. Providers have been pioneering bite sized continuous professional development, shaped and refined by industry.

Good Practice in SY: the University of Sheffield AMRC Technology Centre have designed a tailored range of short on-line and in person courses informed by what the manufacturing sector needs to thrive and grow[6], whilst Sheffield Hallam University has developed responsive degree apprenticeships in their engineering and logistics' faculties.

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[6] These range from metals, materials and machining to leadership and continuous improvement. See here.

Most skills funding has been targeted at young people and unemployed adults and is less focussed on skills for those in the workforce. Colleges traditionally deliver it over academic years. SY need to ensure that the funding allocated supports what businesses want in a timely fashion. More flexibility or financial support locally would help employers meet their needs and/or afford or fund training.

The pandemic has accelerated opportunities for online learning and digital curriculum development this can improve the flexibility of the offer and can help to reduce the 29% of employers who reported they had difficulties with the timetabling of curriculum. There is a global market in digital learning assets and there is an opportunity to increase local participation / access without increasing local provision. Opportunities to both purchase and produce 'our own' provision should be explored when considering opportunities for SY portals. Digital technology means some roles can be performed remotely and provides an opportunity maximise the ecosystem of skills support for business by supporting SY businesses wherever their staff are based and using SY EdTech providers more routinely.

Funding Driven. Skills provision is by necessity funding driven, most often funding participation and full qualifications. The system needs to become more agile to meet the needs of employers, with employers highlighting the need for a 'just in time approach to skills'. Employers and individuals see qualifications as important, but there is a recognition that skills are valuable within the workplace. Current funding methodologies do not easily support the types of provision providers indicate employers need.

Provision needs to be more modular, flexible and not always formally accredited. The long lead in times for the planning and development of qualifications hinders the ability to respond quickly and effectively to skills needs. Providers can develop non-accredited provision rapidly injunction with employers and deliver them almost immediately if funding is available.

Employers cited the opportunities for a Learning and Skills Tax relief system, which could be used to promote engagement and involvement in skills. This might include development and delivery of the curriculum, rewarding employers for giving back to schools and FE providers, supporting tutor CPD, and increasing awareness of opportunities in key sectors.

Employer and stakeholders highlighted that was the employers' responsibility to ensure their workforce was sufficiently training and fit for purpose, and a recognition that the necessary upskilling will not always be fully or part funded/subsidised.

Communication / Working together. There is a lack of opportunity for employers to be involved in curriculum design and delivery and employers recognise that they are part of the solution and are prepared to support through Industry Liaison / sectoral groups.

Industry can better support teaching staff and help impart knowledge to learners through skilled practitioners supporting the delivery of training where appropriate, helping skills provision to keep pace with advances in technology and industry practices.

There is a significant issue with tutor recruitment and retention, particularly in STEAM and digital subjects, which is affecting the quality and availability of programmes in some areas. There is an opportunity to amplify the 'Teach in FE Campaign and to work in partnership with sector groups such as the Construction Industry Training Board who are surveying FE colleges and Independent Training Providers nationally to identify and map trades and areas with the greatest staffing issues. There are opportunities for targeted SY pilots to encourage older workers who are exploring retirement to end their careers in teaching, imparting their experience and knowledge to others.

A focus on tutor development, particularly in terms of returning to the "coalface" through spending time in industry is recommended through the introduction of a programme to provide industry placements for teaching staff and education leaders to better understand the needs of industry.

> *We have a lack of tutors, assessors & high staff turnover. This is impacting on the availability and quality of courses; levels of communication (and feedback) between employer & provider and achievement.*

Employers highlighted that the levels of business support and customer services were variable and finding programmes and engaging was sometimes difficult. Employers need to support providers by communicating the service they require and raising expectations and providers need to commit to delivering it.

Curriculum: Providers can and do bespoke curriculum for employers, but this is typically for larger employers who can build cohorts of learners. There is a need to ensure that the curriculum meets the requirements of small employers and that they have appropriate opportunities to influence. This provides a real opportunity for SME-led curriculum design pilots, in areas such as construction and other sectors with a sizeable proportion of small and micro employers.

> *Some parts of FE are not that responsive to bespoke provision (unless there is an entire cohort from an employer, which enables influence). Colleges need viable numbers in order to influence, make changes and adjust delivery or offer bespoke support.*

Employers highlight the need for a blended curriculum, including technical skills with core / meta skills. The softer skills such as communication, adaptability, resilience, collaboration, critical thinking. It was recognised that these 'core' skills require regular updating for both those in work and those joining the workforce.

Programme design does not always reflect how industry works. There are significant opportunities to develop new methods of curriculum design and teaching; such as delivering digital skills through multi-functional teams who, design, develop and deliver a real-world product in conjunction with industry. This could include the potential for students to 'take over' responsibility for digital assets as part of courses supporting platforms of benefit to SY such as voluntary sector organisations.

The UK Government is moving ahead with plans to cut funding for art and design courses by 50% across higher education institutions in England in favour of STEM related subjects. This will make many arts and design courses unviable, affect student preparedness for the workplace and vulnerable institutions were forced to reduce investment in high-cost technology and technical support.

THEME FOUR: CELEBRATING SUCCESS – ACTIVATING EMPLOYER LEARNING.

Key Message: Work with local employers highlights a barrier to engagement with the skills sector as well as a lack of highlighting the success of skills provision in SY, promoting good practice and stimulating demand through positive messaging and myth busting. Consistent, easily accessible skills messaging and the dissemination of Good Practice is needed.

Learning Cultures. Stakeholders were keen to develop learning cultures within employers, particularly micro and small employers, potentially supported by industry mentors. There was a desire to target leaders to remove barriers by clearly articulating the benefits of skills acquisition and challenging employer views on skills, the sector and their own behaviours and experiences, such as:

1. A reluctance to upskill staff in case they leave or join competitors.
2. Lack of resources (time, money, management and administration) to upskill staff.
3. Clarity on the costs and benefits.
4. Inflexibility of system that does not meet their requirements.
5. Previous experiences of the skills system.
6. Cognitive barriers such as 'choice overload' and 'scarcity mindset'.

Good Practice: HLM Architects has designed its own in-house Academy, a professional development programme, consisting of a mix of internally and externally delivered modules, courses, webinars, coaching, mentoring, and graduate training, blended with on-line resources via Linked-in Learning, aligned to a Skills Framework. This helps individuals develop skills through the stages of Leading Self, Leading Others, Leading Growth, Leading the Future, mapping out and supporting a clear career pathway and providing equity of opportunity for all staff, and was supported by Skills Bank Funding.

Employee Demand. Alongside leaders and managers driving an organisational learning culture, the stakeholder workshops noted that it was important for employees to 'push up' and demand upskilling opportunities. Employer engagement officers and trained specialists such as trade union learning representatives, as can help support this process, by identifying need and researching appropriate provision.

The Foundational Economy. Partners were keen that any priorities considered the requirements of the foundational economy. This is about the big employment sectors that service everyday lives. Their role needs to be championed and celebrated appropriately.

> *We need a multitude of skills and it is the value you add to someone's life that gives them that respect in themselves to become an asset to society.*

Good Practice. Providers take proactive measures to celebrate success and there is much to build on – many have their own celebrations and graduations. SY Colleges sub-regional marketing plan is currently being developed includes case studies a myth-busting campaign around apprenticeships.

As a provider, we use case studies on our website, in the press, in social media etc to raise the profile of what employers and learners achieve. Additional opportunities for this are always welcome. [Plan feedback from College Principal]

THEME FIVE: PROMOTING BETTER PATHWAYS

Key message: There are inequalities within the workforce, which targeted skills provision can help to address. There are several initiatives across SY attempting to address inequalities, these should be built upon, and new pilots develop to address entrenched issues. SY needs to better showcase the breadth of career opportunities and to help challenge systemic challenges about a lack of diversity in certain sectors. Covid-19 has highlighted the need for mental health and resilience to be improved across the workforce and form company leaders to promote employee well-being.

