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LOCAL SKILLS IMPROVEMENT PLAN

North of Tyne
May 2023

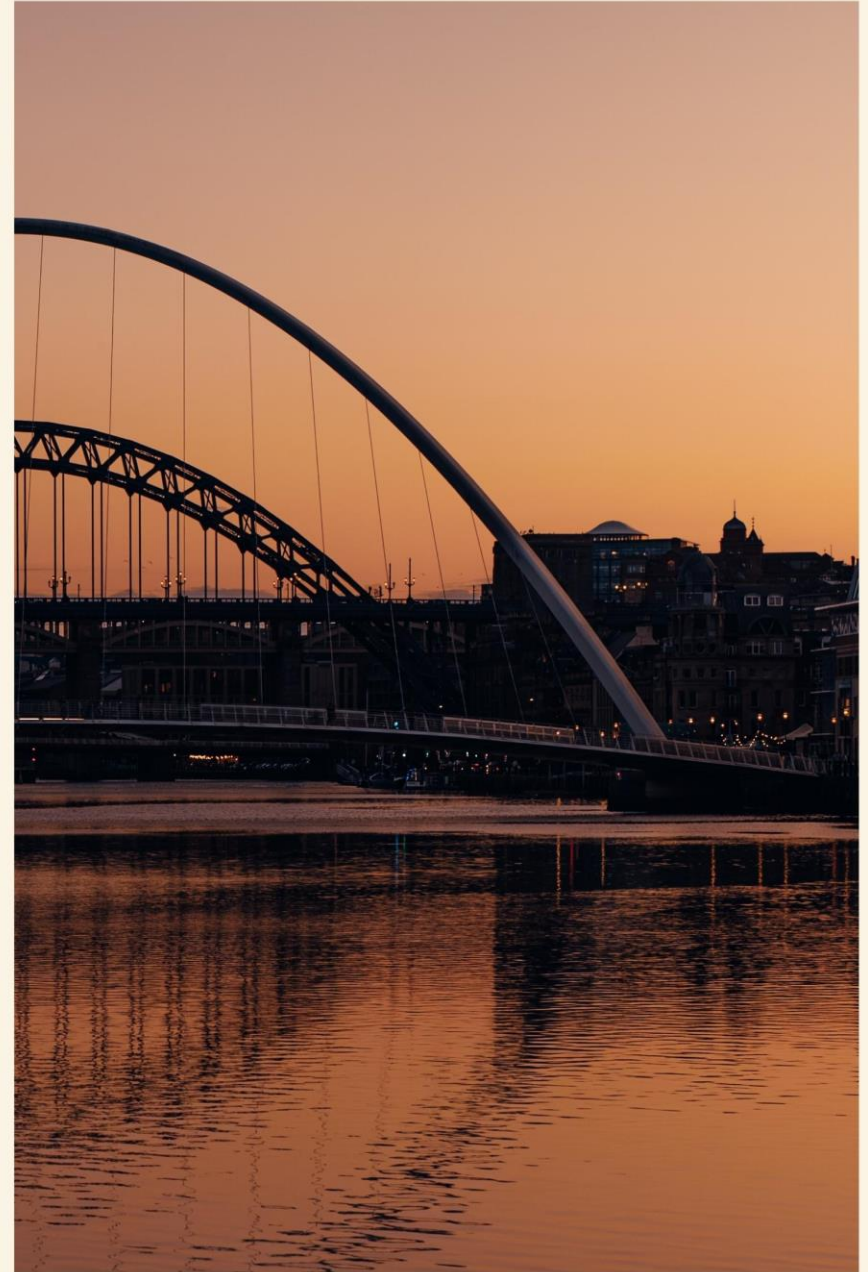


North East England
Chamber of Commerce

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This Local Skills Improvement Plan has been approved by the Secretary of State in line with the approval criteria set out in the [Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022](#), and in accordance with the [LSIP statutory guidance](#).

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PART 1: THE LSIP PRIORITIES

The North of Tyne Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) puts employers at the heart of our local skills system by articulating the skills requirements of a large cross section of employers. This document has been compiled following engagement with 1,767 business across the North of Tyne, both in specific sectors and across the wider business base.

1.1 THE CHALLENGES OUR LSIP WILL ADDRESS

The overall aim of the North of Tyne LSIP is to ensure that the right people with the right skills are available at the right time to fill current and future job vacancies over the next three years.

The North of Tyne is a mixed industrial area with significant strengths in both the manufacturing and service sectors. The area has a strong industrial base with several well-established sectors, as well as opportunities for growth. This is set out clearly in area-based strategies such as Opportunity for All: The North of Tyne Strategic Skills Plan 2021-23. However, the North of Tyne economy faces challenges, including low business density, a skilled but ageing workforce, skills shortages in key sectors, growth in new technologies, and recruitment and retention difficulties in rural areas.

There are also some sectors, such as Construction, Health & Social Care, and Tourism & Hospitality, with large numbers of vacancies and significant future growth predicted. However, these sectors can struggle to attract enough people into the workforce. The skills system has a role to play in strengthening the match between the supply of skilled people and the available roles, and ensuring career paths in these sectors are clear and well understood.

1.2 WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE

The North of Tyne has a strong industrial base with several well-established sectors, including a specialism in offshore wind and the potential for significant investment in battery manufacture. The Strategic Skills Plan indicates that across the wider North, wind, nuclear, hydrogen and carbon capture and storage industries could create 84,000 jobs by 2050. The North of Tyne Combined Authority's (NTCA) digital growth and innovation programme addresses both digital inclusion and raising overall digital skills levels. However, the Plan also highlights evidence from employers in the North East Local Enterprise Partnership (NELEP) area that 30% of vacancies are hard to fill due to low numbers of applicants; and 19% due to candidates lacking appropriate work experience.

Ensuring sufficient people are equipped with the correct skills at the time jobs become available is a major challenge for the area. Key factors that will enable us to respond to this challenge include:

- **Basic and softer skills** are often as important to employers as technical sector-based skills. This includes skills such as communication and confidence, which are highly valued by employers and central to the development of the current and potential workforce.
- Generic and sector-specific **digital skills** should be a priority and form part of core skills provision. There is wide recognition that, whilst individuals have some generic skills such as the use of mobile phones and the internet, there is a significant lack of business and sector-based digital skills.
- Skills provision should recognise and respond to the requirements of employers for **specialist skills** that build on base qualifications. The stated preference of employers is for short courses that can be delivered flexibly.

- **Partnership between industry and the post-16 education sector** must be strengthened and become more collaborative. Employers have a role to play in providing on-site experience, practical insights into the application of skills, and genuine partnership to address the shortage of tutors.
- **Employers must also be supportive of programmes** and translate that support into positive action.

1.3 SECTOR IDENTIFICATION

The key criteria used for identifying the sector focus for this LSIP are as follows:

- Sectors that will experience significant growth over the next three years;
- Sectors with immediate skills shortages; and,
- Sectors where significant planned investment in the economy is likely to cause skills displacement.

Based on these criteria, this LSIP focuses on the following sectors.

Construction: Continues to be a significant feature of the North of Tyne economy, and one which is preparing and adapting for the impact of Net Zero via opportunities including retrofit.

Green Energy/Industrial Decarbonisation and Net Zero: A new and developing sector in the North of Tyne, which includes offshore wind and green transport projects. It is estimated that over the next five years significant investment will create approximately 6,000 jobs in the region.

Health and Social Care: Presents an immediate skills challenge, with significant existing vacancy rates and high levels of demand. Whilst demand levels are predicted to remain stable over the next ten years, there is an acute labour shortage with 2,000 vacancies currently unfilled.

Business and Professional Services: Significant in Newcastle and North Tyneside. North of Tyne business and professional firms may also be impacted by skills displacement from the Darlington Economic Campus bringing 750 civil servants and several new firms to the region by 2025.

Culture, Creative, Tourism and Hospitality: This is also a sector with significant immediate vacancy rates as it recovers from the pandemic. Businesses also face a number of additional challenges, including staffing levels and rural delivery.

Cross Cutting Themes: In addition to specific sectors outlined above, the LSIP also covers essential cross-cutting themes, which were identified through analysis of current vacancies, as well as by building on evidence within the Strategic Skills Plan 2021-23.

- i) **Digital Skills** – Digital skills are a requirement in all sectors of the economy. Whilst the digital sector itself has set an ambition to grow by approximately 10,000 jobs over the next 10 years, there is an additional, significant shortage of digital skills in the wider economy.
- ii) **Professional Development/Business Skills** – Identified as a priority through the work on the Teesside LSIP Trailblazer and analysis of vacancy data. Businesses highlighted skills such as project management where there is a need for development training.
- iii) **Employability** – Cited by many employers as a key requirement but definitions are ambiguous. This required a deep dive into what businesses define as employability skills.