SY has significant numbers of residents with low or no qualifications lower than average productivity and issues with skilled labour moving out of SY. A number of groups are marginalised from the workforce, and this lack of diversity impacts innovation, creativity and productivity. Both employers and skills providers need to embrace diversity and build better pathways into employment through removing barriers to skills provision.

> *All providers work heavily in this area but commitment to longer term projects and support for individuals would be welcome. [Plan feedback from College Principal]*

Of course, some shortages are a result of jobs on offer. For example, one of the reasons why there is a shortage of LGV drivers is the perception of unsociable hours and poor working conditions making the job unattractive.

Diversity. There are significant current labour shortages, alongside skills gaps in a number of sectors and employers will need to recruit from a broader talent pool, which presents opportunities to rebalance under representation and improve diversity. It is suggested that there is an issue about supporting women, Minority Ethnic and disabled people in work once they have received training. Low pay, childcare costs, and lack of reasonable adjustments in the workplace mean it can be difficult for people to sustain work. Partners want to support people to succeed at work by adjusting to their needs and/or addressing their barriers and having better visual representation so people can see themselves represented in the workforce with role models, PR, media, school visits etc.

Good Practice: Sheffield Digital highlighted the Innovate Her to SY (see https://innovateher.co.uk/) and targeting the sub-region's service centres for upskilling into tech roles. At one point over 60% of all PlusNet's development team had come from their call centre and been upskilled through their internal programme.

Sector organisations such as the CITB recognise that diversity is an issue within recruitment practices in the construction sector. This presents significant opportunities but to maximise potential benefits of a change in practice requires a more personalised and tailored approach to the career's guidance offer in addition to specific programmes that help these cohorts of people into jobs.

Some parts of the digital sector for example struggles to recruit women, and those from white working-class backgrounds.

> *The industry will need to consider how to attract, train, and retain entrants from other sectors and under-represented and hard-to-reach groups, including adult re-skillers, Minority Ethnic, NEETS, long-term unemployed, and economically inactive.*

Good Practice: The construction industry has introduced the Fairness, Inclusion and Respect (FIR) programme that provides training and resources to help employers instil an inclusive work environment.

There are examples of a range of targeted skills and employment programmes aimed at promoting inclusion, from which SY can develop Good Practice, however they need to be mainstreamed as they tended to be funded through ESF and did not achieve sustainability post discretionary funding.

AESSEAL a manufacturer of sealing solutions is passionate about increasing the numbers of women in engineering. There is a shortage of girls studying A Level physics and this is crucial to study engineering at University. The organisation worked with the University of Sheffield, Sheffield Hallam University and

Queens University Belfast, to invest in and support female engineering students who had not studied physics at advanced level previously.

HLM Architects was keen to see alternative routes developed into architecture and was part of the Trailblazer Group that developed two architectural apprenticeship standards. Sheffield Hallam University will be the first provider in the north to introduce Level 6 alongside their existing Level 7 next year. HLM have developed a programme of interlinked interventions from primary school through to sixth form to raise awareness of the various career roles in architecture throughout the learner journey, and to promote the apprenticeship as a new and more accessible pathway, bringing much needed diversity to the profession.

Work / Practical Experience: Employers highlight the lack of practical work experience that candidates possess, and this has been exacerbated by the pandemic. This has led to a noticeable drop in workplace and work socialisation skills. Employers indicate a willingness to offer work experience and 23% of respondents in the survey indicated that they would like guidance and support to ensure placements are worthwhile.

Work experience is key to being job ready, everyone recognises this, and it is being factored into DWP initiatives, T levels etc. but more funding is needed to support businesses to provide the necessary structure to do more of this.

There is a need to make it easier for employers to offer meaningful experiences to those in education and skills. Employers need to recognise that when they employ a young person it is often their first time in employment and so they will need to develop core soft skills within their job role. Apprenticeships recognise this as a core requirement of their learning and the proposed Hub will be able to offer valuable advice to employers in this area. Sheffield City Council produced an Employer Work Experience Toolkit to simplify process and encourage the reluctant employers.

To help young people prepare for the world of work and to reduce the burden on SME employers, it is recommended that measures – with a focus on work readiness and commerciality – are introduced and made available to all of the sub-region's graduates. A Bootcamp is proposed in Theme Five to address this.

Careers Advice: The availability and quality of careers advice was seen as a significant skills barrier, particularly the lack of sector specific advice and support. It was highlighted that in many sectors, self-employment is the norm, and so help for young people to prepare for this option should be a central part of the careers advice available, including signposting of skills and training that support new entrepreneurs and those setting up new businesses. There is merit in extending the remit of the Careers Hub to support the primary sector to better highlight the breadth of career opportunities in the sub-region and to help challenge systemic challenges about a lack of diversity in certain sectors.

More guidance from schools and careers when talking to students; building a pipeline of young people to come into the industry – making them aware of progression routes etc.

STEM careers are often inadequately understood by career advice and guidance providers which can cause learners to seek the information themselves, which some are ill equipped to do.

Mental Health and Resilience: Covid-19 has adversely impacted upon many people's mental health, and it has particularly affected those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The TUC highlighted the issue and stressed the need for mental health awareness to be part of a local response to improving and updating core skills provision. As mentioned, new recruits are not the 'finished article', they are ready to develop into an employee and often today have mental health concerns and lack confidence due to the impact of Covid-19. This is where employers need to support and access funding by training providers to help as well. Delivering training does not change attitudes and behaviours; it provides skills and knowledge that they then have to learn how to put into practice in the workplace.

3.3. LESSONS FROM SDF PILOTS

SY STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT FUND

The SDF will respond directly to the recommendations made in this LSIP and activities will include but not be limited to the development of a suite of bite sized online skills modules focussed at improving the digital literacy of employees across all sectors, through working with employers to better understand employer needs and current skills gaps.

The programmes are being developed in partnership with employers and an awarding body (Gateway Qualifications), they are non-accredited but will be certificated using both Skills Accelerator and employer branding.

The programmes will be digitised and made freely available to employers and employees online through the SY Skills Accelerator website and social media platforms.

PROGRESS

The first stand-alone modules have been developed following one to one consultation with a specific employer for each activity and are currently being tested by other employers. They cover the following:

- Using Microsoft Forms.
- Using Microsoft Office 365.

There are plans to develop further modular programmes including:

- An introduction to Cyber Security.
- Social Media Marketing.
- Digital Marketing.
- Data Analysis.
- Basic I.T. Networking.

The pilot will engage with employers across SY via various college and provider business development colleagues who will introduce the modules and encourage the development of further additional subject topics currently not included in the list above.

The DfE has extended the pilot until November 2022, providing seven additional months for delivery.

LESSONS

The lessons from the SDF are as follows:

- The concurrent delivery of an SDF that is designed to respond directly to an LSIP is challenging.
- The opportunity to be actively involved in the LSIP is essential to the potential successful delivery of the SDF response.

LEGACY

The project aims to show the benefits of co-design of online programmes with employers as a pilot / proof of concept exercise. The pilot:

- Introduces a new way of working with employers.
- Involves the co-development of products, with employers throughout SY.
- Will offer free to access, high quality bite size courses.
- Will meaningfully engage employers with the local skills system and encourage the development of learning cultures and access to further skills provision.

Discussions with SY MCA are on going regarding future funding through devolved Adult Education Budgets. The SY Accelerator Board members will signpost businesses to colleges interested in digital literacy and keep the colleges informed of what businesses wanted to be engaged across the sub-region.