These priorities have been directly informed by, and build upon, the work of NTCA and the NELEP. Following the devolution of the North of Tyne Adult Education Budget (AEB) to NTCA in 2019, NTCA has delivered around £69m of funded provision supporting over 77,000 learner enrolments. NELEP,

through its Skills Advisory Panel, provides labour market analysis and skills system insight. The priorities above reflect and build upon those articulated in key strategic plans including the Strategic Skills Plan 2021-23, NTCA Corporate Plan 2022, and the North East Strategic Economic Plan (see Annex A).

1.4 HOW THE LSIP WILL DRIVE CHANGE

The LSIP is intended to drive change through strengthening employer engagement within the skills system. The North of Tyne LSIP is a statutory document designed as a roadmap for change and drawn up in collaboration with employers, stakeholders, and providers within the region. Employers have given their feedback and signalled a real willingness to work collaboratively to deliver the skills and opportunities the region needs to move forward.

Key Changes

During our consultation with employers, feedback indicated that the overall standard of technical and vocational courses is good. They praised local provision and reported that courses such as Health and Social Care, Construction Trades, and Engineering teach the right technical skills to an appropriate level of competency.

In terms of improvements to provision, employers stated that they would like access to more advanced technical specialisms that build on base provision, emphasising that such provision should be available in shorter courses with flexible delivery to fit around work. Based on our consultations we have identified the following priorities for improvement to the local skills system that our LSIP will focus on.

- Provision of **advanced technical skills** building on the solid base of Level 2 and 3 qualifications.
- Employer engagement in the **provision of tutors/mentors** for technical skills delivery.
- **Flexible apprenticeships** delivered in partnership with employers.
- Inclusion of **sector specific digital skills** provision in existing courses.
- Renewed, strong emphasis on developing general, business focused, and sector specific **communication skills**.
- Improvement and development of **digital skills provision** for both new employees and to re-skill the existing workforce.
- Provision of **on-site experience** to develop practical skills relevant to the cultural sector.
- Greater **local training provision** for business and professional services.

As the Employer Representative Body (ERB) leading the LSIP, the Chamber will work with local stakeholders, providers, and employers to bring together practical partnerships to deliver the changes required. Some measures will be changes to existing provision and some will use or signpost to existing programmes. Other measures will require the development of new and innovative projects. There is a significant role for employers in delivering the changes identified by the LSIP, which will require initial buy-in and long-term, sustained commitment to deliver success. Working with over 1,700 businesses for this LSIP, as well as many providers and strategic partners, creates the foundations necessary to deliver the long-term partnerships on which the proposals in this LSIP will build.

PART 2: TAKING THE LSIP PRIORITIES FORWARD

This section sets out the specific skills and training requirements articulated by employers in each of the priority sectors that form the basis of our LSIP. For each required skill we have identified what provision currently exists to meet these needs, where new provision is required, and the priority changes needed to better meet employer needs.

2.1 CONSTRUCTION

The construction sector is thriving within the North of Tyne, and several major projects are planned within the area. Given this growth, this section focusses particularly on large scale industrial projects and new technologies.

2.1.1 GENERAL CONSTRUCTION TRADE SKILLS

Key issues and challenges

There is a significant lack of core skills and trades (joiners, plumbers, grounds workers, bricklayers, steel workers and manual labourers) with employers experiencing recruitment and retention issues across all roles.

Employers have highlighted that their current workforce is ageing, with many employees soon to be of retirement age and there is concern about losing their expertise. Alongside this, not enough people are enrolling in apprenticeships or training programmes to replace workforce losses.

Competition for core skillsets among construction employers in the region is high. Employees and sub-contractors cannot be retained due to higher wage offers elsewhere, which leaves projects with insufficient skilled staff.

There is concern that this will lead to increased delays in projects, and further increases in pay, leaving SMEs unable to compete and further perpetuating this problem.

Workplace experience remains vital. Employers want people with exposure to onsite work and applied knowledge of the procedures that accompany this, such as health and safety regulations.

Current provision

There are currently extensive courses and apprenticeships offered in the North of Tyne region which cover the skillsets and roles identified, but there are insufficient people enrolling on the courses and too few employers taking on apprentices. This creates a significant skills shortage. The current gap in provision is related to the flexibility of apprenticeships and mechanisms to allow employers to pool resources. The government is trialling flexi-job apprenticeships in areas such as Bricklaying, Civil Engineer Technician, Construction Design and Build Technician, amongst others. However, the current system requires a flexi-job agency to employ the apprentice (charging employers a significant amount to engage the apprentices) or the apprentice must source the employment themselves. EN:Able Futures are currently the only agency offering flexi-job apprenticeships in the region.

The PlanBEE higher level skills qualification is also on offer at Gateshead College, which is a flexible-style apprenticeship developed by a consortium of local and national businesses. This is a two-year programme which allows students to gain experience in several workplace environments and companies. It is currently only offered in Design, Construction and Management covering five topics: Leadership, Economics, Design, Technology and Production. £2.5m has also been invested by NTCA in Skills Bootcamps for construction trades since 2021.

Priority changes needed

Employers highlighted the following changes to provision that would help to improve the availability of people and skills within the region.

- **Flexible apprenticeships:** There is a need for a more flexible apprenticeship model which would allow employers to take on apprentices for shorter periods of time, suitable to project length. This approach is being trialled in other sectors such as digital and allows apprentices to work across multiple businesses within their apprenticeship, gaining experience in different environments.
- **Flexibility of apprenticeship levy:** Employers highlighted that the apprenticeship levy is too rigid. Employers would like more flexibility to be able to share their levy with subcontractors or clients and be able to use it for all types of training.
- **Promotion of sector:** Positive promotion of the sector is needed to address the negative stereotypes associated with construction careers. Key messages employers would like to communicate include the opportunities for progression into higher roles, the positive aspects of site work, and the inclusiveness of the modern sector.

2.1.2 WORKPLACE EXPERIENCE

Key issues and challenges

Experience is vital for traditional and specialist roles within construction as many of the skills needed to work in the sector, such as welding, can only be learned with continued practice. Employers have found that those without experience 'on-site' or in a construction environment, do not have the skillset needed to meet workplace expectations. Construction sites are often fast-paced and can be dangerous, therefore workers need to have the ability to work independently, to work safely, and to have knowledge of their role and tasks gained through previous experience.

Current provision

There is a lack of onsite training schemes in the North of Tyne, with the exception of Skills Bootcamps which rely on a strong provider/employer relationship to make the onsite training available as part of the programme.

Priority changes needed

- **'On-site' training environment:** Provision which allows students or trainees to gain experience in an 'on-site environment' with trainers who have industry expertise. Tier 1 companies have indicated they would be willing to engage with a programme in which they allow trainees onto site.
- **Mentoring scheme:** Supporting experienced employees to mentor trainees in site functionality and construction skills. This would be mutually beneficial as mentors could receive a training qualification alongside equipping the future workforce with a specialist skillset.

2.1.3 TRADE SPECIALISMS

Key issues and challenges

The need for electricians, welders, and engineers (civil, electrical, mechanical and gas) was specifically highlighted. There is currently a good base education in the North of Tyne for these roles. However, there is a need for more people with these skills and further specialised skills within each branch.

There is also a lack of uptake in apprenticeships into these roles and a request for some reform to how these skills are taught.

Current provision

The welding and engineering provision in the region is mainly attached to apprenticeships, which are long in length, lasting anywhere from 11 months to four years. There is a lack of add-on engineering welding courses within the North of Tyne area.

Priority changes needed

- **Flexible apprenticeships:** There is a need for more uptake in engineering apprenticeships, especially within civil engineering. Flexible apprenticeships have been proposed by employers as a potential solution to improving completion rates and increasing the pipeline of apprentices.
- **Add-on upskilling courses:** There is a good base education for many disciplines in the construction sector such as welding, engineering and electrical. Employers would like shorter, more flexible courses teaching specialist or advanced technical skills, such as heat pump engineering, design engineering, construction technician skills and hydrogen boiler installation.
- **Promotion of the sector:** There is a need to address the negative stereotypes associated with construction and engineering careers, such as low wages and poor site conditions. Employers would like to collaborate with providers to promote more positive and realistic expectations and opportunities in the sector.