4. SY ACCELERATOR LSIP ROADMAP FOR DELIVERING CHANGE

THEME 1: NAVIGATION

Leadership*	Potential Supporters	Recommendation
Sub-Regional	Providers Businesses	1. Business have told us that they find it difficult to effectively and efficiently access training opportunities that meet their needs. It is recommended that an audit of existing, publicly funded, skills portals and brokerage services be undertaken to improve quality, reach and usability. If there is a need for a new or evolved navigation system; it should have a focus on simplicity and be designed and configured for simple and effective use by micro businesses and SMEs.
Providers	Sub-Regional	2. Businesses have stated that existing skills portals and navigation systems are rarely up to date. To ensure the longevity, performance, and accountability of skills portals and navigation systems, it is recommended that the sub-region and providers particularly, explore the possibility of jointly funded navigation systems rather than relying on publicly funded 'impartial' brokerage models that, over time, have sometimes proven to be ineffective.
Sub-Regional	Providers	3. Businesses know there is untapped potential in our communities and that they are open to talent wherever it comes from. To help stimulate upskilling in the workforce and directly empower communities, it is recommended that a service consistent with the MCA's commitment to all-age careers provision be created that helps SY's residents identify meaningful and relevant training and development opportunities that they can access.
Sub-Regional	Providers Businesses	4. Businesses said it needs to be easier to access and develop technical skill sets. To help businesses simply access technical talent, it is recommended that an Apprenticeship Hub is introduced for the sub-region and promoted by a large-scale and high-impact annual apprenticeship campaign, including high profile events that are open to communities.

THEME 2: PROACTIVE EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

Leadership	Potential Supporters	Recommendation
National		5. Businesses stated that they want to proactively engage in the skills system and further invest in their workforce, but that this needs incentivising. It is recommended that enhanced tax support be introduced by National Government – possibly along the lines of R&D Tax Credits or via the Annual Investment Allowance.
National	Sub-Regional	6. Providers and stakeholders have identified an ongoing need to engage with a more diverse range of businesses. It is recommended the family of business organisations (national and local) engaged in the LSIP pilot is further developed and

		that business engagement and insight continues to be appropriately paid for as it was in the Trailblazer, as this will drive the quantum and quality of insight gleaned.
Sub-Regional	Providers Businesses	7. Businesses have told us that they want high quality, easy to access, and up to date advice and guidance on supporting their skills and training development needs. To maximise the reach and talents of the sub-region's collective business engagement workforce – and to engage more businesses in the skills ecosystem, whether in growth sectors or the foundational economy – it is recommended regular knowledge and development activities be delivered to help business-facing colleagues in organisations learn more about skills provision in the area to improve advice, signpost support and drive increased referrals. This would include Chambers, the Federation of Small Businesses, local authority business teams, gateway staff and so forth. Investment into a dedicated employer engagement resource, for instance through SYMCA Gainshare, would also be helpful.
Sub-Regional		8. Businesses want to understand the opportunities to access, and then benefit from, resources to support skills and training. To help demonstrate the resources available to the sub-region and stimulate employer activity, it is recommended that a method is identified to estimate and report on the sub-region's collective unspent Apprenticeship Levy funds on at least an annual basis and to establish a simple way in which underspend can be redistributed across the sub-region business community
Sub-Regional	Businesses	9. Businesses want more support from their peers and some anchor employers have committed their willingness to offer help. To help SMEs take a strategic approach to skills planning, it is recommended that a bank of anchor employers is developed to mentor SMEs with high-growth potential specifically in relation to recruitment, retention, and skills development.
Sub-Regional	Providers	10. Businesses said they want more support in maximising talent and increasing the productivity of their current workforce. It is recommended that a programme of short courses be introduced for middle leaders – possibly along the lines of Common Purpose or the Help to Grow programme – to promote better people management in the sub-region's priority sectors.
Sub-Regional	Businesses	11. Businesses highlighted that they wanted simple and easy to follow advice to help them more effectively recruit, retain and develop their workforce. It is recommended that an annually refreshed 'how to' guide – along with supporting digital assets – is produced and sent to each employer in the sub-region including hints and tips and signposting to local agencies that can provide support and assistance including highlighting the benefits of continuous learning.
Business	Sub-Regional	12. Employees and employer representative bodies have told us that they want more opportunity to influence skills planning. It is recommended that to encourage a more holistic view of a business's skills need and growth potential, transferable mechanisms are developed to include stronger employee voice in relation to skills planning, possibly starting with anchor employers and / or employee-owned businesses that can share their best practice via case studies and mentoring with SMEs
Providers	Sub-Regional	13. Businesses claimed that higher technical skills are imperative to economic growth and that they would like to see more collaboration within the further and higher education sector. The proposed Institute of Technology, if approved, will provide solutions to both of these issues, but is not yet widely understood by the private sector. Therefore, to help maximise the opportunities afforded by the IoT, it is recommended that a significant marketing campaign is developed to promote the

		proposed IoT to the business communities to drive engagement with the new institution and influence the development of its offer to employers.
Business	Providers Sub-Regional	14. Providers have articulated that they want more opportunity to better understand the needs of industry; for example, recognising the scope and application of higher digital skills. It is recommended that a programme be introduced to provide industry placements for teaching staff and education leaders enabling dual professionalism with employers supporting specialist delivery.
Sub-Regional	Providers Businesses	15. Providers have stressed that there are currently acute shortages of industry specialist tutors within both FE and HEI settings. It is recommended that specific campaigns are developed to attract skilled retirees into the education sector including a transition programme to help retain and retrain those who are leaving industry but that could be inspired to lecture or teach.
Sub-Regional	Providers	16. SMEs have concerns that there is a risk and burden on employers in taking on apprentices. It is recommended that the groundwork is laid to prepare an application to DfE / ESFA for a SY Flexi-Job apprenticeship if / when further applications are invited. This will allow groups of employers to share the experience of employing an apprentice with others and to have the overall apprenticeship managed and co-ordinated by an Apprenticeship Flexi-Job Apprenticeship Agency.

THEME 3: RESPONSIVE PROVISION

Leadership	Potential Supporters	Recommendation
National		17. Businesses, providers and stakeholders want a more holistic opportunity to review and refine the skills system in order to meet the needs of employers. It is recommended that, when rolled out nationally, LSIP deliverers are not briefed by the DfE to focus primarily on the Further Education sector but to be fully inclusive of other providers including private providers and HEIs.
National		18. STEAM based employers have growing and ever changing technical education needs but that some existing qualifications are still fit for purpose and highly regarded by industry. It is recommended that BTECs are preserved on the curriculum where possible and that National Government reconsiders the erosion of this recognised and valued qualification.
National		19. Businesses think that some recent skills policy decisions will potentially be hard to implement, such as the work experience requirement within T-Levels, even if it can be shared between employers; this demonstrates that whilst Government is sometimes good at co-designing skills policy with industry, it tends to be with the larger employers that have the time to invest in detailed conversations with the public sector. To ensure that the needs of SMEs are understood and respected, it is recommended that Government place a much greater emphasis on working with, and addressing the concerns of, small and micro businesses at the policy design stage.

Sub-Regional	Providers Businesses	20. Businesses were unsure of how to influence the skills system and get their voices heard. To develop partnerships and understand business requirements, it is recommended that quarterly events be introduced to brief providers on the evolving needs of the private sector; these sessions would be informed by data and led by sector champions.
Sub-Regional	Providers Businesses National	21. Providers would like more regular access to local labour market trends and data to help them respond to the needs of businesses. It is recommended a robust and real time skills data system is introduced and promoted for local use that is fed by jobs boards, recruitment agencies, anchor employers, and SMEs; the data should be publicly available and proactively sent to providers on a quarterly basis. The SY Data and Intelligence Hub hosted by SYMCA provides a starting point for this facility.
Providers	Sub-Regional	22. Businesses and business organisations say it is sometimes hard to translate their skills needs into language and data that is understandable and useful to providers. It is recommended that – through the SDF – the provider community produce a standardised set of data and evidence requirements to which the business community can easily respond
Providers	Business Sub-Regional	23. Businesses wanted assurances that they will be quickly supported by the provider network when requesting training and development assistance and that their expectations of swift and supportive customer service will be met. It is recommended that a pledge is introduced enabling providers to publicly commit to rapid response times and customer service and performance standards.
Sub-Regional	Providers	24. Providers and partners wanted to see investment into skills capacity retained within the SY provider network. It is recommended that SYMCA take steps within its commissioning approach to improve social value returns to the sub-region by increasing the proportion of total provision delivered by providers with a SY base.
Providers	Business Sub-Regional	25. Businesses need more bespoke, modular approaches to training and development that provide a mix and match approach whilst also creating recognised pathways for learners to demonstrate their capabilities. It is recommended that the provider community place a greater emphasis on an employer focused offer with short courses and bite-sized learning with a variety of modes of delivery, supported by a system of micro-badging and credentialing. Such courses might potentially be funded via gainshare monies once the Strategic Development Fund has timed out.
Sub-Regional	Providers	26. Businesses, partners and providers claim that better systems thinking and a more agile skills system is needed. It is recommended that subject to SYMCA approval, the capacity of the MCA's skills team is boosted by secondments or placements and joint roles from the local authorities and potentially other partners too, for example Chambers and Universities.
Providers	Sub-Regional Businesses	27. Businesses and providers want to create better collaboration between industry and education. It is recommended that more opportunities for co-location – building on the best practice between Barnsley College and Barnsley and Rotherham Chamber of Commerce – are explored and encouraged.
Providers	Business Sub-Regional	28. Businesses have told us that that the skills being taught in (or out) of the classroom need to be kept current and up to date. It is recommended that a similar programme to SHU's Entrepreneurs in Residence and Expert in Residence programme is

		scaled up across education and training providers to release more individuals from business into the education community to support learning and teaching as guest lecturers with an initial focus on digital skills
Sub-Regional	Businesses Providers	29. SY's digital sector employers insist the pace of change in relation to digital skills demand requires significant changes within our education and skills system to meet that demand. It is recommended that future iterations of the LSIP retain an overt focus on digital skills; to support this, further expertise and experience could be identified from within the digital sector than work across industries to help articulate their digital skills needs and highlight the potential for the application of digital skills across a range of sectors. It is suggested that the knowledge and resources of SY EdTech sector is use to improve outcomes for SY learners.
Providers	Businesses	30. Digital businesses have told us that the way learners are taught in schools too often reflects the skills and behaviours required in some of the sub-region's legacy sectors. It is recommended that new learning experiences are developed and tested with employers and providers working collaboratively on interdisciplinary projects. This will unlock the capabilities of people to design, develop and deploy new products and services whilst gaining valuable work readiness skills.

THEME 4: CELEBRATING, SPOTLIGHTING AND SCALING UP SUCCESS

Leadership	Potential Supporters	Recommendation
Sub-Regional	Providers Businesses	31. Businesses and Providers have told us about the breadth of career opportunities and examples of innovative learning practices happening across SY. It is recommended that an annual and nationally significant 'Festival of Learning' is introduced for the sub-region to promote SY as having superb career opportunities and a commitment to delivering continuous learning and better outcomes for businesses and communities, The festival could also encourage community-based learning and parental engagement.
Sub-Regional	Providers Businesses	32. Businesses, Providers, and partners have highlighted many examples of local best practice including great work that is taking place in UTCs, Further Education, Higher Education, and the private provider market. It is recommended that a SY Skills and Education Awards is introduced. This should also recognise best practice, engagement and employer initiatives and celebrate apprenticeship success and graduation events to raise awareness and add recognition of different work pathways.
Sub-Regional	Businesses	33. Businesses want a more cohesive route to access emerging talent and promote themselves to labour market entrants as employers of choice. It is recommended that well marketed and resourced programme – along the lines of 'Investors in Young People' – is introduced. This should also consider and highlight businesses who are continuously upskilling and re-skilling and repurposing talent, providing great places to work with flexibility of offering to allow individuals to progress and work when and where they can do their best work.

Sub-Regional		34. Business, providers and partners have given examples of current and previous best practice that all have short term funding. It is recommended that the MCA and local authorities engage in a conversation about the long-term plans and financial model behind these programmes to ensure they are preserved and developed, for example Get Up To Speed, Opportunities Doncaster Live, CAFÉ, Code Make Win, Code4000 and many others.
Sub-Regional	Providers	35. Businesses want to know what difference to the economy and skills system has been made through this work and other skills workstreams. It is recommended that to evidence impact and measure success a report will be published for employers highlighting what has been achieved and the impact this is making on the local economy, education, and skills ecosystem – this will include examples of innovation and creative approaches.

THEME 5: PROMOTING BETTER PATHWAYS

Leadership	Potential Supporters	Recommendation
National		36. Businesses require skills such as creativity, problem-solving, team working, and performing under pressure. It is recommended that damaging cuts to arts education are reversed and that arts pathways – including those that lead to other sectors – are promoted.
National	Sub-Regional	37. Businesses claim there are talented people unable to access or remain in the labour market due to childcare and carer responsibilities. It is recommended that childcare and carer funding to support people into and stay in work is increased and significantly simplified.
Sub-Regional	Providers Businesses	38. Partners and providers assert that the number and remit of skills boards and groups needs to be refined to avoid duplication of effort. To create a more joined up approach to skills planning in SY and therefore create better pathways, it is recommended that the Skills Accelerator and Skills Advisory Network Boards merge and take on a greater role in policy formation to inform the recommendations being made by the SYMCA Executive to the SYMCA Education, Skills, and Employability Board. The new Board should be inclusive of providers but be led by the private sector and include a majority of private sector members.
Sub-Regional	Businesses	39. Businesses claim that they are meritocratic and civic minded and that they want to attract and develop people from disadvantaged backgrounds. It is recommended that a new programme be introduced to make it easier for employers to engage with the sub-region's prisons and offenders; thus, ensuring that those leaving the criminal justice system are equipped for the world of work and can access gainful employment. The excellent work done by Code 4000 to train inmates and those on probation to be professional software developers and secure them work could provide a scalable template for this activity.
Sub-Regional	Businesses	40. Businesses and stakeholders believe that talented women are often disadvantaged when it comes to developing their careers. It is recommended that pilots are introduced that would enable more women to access work in priority sectors and support employees to remain in work and succeed by adjusting to their needs and/or addressing barriers faced such as childcare.