2.1.4 EMPLOYABILITY AND ADDITIONAL SKILLS

Key issues and challenges

Employability and soft skills are vital within the construction sector. However, employers identified a lack of these skills, largely among newcomers to the workforce. Communication, teamwork, self-management, and adaptability were all identified as priorities. Whilst employers appreciate such skills often come with experience, they did feel more emphasis should be placed on teaching them alongside technical skills.

Current provision

Almost all colleges and training providers offer employability and soft skills training either integrated into courses or as a separate add-on qualification. For example:

- Back to Work Complete Training offer: Certificate in Securing Employment Level 1
- Interserve Learning and Employment offer: Personal Development for Employability Level 1
- Release Learning offer: Foundation Learning and Employability Level 1, 2 and 3, Foundation Learning and Employability Traineeship Level 1

Priority changes needed

- **Mentoring scheme:** Development of a mentoring programme to enable industry-experienced trainers to promote functional workplace soft skill training. This should be tailored to workplace expectations and behaviours, in either classrooms or via onsite mentoring where Tier 1's allow this experience.

2.1.5 RETROFIT SKILLS

Key issues and challenges

Retrofit is a priority for employers, who are aware of the vast opportunities and projects available in the region. Retrofit activities involve using core skillsets from the construction sector such as electricians, joiners, insulation installers and gas engineers, alongside specialised skillsets such as heat pump engineers. Employers are concerned about shortages as employees from traditional trades transition into retrofit activities.

Current provision

There are currently Skills Bootcamps offering Provincial Seals Domestic Retrofit Installation, and Retrofit Assessor courses. However, these courses are targeted at those entering the industry and are not available to build on existing qualifications, therefore do not meet the full needs of employers.

Priority changes needed

- **Upskilling and accreditation courses:** There is a need for add-on, local courses to upskill existing employees such as heat pump engineering, hydrogen boiler installation, heat network skills and insulators. There is also a need for more local, in-person retrofit accreditation courses (such as PAS 2035) to enable those currently working in the sector to work on retrofit projects.

2.1.6 KNOWLEDGE OF NET ZERO

Key issues and challenges

There is currently a lack of knowledge and understanding of Net Zero within the construction sector regarding practices, new skills, and technologies. For example, the impact of the retrofit agenda on the UK's Net Zero targets is poorly understood.

Current provision

There are currently six green apprenticeships being trialled in the UK, two of which relate to the construction sector (low carbon heating technician and installation and maintenance technician). However, it is unclear if they are being offered anywhere in the North of Tyne. Employers in the region have outlined that they currently do not require specific specialised skill apprenticeships in these areas, such as engineering, but instead favour add-on courses in those skills.

Priority changes needed

- **Green apprenticeship and integrated knowledge in training:** A 'green apprenticeship' focusing on the concepts and practices of Net Zero is a proposal for the future. In the immediate term there is a need for integrated 'green education' within current apprenticeships or training schemes.

2.1.7 DIGITAL SKILLS

Key issues and challenges

Employers in the construction sector highlighted the lack of basic digital skills in both their current workforce and newer employees entering the sector. New technologies, software, and practices affect areas such as compliance and quality monitoring, digital business processes, word processing, planning and productivity software, and using tablets and smartphones for onsite operations. In addition, employers would like some of their workforce to be skilled in Computer-Aided Design (CAD), Lidar, BIM and other technologies and software specifically used in construction.

Current provision

The majority of colleges offer digital courses separately from construction training. It is unclear whether tailored construction digital skills are integrated into existing construction provision.

Priority changes needed

- **Integration into current provision:** Employers articulated that this increased digital skill need should be addressed via existing provision, as newcomers entering the workforce directly from training provision struggle with these basic skills.
- **Digital skills refresher course:** For the current workforce, this training is usually done on the job. However, there is an upskilling/refresher need as these digital practices become more normalised day-to-day.
- **Virtual construction environments:** Employers highlighted the use of virtual reality (VR) technology in training. Creating virtual construction environments will allow trainees to gain practical experience without site attendance, mediating health and safety, and resource issues. This style of training is still in its infancy, but it would allow providers to equip students with 'hands-on' experience in the future.