Sub-Regional	Businesses	41. Businesses and stakeholders say that untapped talent is impacting on skills growth across the sub-region. To create better pathways for former forces workers – many of whom are well placed to meet the skills needs of local employers – it is recommended that a campaign is developed to promote the adoption of the Armed Forces Covenant and to explore the potential of previous programmes. For instance, there was a programme developed by a SHU Computing and Forensics undergraduate to reskill ex-forces personal in cybersecurity, called Tech for Troops that could be used as a template for this.
Sub-regional	Providers	42. Individuals have insisted training and development for those not in employment currently needs to support them into work more effectively. It is recommended that employability support to develop programmes for disadvantaged communities that, following a period of training and development, provide guaranteed job interviews - possibly working with anchor businesses or those in the digital sector. This could build on, and replicate, where appropriate successful elements of the ESF Pathways programme and existing local authority programmes.
Sub-Regional	Providers Businesses	43. Apprentices want more opportunities for professional development and gain peer support. It is recommended that an Apprenticeship Network for those who are currently undertaking or have successfully completed an apprenticeship is created and maintained by the sub-region.
Sub-Regional	Businesses	44. Businesses want to engage more with young people throughout their education and to provide meaningful encounters within the workplace. It is recommended that an annually refreshed 'how to' guide – along with supporting digital assets is developed and sent to each employer in the sub-region including hints and tips for engagement with schools and colleges, providing work experience and placements, and helping with the co-design of curriculum.
Providers	Sub-Regional	45. Businesses maintain that many of the young people they employ, particularly graduates, and are not ready for the workplace placing a burden on the employer to get them up to speed. It is recommended that 'last mile' Bootcamps – with a focus on work readiness and commerciality – are introduced and made available to all of the sub-region's graduates with common language frameworks around employability skills. This would also support graduates into sub-regional SMEs and/or help them develop skills to pivot to hard to fill jobs. This is suggested as a pilot so that key lessons can be identified and, where appropriate, embedded across all levels of education.
Sub-Regional	Businesses	46. Businesses have told us their sectors are often misrepresented in the education system and that their engagement with young people often starts when misnomers and biases have already been embedded in the minds of young people. It is recommended that greater emphasis is placed on linking business to primary education and that the scope of the Careers Hub is broadened to further support the primary sector to better highlight the breadth of career opportunities in the sub-region and to help challenge systemic challenges about a lack of diversity in certain sectors.

**The descriptors in this column below may include and is not limited to the following organisations -National – includes Government and its constituent departments incl. BEIS, DfE, DWP and national representative/sector bodies. Sub-Regional – SYMCA, South Yorkshire's Local Authorities, Chambers of Commerce, regional/SY based representative bodies Providers – FE, HE, Schools, Training Providers, Businesses - SY based employers and anchor businesses.*

By adopting the above recommendations SY will create a more agile and responsive skills offer that embeds a commitment from employers, providers and wider regional partners to support a skills ecosystem that will allow economic growth and a culture of learning, partnerships and collaborations to continue to thrive.

These benefits will be realised by combining efforts across all partners by:

- Creating a more coherent and streamlined approach to delivering a high-quality skills ecosystem for SY that responds to employer need leading to a series of practical measures under the theme of 'navigation' resulting in an easy to find, co-ordinated, and accessible SY skills system for all.
- Initiating a more proactive approach to employer engagement with employers actively informing learning design and delivery to service the sector's unmet and growing skills requirements.
- Developing innovative ways to provide responsive and appropriate provision building on exemplars already within SY.
- Recognising and celebrating success to inform and further develop effective provision.
- Providing and promoting better pathways for all SY residents into education and work to increase diversity, targeting those most disadvantaged.

Within the recommendations, there is recognition that many can be realised at a local level and as such, the next step for this will be drawing all partners together on 26th April 2022 to agree the employer responsive narrative that will form part of the sub-region's skills strategy with full support from the MCA. This workshop will identify how we resource, take ownership of activities and timeline the specific requirements of each of those recommendations that are in our gift to address.

Whilst a wide range of stakeholders have been collaborated with the LSIP is recognised that there may be others that wish to engage. Support is welcomed and encouraged from any organisation/partners to engage in and take a role in making the above a reality therefore the door will always be open to new partners that are willing and able to play a part in developing the skills ecosystem in SY.

5. ANNEX ONE: EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF DELIVERY

5.1 PROCESS OF ENGAGEMENT

This Section details the methods used to develop the LSIP including both qualitative and quantitative data. The Chambers were supported by Kada Research LTD, who were commissioned as research partners for the LSIP.

SY SKILLS ACCELERATOR BOARD

The SY Skills Accelerator Board has supported and guided the development of the LSIP from the beginning. The Board provides strategic, senior governance and leadership to the delivery team. There is one Project Board for both the LSIP and the SDF to ensure alignment between the two projects, maintaining focus on shared goals for the sub-region. The board includes:

- Yiannis Koursis, CEO Barnsley College
- Jane Hickie, CEO AELP
- Karen Beardsley, MD Unipart Rail and Non-executive Director Doncaster Chamber
- Andrew Denniff, CEO Barnsley and Rotherham Chamber of Commerce
- Karen Mosley (Chair), MD HLM Architects
- Matt Travis, Director Enzygo
- Chris Dymond, Sheffield Digital
- Dan Kirkland, Tribe Pad
- Dave Lombardi, FSB
- Alan Chater CEng FIET, Joint Professional Engineering Institutions Committee
- Conor Moss, Group Director, Business Engagement, Skills and Employability at Sheffield Hallam University
- Nikki Jones, Director, The University of Sheffield, AMRC Training Centre
- Helen George, Asst Director – Employment and Skills at SYMCA.

DESK REVIEW

A desk review was undertaken to explore quantitative and qualitative literature surrounding employer engagement with the system and the barriers faced. Several themes were identified from the literature: navigating the skills system. funding challenges, communication and collaboration, employer issues and opportunities and structural and sectoral issues. The evidence was mostly available at a national level and reflects the difficulties obtaining accurate and timely local intelligence on employer engagement with the skills system. The desk review also included an overview of national skills policy.

ANALYSIS OF ECONOMIC, SKILLS AND EDUCATION LANDSCAPE FOR SY

The Centre of Regional Economic and Social Research (CRESR) carried out data analysis (available here) to inform the LSIP. The analysis covered: contextual and demographic; labour market; economic projections; education; and skills. Most of the data was available at an England, Yorkshire and Humber, SY and local authority levels although there were minor gaps. The robust quantitative analysis provided important insights for the LSIP. It is included as a user-friendly resource on the Skills Accelerator website to help businesses and stakeholders in the future.

EMPLOYER SURVEY

The employer survey was developed informed by findings of the desk review. The 30-question survey explored employer engagement in the skills system and their skills needs – for both questions asked about current and future situations. The survey explored the barriers and opportunities for SY businesses to engage in the skills system to understand the situation now and the appetite for change.

The survey was available online (70 businesses participated) and Kada commissioned a telephone survey of 78 local businesses. The survey was widely shared by Chambers and employer organisations including Sheffield Digital, Home Builders Federation and the Construction Industry Training Board, as such it was able to reach a range of businesses outside existing Chambers networks. Just under two thirds of the businesses employed 24 people or under. They worked in a range of sectors including manufacturing (18%), technology (7%), education (8%), construction (9%) and health and social care (7%); which is broadly reflective of the SY labour market.

Separately, the Chambers included six questions about employer engagement with the skills system in their Quarterly Economic Survey with nearly 400 responses from across SY. Both surveys were analysed and used to inform subsequent engagements with employers and the development of the LSIP.

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT WORKSHOPS

Two employer engagement events took place to inform the development of the LSIP and ensure it was based on the needs of SY businesses.

The first workshop was held online on the 18th of January 2022. It was attended by 39 people and made up of employers and stakeholders (skills providers, employer representative bodies, SYMCA, and Chambers) from across SY. The event lasted two hours and aimed to introduce the LSIP and explore the emerging findings from the desk review and survey. The event included a keynote presentation from AESSEAL who discussed their experiences of engaging with the skills system and showcased excellent practice in how to make skills development a natural activity for the business to do, from engaging with local schools, to upskilling in advanced technologies and green skills. Emerging themes were presented from the desk review and initial employer survey results.

In small groups of approximately eight participants each were asked to discuss three questions:

- Do the emerging themes presented reflect your situation (skill shortage)?
- What step change do we need in the skills system to support SY businesses?
- What is your role in making it happen?

All attendees were invited to record their responses to the questions in the chat which was a useful tool for reflection and gave space for participants to provide detailed, considered examples and explanations.

From the workshop, the emerging findings were tested with employers and subsequently refined. The workshop enabled detailed qualitative insights into the experiences of skills provision in SY and the barriers employers faced in engagement. It also highlighted examples of good practice and activities employers and skills providers would like more of.

The second workshop was held in person at the University of Sheffield AMRC Training Centre in Rotherham on the 2nd of March 2022. It was attended by 30 individuals and made up of employers and stakeholders (skills providers, employer representative bodies, SY MCA, and Chambers) from across SY. The event lasted two hours and was followed by an optional tour of the venue. The aim of the event was to present the themes of the LSIP, informed from prior research and engagements, and test, refine and discuss these with participants. The event included a panel discussion with two employers and two skills providers (Barnsley College and the University of Sheffield AMRC Training Centre) who explored employer engagement in skills. This was followed by a presentation of key findings and themes. Attendees broke out into smaller groups for a facilitated workshop to explore three themes for the skills system: navigate, responsive, deliver better pathways. Participants were questioned over the prioritisation of themes and potential barriers, actions, and collaborations. The workshop enabled the further refinement of LSIP themes and potential actions.

Both workshops were vital to the development of the LSIP and ensured the plan would be reflective of the needs of SY employers.

WORKSHOPS WITH KEY STRATEGIC STAKEHOLDERS

Two 'ideation' sessions were held online with strategic stakeholders across SY to help develop and refine the LSIP. It also ensured the LSIP complemented and built upon existing (and future) strategic priorities and programmes. Attendees included:

Name	Organisation
Alexis Krachai	Sheffield Chamber
Andrew Denniff	Barnsley & Rotherham Chamber
Andrew Hartley	Sheffield College
Anita Straffon	Sheffield College
Conor Moss	Sheffield Hallam University
Dan Fell	Doncaster Chamber
Dani Adams	Doncaster Council
Helen George	SY Mayoral Combined Authority
Jayne Vose	SY Provider Network
Jill Cooper	DN Colleges Group
Karen Mosley	HLM Architects
Michele Martin	Total Training Provision
Nikki Jones	The University of Sheffield AMRC Training Centre
Paul Clifford	Barnsley MBC Business Development
Peter Edwards	SY Manufacturers Forum
Simon Leach	Rotherham Investment Development Office
Tracy Hill	Home Builders Federation
Yvonne Asquith	Business Sheffield

The first workshop on the 10th of February 2022 ran for two and a half hours. A contextual paper was given to attendees prior to the event to help inform discussions. The workshop was attended by eight stakeholders from SYMCA, Chambers, Doncaster Council, FE, and HLM Architects. The workshop focused on national issues with three questions which were chosen by participants from a long list derived from desk research:

- How nationally can we encourage more proactive employer involvement in the skills system?
- How should the skills system react to both national and local skills shortages?
- Should the skills system be more focussed on outcomes, such as jobs and pay progression rather than outputs such as qualifications?

After a brief introduction, participants were separated into two small groups of four and each question was discussed for 40 minutes. The discussion began with participants giving their initial views that then opened into a group discussion. Recommendations were developed by the groups for each question. Lastly, the group came back together and a short debrief of key messages was provided by the facilitators.

The second workshop (28th February) ran for three hours. It was attended by 17 strategic stakeholders including representatives from FE, HE, ITP, the University of Sheffield AMRC Training Centre, SY Chambers, SYMCA, business development groups and employer organisations. The workshop focused on local issues for the LSIP, and groups discussed five themes and for each, participants were presented with the following options developed from the LSIP research.

Skills system and funding:

- Simplify the system for SY employers by producing a skills menu and suite of options for the sub-region, detailing the programmes, how they fit together, how to access them, funding etc.
- Support employers to access skills training through a broader, more extensive skills brokerage (employer focussed) service.

Communication:

- Further develop appropriate skills forums throughout SY and create the right spaces to collaborate. Consider the potential for Employer Advisory Boards.
- Improve access to data and performance information. Explore the potential for more open data, enhanced reporting, and a local skills repository.
- Acknowledge the need to help individuals to access the system, and 'push up' to encourage their employers to participate.
- Enhance the promotion of businesses with good practices around the upskilling of staff and engagement in the system.

Structural issues:

- Increase opportunities for enhanced collaboration between providers, increase specialisation and reduce unnecessary competition.
- Support more industry practitioner participation in FE delivery to improve the talent pipeline and reduce tutor vacancies, particularly in sectors such as engineering and digital.

Meeting employer needs:

- Pilot the development of generic key workplace skills provision focused on those already in employment. Programmes to focus on improving softer skills such as communication, adaptability, resilience, collaboration, critical thinking.
- Further encourage and/or pilot collaborative curriculum design between providers and employers in skills shortage areas, building on good practice within the sub-region.

Apprenticeships:

- Report locally on unused Apprenticeship Levy and maximise Levy transfers, potentially through an enhanced skills brokerage service.
- Consider the development of a UCAS style apprenticeship system.
- Greater awareness raising around the benefits of apprenticeships. Potential for an alumni group to recognise and celebrate the achievements of apprentices.

For each theme participants were asked to consider the following: Are these the right approaches? Are there other options or opportunities? Where are local areas of Good Practice?

A paper was produced from both the workshops. The workshops provided the opportunity for high level discussions of what and how of the LSIP might develop appropriate recommendations and gave a space to discuss emerging findings and potential actions.

BUSINESS COMMISSIONS

The Chambers commissioned six employer organisations to gain sectoral perspectives to inform the LSIP. Organisations were tasked with direct engagement with employers to create a summary report of the key barriers and challenges facing their industries regarding skills and identification of good practice. The commission included:

- Medilink (reached out to 30 organisations, interviewed 3)
- Sheffield Digital (17 contributors across the local digital sector)
- Home builders Federation (invited 20 sub-regional building developers to contribute)
- Construction Industry Training Board (22 employers and a round table event)
- Confederation of British Industry
- Trades Union Congress (25 individuals representing over 32,000 workers)
- SY Manufacturing Forum

The businesses were provided with a tool kit (see here) to support employer engagement within their own networks. The document set out emerging themes from the desk review and information and guidance for carrying out their engagements. An online workshop was held to help organisations with engagements and creation of the report and individual support was provided by Kada Research.

The business commission provided important sectoral insight into the employer's current and future skills needs and their engagement with the skills system. It highlighted the overlapping themes between industries as well as the need for bespoke solutions in some settings.

OTHER STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENTS

Alongside the robust collection of quantitative and qualitative evidence for the LSIP, numerous individual conversations were had with employers, employer organisations, FE, and other training providers. The conversations provided greater insight into the skills needs of employers as well as the perspectives from skills providers. It also provided an opportunity to explore good practice in SY and test potential actions for the LSIP derived from the research. Stakeholders included:

- Creative UK
- RIBA/Sheffield Architects Society
- Federation of Small Businesses
- Cast Theatre Doncaster
- Unipart Rail
- Institution of Engineering and Technology
- AESEAL
- SY Manufacturing Forum
- Sheffield College
- The University of Sheffield AMRC Training Centre

5.2 CONSULTEES

Consultees have been organised via engagement route.