Construction: Summary of issues and priority changes

Key issues and challenges	Description of change needed	Outcome for employers
Workplace experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme of excellence/training centre to provide practical, 'on-site' experience. • Industry-experienced mentor. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees have the experience required by employers in relation to current practices and behaviours.
Length of courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shorter, add-on courses in higher level and specialist skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees will be able to focus on current role whilst gaining the skills needed for more specialised projects.
Employability skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'On-site' experience to gain relevant employability skills delivered through a site mentoring scheme developed with employers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater synergy between employer expectations and employee experience.
Retrofit accreditation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local, flexible, in-person, add-on course for retrofit provided by colleges for upskilling and accreditation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees and subcontractors in the region will be ready for demand for retrofit projects.
Knowledge of Net Zero	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration of 'green concepts' such as Net Zero, Net Zero technologies and careers in construction into current apprenticeships. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future workforce educated about renewables and Net Zero concepts and business practices.
Lack of uptake in apprenticeships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible apprenticeship model which allows apprentices to work on multiple shorter-term projects across employers. • Ability to use apprenticeship levy more flexibly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow employers to take on more apprentices and create a pipeline of future employees which will fill skills gaps.
Lack of basic digital skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current basic digital skills integrated into technical education for construction. • Use of VR construction environments to teach hands-on training. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees will have the ability to engage with basic digital technology within day-to-day activities without on-the-job training.

2.2 GREEN ENERGY AND NET ZERO

The wind industry is growing significantly in the North of Tyne and there are substantial green transport projects set to be developed in the region.

2.2.1 SPECIALIST SKILLS

Key issues and challenges

Lack of experience in specialist skills: There is a shortage of high and low voltage engineers, wind turbine technicians and wind turbine welders, alongside appropriately skilled welders, electrical and mechanical engineers with experience of working on wind turbines. Several employers outlined how they would ideally like their staff to be experienced in different types of engineering and work on multiple parts of turbines.

Lack of specialist training provision: Employers identified a good base educational offer for engineering and welding, with several wind-specific courses within the region which have been endorsed by employers. However, employers identified a gap in the further education offer related to high level technical skills with integrated opportunities for workplace experience and industry-experienced trainers.

Local recruitment: Although employers aim to recruit within the North of Tyne, some identified the need to recruit from outside the area and other countries to meet resource requirements.

Lack of site experience: Workplace experience is essential when operating in this sector, yet due to the issues mentioned above, this can be incredibly hard to gain.

Current provision

Newcastle College Energy Academy offers Renewable and Subsea Engineering courses which last around one to two years, including:

- FD Energy Engineering and Welding Diploma courses
- Engineering and Welding: Level 1
- Welding Fabrication: Level 2 and 3
- Engineering for Subsea and Renewable Energy: Level 3
- Offshore Renewables and Subsea Engineering: Level 3

The courses include work experience and industry visits. Renewables Field Services and AIS Survivex currently offer training for Wind Turbine Technicians with industry-experienced trainers, in modern 'on site' training environments in the North of Tyne area. However, these providers are private, and there is a cost associated with this training.

Priority changes needed

- **Industry-experienced trainers:** Highlighted as important to ensure trainees have up-to-date knowledge and that training is of quality and contextualised. Currently difficult to attract industry experienced individuals into training positions due to salary differences. However, with the ageing population in the energy sector, employers have suggested they could 'lend' their older employees to pass along their expertise.
- **High level technical skills:** There is a good level of education in the North of Tyne related to wind turbine technicians. However, there is a large need for high and low voltage engineers and employers feel this skillset has been neglected. Therefore, add-on courses in high and low voltage engineering are required in the region to fill this gap.
- **Workplace experience:** Due to the health and safety issues related to wind turbines, trainees often do not get the opportunity to get hands-on practice, which is crucial to employers who want skilled, experienced employees. A practice turbine would offer an excellent environment to enable learners to practice skillsets to become workplace ready.

2.2 APPRENTICESHIPS

Key issues and challenges

Restrictions of apprenticeships: Employers described a low uptake in apprenticeships which may lead to a skills pipeline issue. Apprenticeships can last up to four years and this model is incompatible with the short timelines associated with many green energy projects. Whilst employers need and want to take on apprentices, they cannot commit as their projects do not have the longevity needed to sustain the requirements of the learning offer.

Current provision

There are currently several courses and apprenticeships offered in the North of Tyne related to green energy, supported by additional programmes such as NTCA's green skills programme. This £2m fund targets employers in low carbon sectors to work alongside skills providers to identify the training and support they need to upgrade their existing skills in the transition to a green economy. As outlined in section 2.1.1 the government is trialling flexi-job apprenticeships in some areas, but this does not currently cover green energy.