Business Commission and Reports	
Medilink	Construction Industry Training Board
SY Manufacturing Forum	Confederation of British Industry
Sheffield Digital	Trades Union Congress
Home Builders Federation	Institute of Engineering and Technology
Employer Engagement workshops	
Grad consult	Naylors
AESSEAL	Association of Colleges
ACW Advisors	International Trade Forum LTD
City Fibre	Sheffield University Management School
Vine Hotels	OSL Group
Sheffield College	Plan Grow Do LTD
Calderdale College	Barclays
CC33	Sky Bet
Andy Hanelsman Consulting	Sheffield Digital
Sheffield Hallam University	UTC
DN Colleges group	Institution of Engineering and Technology
TransPennine Express	HLM Architects
Glu Recruit LTD	Datatrainer
Sheffield City Council	Home Builders Federation
Barnsley and Rotherham Chambers of Commerce	The Source
Morthynh Group Ltd	The Developer Academy LTD
SY MCA	Enzygo
AMRC	Construction Industry Training Board
BHP LLP	Reef App LTD
Barnsley College	
Employer survey	
148 SY businesses reached	
Stakeholder workshops	
Sheffield Chamber	HLM Architects
Barnsley & Rotherham Chamber	Total Training Provision
Sheffield College	AMRC
Sheffield Hallam University	Barnsley MBC Business Development
Doncaster Chamber	SY Manufacturers Forum
Doncaster Council	Rotherham Investment Development Office
SY Mayoral Combined Authority	Home Builders Federation
SY Provider Network	Business Sheffield
DN Colleges Group	
Other stakeholder engagements	
Creative UK	AESSEAL
RIBA/Sheffield Architects Society	Sheffield College
Federation of Small Businesses	AMRC
Cast Theatre Doncaster	Institution of Engineering and Technology
Unipart Rail	

6. ANNEX TWO: EMPLOYER NEEDS STATEMENT

CURRENT: SKILLS FOR EMPLOYMENT / CORE SKILLS

Key Message: Employers consulted highlighted the degree to which they consider core and work readiness skills to be an issue for both potential new recruits and those already in work and the fact these were changing to include competencies such as communication, adaptability resilience, collaboration and critical thinking.

Work with employers has highlighted the degree to which they consider core skills to be an issue for both potential new recruits and those already in work. There is no single naming convention for core skills and employers refer to them interchangeably as skills for employment, employability and work readiness skills, core skills, work skills, meta skills, and soft skills.

The world of work is changing rapidly, and core skills cover a range of skills and competencies such as communication, adaptability resilience, collaboration and critical thinking which are important for all members of the workforce to possess to be productive in the workplace. Soft skills are generic (not sector specific) and are transferable between jobs and employers.

The SY Skills Accelerator survey highlights the importance of these skills and the significant gaps seen in both potential and current employees (see Section 2.2). There was universal agreement regarding the need for enhanced core skills delivery both stand-alone (outside) and within technical skills programmes.

> *For young people entering the engineering workforce, 46% of employers think young entrants lack the technical and soft skills required.*

The development of a SY 'twenty first century' core skills offer was suggested by employers, who outlined that these skills are broadening to include a wider range of transferable skills and knowledge including managing mental health and wellbeing, entrepreneurship, creative thinking, active listening. Alongside the core skills above. The skill needs included:

1. Communication.
2. Adaptability.
3. Resilience.
4. Collaboration.
5. Critical Thinking.
6. Entrepreneurial skills).
7. Conflict Resolution.
8. Problem Solving.
9. Active Listening.

> *90% of the workforce in the Home Building industry is self-employed – young people on trade courses are not always prepared for a self-employment career path.*

A survey undertaken by the TUC for their case study found that 84% of respondents identified awareness around mental health and wellbeing as a learning need, with skills for managers particularly highlighted so that they can enable good mental health and well-being.

Sheffield Digital highlight:

> *In many core professional digital skills there is still a significant gap between the capabilities of those entering the industry (most often graduates) and productive professionals. A common assessment from employers is that there is a two-year lead time before a graduate recruit becomes proficient enough to be a fully productive team member.*

They recommend further identification and description of the specific core skills found to be missing and working with training providers to practise these soft skills through a combination of approaches including enhancing group working and assessment models. There is good practice to build on and most providers have measures in place. For instance, DN College group have a soft skills model which they are happy to share. They noted in their feedback to this plan that funding is poor for this, so providers often have to charge full cost for this provision. There is potential for the application and adoption of a standard, such as the Skills Builder Framework used in Sheffield to help promote a common language and assist skills providers to develop skillsets which are consistent throughout SY.

From a professional digital skills perspective, 'twenty first century' core skills require people to work together flexibly to solve problems, often over distance and boundaries, whilst acting autonomously, taking responsibility for their own learning and productivity. These skills are difficult to instil in classrooms and delivery methodologies may need to radically change and the way students work collectively. For instance, Sheffield Digital recommended the provision of entirely new learning experiences that prioritise employers and skills providers working in interdisciplinary projects. Embedding these skills within the curriculum from the earliest age should also be considered.

In addition, it is becoming increasingly apparent that several job roles require creative thinking skills, the ability to look at things differently and find new ways of solving problems. There was concern expressed that move away from the arts and creative subjects (such as music) in schools is likely to disrupt and reduce creative thinking in cohorts of young people.

CURRENT: DIGITAL SKILLS

Key Message: Both qualitative and quantitative data collected for this plan highlights the need for increased levels of digital skills within the SY workforce. The digital skills landscape is complicated and fast paced, and employers can struggle with its potential application. It covers both technical and non-technical skills, and the sector recognises that there is an opportunity to embrace a more diverse workforce.

As Section 2.2 outlines employers struggle to articulate the digital skills they require and gathering further data on this should be a key requirement of the Roadmap.

There is a significant difference between the need for IT skills and digital literacy in the general workplace and the requirement for high-end technical skills, and each require tailored interventions specifically. Sheffield Digital undertook a consultation with the local digital tech and media industries considering the need for a Professional Digital Skills Framework, the development of which could form part of the permanent "Employer Skills Forum" proposed as part of the Institute of Technology bid and provide a benchmark for revised employer engagement models.

> *Preparing young people for 'tech work' directly affects the talent pool in the locality and getting this right has a double bonus of both attracting inward investment and retaining high growth companies in the vicinity. [Response received to the first draft of the LSIP]*

Sheffield Digital highlight that alongside the technical skills involved in the design, development, deployment and maintenance of digital products and services, as well as technical capabilities in networking, electronics, digital manufacturing, cyber security and digital media, the industry also requires people who are proficient in a range of related "non-technical" skills, These include user research, design, business and systems analysis, project management, product management, team leadership, business development, legal compliance, digital business administration.

> *Much of the focus on Professional Digital Skills education surrounds technical skills involved in the design, development, deployment and maintenance of digital products and services, as well as technical capabilities in networking, electronics, digital manufacturing, cybersecurity and digital media production, etc. However, the industry also needs people who are proficient in a range of related 'non-technical' skills which are just as important, including user research, design, business & systems analysis, project management, product management, team leadership, business development, legal compliance, digital business administration, digital entrepreneurship, etc. [Sheffield Digital Response]*

The digital sector does not have a diverse workforce, it struggles to recruit people from under-represented backgrounds such as women, people from Minority Ethnic groups or working-class background.

Good Practice in SY: The Developer Academy trains women and people from under-represented backgrounds; the highly supportive work of groups such as Sheffield Women in Tech; and grassroots efforts from a range of community providers such as Access Space, Aalfy, Sheffield Hack Space, Bright Box and others across SY, some of which go back decades and should be far more widely celebrated and/or scaled or developed.

The EyUp Academy is helping to plug the SY tech talent gap by teaching local people tech skills, finding them roles as developers, nurturing their start-ups to spread success across SY communities.

Sheffield Digital suggest we should be leveraging the outstanding EdTech business base and activity. SY's EdTech sector is arguably the largest and most successful outside of London and should be harnessed to enhance learning experiences, personalise content and improve the operational efficiency of providers.

CURRENT: TECHNICAL SKILLS

Key Messages: There is an acute shortage of skilled construction workers across all site trades, and construction management and a growing requirement for skills in low carbon manufacturing and green energy.

Construction: There is a well-documented significant shortage of skilled workers across all site trades, and construction management roles, which is so acute that provision is not meeting employer demand. The Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) have identified gaps in provision across SY in the following areas:

- Scaffolding (Apprenticeships)
- Land Based Service Engineer / Land Based Service Engineer Technician.
- Tiling.

CITB highlight that alongside gaps in skills provision, there is also a labour shortage / reluctance to train in key trade areas. There is provision available for example in painting and decorating and plastering, but there is a lack of learner demand. Provision for tiling was previously available locally but failed to attract sufficient learners to ensure viability. Additionally, there is scope for more specialist and bespoke provision in areas such as bathroom and kitchen installations, areas of joinery (such as the manufacture of staircases) and partition and wall insulation.

There are key strengths in provision. Sheffield Hallam University is a major provider of the construction labour force and its National Centre of Excellence for Degree Apprenticeships has the biggest portfolio of degree apprenticeships in the UK. The number is significantly growing and many students are from the sub-region. SHU also provides Degrees and Degree Apprenticeships in Quantity Surveying (there are 100's of learners on these programmes).

Green Energy: Green energy is a fast-growing sector; supply chains and talent pools are having to try and keep up. Skills providers need to adapt courses to accommodate the new skills demanded by these sectors. In SY, 'in-house' academies are being set up in the hydrogen sector and other sustainable energy solutions, such as district heating programmes to satisfy employment and skills demands.

Good Practice in SY: Doncaster UTC founding employer partners take an active role in curriculum development and experience development opportunities. They include firms with expertise in the UTC's specialisms of engineering and digital technologies: Agemaspark, Polypipe, Skanska, VolkerRail and Wabtec.

AMCOGiffen are working in partnership with Barnsley College to tailor Level 3 provision as an entry route to apprenticeships within their organisation.

In 2011, the Cutlers Company started an initiative to embed technical and employment skills into the curriculum through real life projects, work placements, internships, creating greater engagement between businesses and schools. More recently this has been rebranded 'The Better Learners, Better Workers scheme' and The Workwise Foundation is an employer led charity set up to support and enable STEM opportunities and careers.

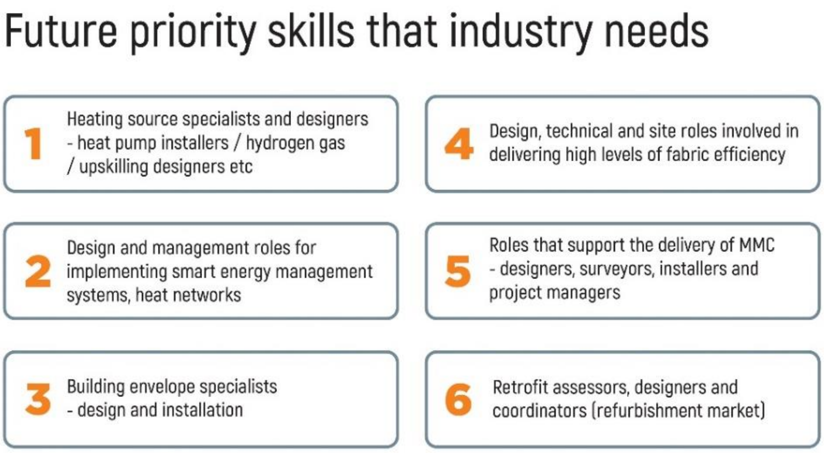
FUTURE: TECHNICAL SKILLS

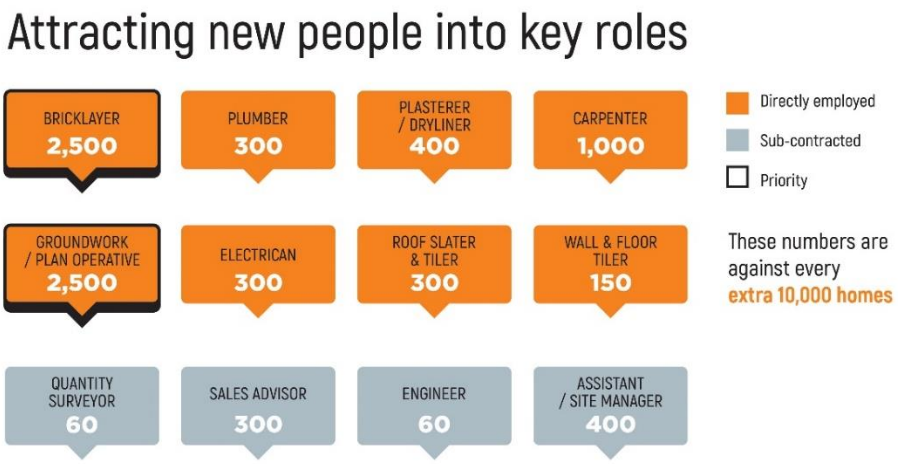
Key message: Several drivers are stimulating demand for technical skills including the drive towards net zero and digital transformation.

Construction: Future skills requirements include replacement demand for an aging workforce and jobs linked to new technology and construction methods and the drive for net zero. The UK's construction and infrastructure pipeline has projects worth more than £11.8 billion planned for the sub-region. Two-thirds (£8 billion) of which will be in the green economy[7]. This includes domestic low carbon tech, electric vehicles, carbon capture, smart and resilient utilities networks, waste management, recycling and the circular economy and information technology, artificial intelligence and data science.

The following chart from the HBF looks at key roles and new skills needed in the housing sector alone. The Home Builder's Federation articulate the impact of Government's commitment to increasing new housebuilding to 300,000 per year. The second graphic shows the number of skills workers per every extra 10,000 new homes.

[7] HEY LEP Green Jobs and Skills Analysis December 2021





Engineering and Technology: The IET survey (2021) reported design and manufacturing (36%) and energy and environmental sustainability (35%) as the skills most important for growth over the next five years. Historically, IET has focused on more traditional engineering but is increasingly focused on the digital technologies as this becomes more widespread throughout the industry as it is used in the design process, production, and different methodologies such as agile development. This has highlighted a significant skills gap in the industry and a need to upskill the workforce and recruit for different skills sets.

Professional Digital Skills: Businesses in all sectors are becoming increasingly 'online / digital' they are therefore increasingly building internal teams to take ownership and design control of their end-to-end digital user experiences and machine-to-machine interfaces. As this digital transformation proceeds, more 'traditional' businesses will become technology businesses, adapting their business models, and competing with other technology employers for talent. Subsequently, the number of trained people leaving providers will need to increase, and more will need to be done to retain them in the sub-region.

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31 March 2022

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SW1P 3BT

Dear Nadhim,

It was fantastic to meet you and your team earlier this month. I am grateful for the time you took, and for your commitment to working with us in South Yorkshire to deliver a skills and employment system fit for the 21st century.

Central to delivering this is the success of our Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) and the partnerships we need to have in South Yorkshire that bring together the demand from businesses with the supply of skills.

Through the Skills Accelerator Board, our Skills Advisory Network and our joint Mayoral Combined Authority and Local Enterprise Partnership Education, Skills and Employment Thematic Board we have these partnerships, networks and commissioning relationships increasingly in place. All working together to build a better more responsive system.

I am pleased to say that this spirit of collaboration has driven the development of the Plan submitted to you by our Chambers of Commerce. The partners involved have consulted widely with businesses, stakeholders and have engaged fully with my team and the MCA throughout the process.

The plan has my full support. And we stand ready to support its implementation.

The LSIP is part of a journey we're on. Through the devolved Adult Education Budget, our innovative Skills Bank, our work on careers and education, our Institute of Technology, exemplar Higher and Further Education collaboration and the MCA's own commitment to securing social value from both our procurement and investment programmes we have a track record of getting things done.

If there is anything you or your officials need from the MCA in support of the LSIP submission please do not hesitate to contact me.

With my very best wishes,

Dan

Mayor Dan Jarvis MBE MP
South Yorkshire
Mayoral Combined Authority

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