Priority changes needed

- **Flexible style apprenticeships:** Employers are supportive of flexible-style apprenticeship models which would allow an apprentice to work on multiple projects across a range of employers, addressing the risks presented by the duration of projects.

2.2.3 SKILLS TRANSITION FROM OTHER SECTORS

Key issues and challenges

The oil and gas industry was identified by employers as having many complementary skills relevant to the renewables sector and providing a good source of skilled and experienced employees to tap into. As the region transitions from oil and gas to wind and solar energy generation there is a significant opportunity to support skills and workforce transition. However, barriers identified included lack of training to support that transition.

There will be future demand for low carbon battery technology specialists within the area but it is difficult to source employees with experience working with and making low carbon batteries as it is a new technology. However, electrical, chemical and process engineering and manufacturing roles have complementary skillsets. Training will be needed to support this skills transition without displacing the workforce in these established industries.

Current provision

The Energy Skills Alliance is developing training related to the transition between oil and gas and the green energy sector nationally, although it is unclear when this will be available. Newcastle University is raising capital for an Electrification Process Innovation Centre (EPIC) which may offer transitional training in the future. There is currently no skills provision available to transition into battery technology from other sectors.

Priority changes needed

- **Bridging course:** Employers would support short, add-on courses to train those moving between the sectors and industries in how to use their existing skillset in new environments. With some short training, employees transitioning from the identified sectors could help to address the immediate skills gap in both wind/solar and new battery technology.

2.2.4 KNOWLEDGE OF NET ZERO

Key issues and challenges

As the sector grows, there is a need for greater knowledge and understanding of Net Zero, renewables and the region's approach to a 'just low carbon transition', specifically what this means and how it will impact the future of the region, country, and industry. Employers identified a lack of training related to this and new employees in the sector particularly lacked knowledge of these important concepts.

Current provision

There are currently six green apprenticeships being trialled in the UK, two of which relate to the construction sector (low carbon heating technician and installation and maintenance technician). Employers still favoured add-on courses, however, they feel these specific courses are too specialised to meet their major workforce needs.

Priority changes needed

- **Net Zero apprenticeship and integration of Net Zero knowledge into provision:** Employers have outlined the need for training which will equip people with 'green skills' and knowledge regarding green energy, Net Zero and renewables. This was identified as a particular priority for management roles, to allow businesses to adapt their Net Zero strategies and compete in a rapidly maturing marketplace. Employers identified the need for a new Net Zero apprenticeship.

2.2.5 DIGITAL SKILLS

Key issues and challenges

Digital skills are central to this sector. As the green energy and Net Zero sector is maturing, new digital technologies are being applied to operations at a fast pace. Employers need their workforce to be able to use and understand these digital technologies. Data skills have been consistently highlighted as vital for the future of the sector and are seen by employers as part of the digital skills requirement, specifically data analysis, coding, and data literacy.

Current provision

As previously mentioned, the majority of colleges offer digital courses separately and it is unclear whether tailored green energy and Net Zero digital skills are integrated into current provision.

Priority changes needed

- **Integration into current courses:** Digital and associated data training appears to be lacking. Employers would like to see additional training provided, to ensure employees have the adaptability and confidence to encounter and use new technologies. There is no identified need for specific courses related to data literacy, coding, and analysis, rather, employers would prefer this was integrated into engineering courses.

Green Energy and Net Zero: Summary of issues and priority changes

Key issues and challenges	Description of change needed	Outcome for employers
Lack of highly skilled engineers, turbine and blade welders and technicians.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add-on courses allowing current workforce to move into wind and renewables sector. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased pool of trained engineers and operatives.
Shortage of tutors with up-to-date practices and industry experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Lending’ style scheme allowing employers to collaborate with providers to pass ‘live’ industry expertise to students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased numbers of experienced tutors available.
Lack of transfer between sectors due to non-standardisation of qualifications.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bridging course allowing smooth transition into renewables. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the number of people with the skills needed to fill the immediate skill gap.
Lack of knowledge and education regarding Net Zero and renewables.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A renewables Net Zero apprenticeship • Relevant content integrated into current courses or as an add-on course. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future workforce will be educated about Net Zero and able to influence business practice/productivity.
There is a lack of digital skills, including data skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data literacy, analysis and coding are core competency in engineering qualifications. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wider pool of data/digital literate employees able to adapt to demands of modern roles.
Flexibility needed in training schemes to suit project limits.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A flexible apprenticeship model allowing an apprentice to work on multiple projects. • Use apprenticeship levy more flexibly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow employers to take on more apprentices and create a pipeline. • Improvements in-work progression, via existing available funds.

2.3 HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

The Health and Social Care sector currently has the highest number of job vacancies in the NTCA area, running at around 2,000 vacancies per month (source: Indeed May 2023).

2.3.1 COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Key issues and challenges

Face-to-face communication: Care is primarily a person-focused career. CQC inspections require evidence of care workers engaging with clients at all opportunities and employers require candidates who understand the importance of every contact with a patient/resident/client.

Telephone skills: Care workers must communicate with relatives, other health care professionals, and external agencies through verbal communication as well as written. Employers feel that current course assessments focus on written and digital skills at the expense of verbal communication skills.

Written skills: In the care sector, written skills form part of the legal requirement to keep accurate and timely records. However, employers raised concerns over general standards of written work. This included spelling and grammatical errors that make it more difficult to correctly interpret records, as well as a lack of knowledge on how to produce professional and formal emails and correspondence.

Employers also reported a perception of stigma attached to the sector, including relatively low pay, long hours and lack of clear career pathways or opportunities to progress.

Current Provision

There are 128 health and social care courses available across the North of Tyne area, 60% of which are Level 2 courses. There are 26 apprenticeship schemes available. All three colleges in the area also offer the new T Level Health qualification, although it is not fully clear what second-year specialisms are offered across the geography. There is also a University Technical College in Newcastle that offers Level 3 Medical Science and Cambridge IT courses. The national T Level transition programme will reduce the number of health and social care courses over the next two years. This will restrict 16+ learners to either a T Level or apprenticeship.

Priority changes needed

- **Practical skills:** Employers reported positively on qualifications such as NVQs, which offer practical training. There were concerns that QCF qualifications such as the new T Level Health qualification would be too theoretical and needed to include more practical learning elements. For example, the core component of the T Level A8.7 covers verbal and non-verbal communication skills in health: this could include practical exercises to develop specific communication skills.
- **Mock work settings:** Whilst some practical sessions are used, employers highlighted that regular and frequent practical sessions were needed to allow students to develop the required communication skills for health and social care settings. Practical sessions in a mock ward or other care setting would allow for various elements of communication skills to be rehearsed, from a care plan meeting to establishing food and drink preferences. The exercise works for all health and social care careers by varying the scenario.
- **Different methods of communication:** Written communication in colleges and schools tends to focus on assignments and formative work. SPaG (spelling, punctuation and grammar) is usually an integral part of the process. Whilst some topics need to focus on detailed written work, like safeguarding legislation, other topics enjoy more flexibility and can incorporate PowerPoints, videos of practical work, posters and tables.
- **Hand-written assignments:** Employers suggested that written skills could be incorporated into the curriculum as part of professional standards for working in the care sector. Some employers thought that hand-written assignments, whether summative, formative or both, were necessary as much of the handwriting they encounter is illegible.

2.3.2 DIGITAL SKILLS

Key issues and challenges

Employers consistently highlighted the lack of appropriate and adequate digital skills. There was a distinction made between generic or baseline digital skills and role-specific digital skills.

General IT skills: Employers reported these varied significantly across candidates for roles and existing employees. The industry requires competency in the core Microsoft suite of Word, Excel, and Outlook as a minimum.

Excel skills: This program was frequently mentioned, given its use in rostering, stock control, visual display of data, analysis of costs, and resident engagement/preference management.

Specialist digital skills: In comparison to the NHS where standardised software packages are used, local authorities, private, and community social care providers use a range of different patient management systems. Employers identified the need for flexibility/adaptability to work with a range of systems.

Current Provision

As previously mentioned, the majority of colleges offer digital courses separately and it is unclear whether tailored health and social care digital skills are integrated into current provision.

Priority changes needed

- **Excel skills training:** Employers would welcome the inclusion of Excel training wherever possible in the curriculum. For example, it could be incorporated into T Level Health Core component 2.9 (Evidence-based practice) or 2.14 (Public Health approaches) through students learning.

2.3.3 STAFF RECRUITMENT

Key issues and challenges

Lack of appropriate candidates: Employers reported that some of the recruitment pathways, for example via Job Centre Plus, generated candidates who lacked understanding about the demands of the sector. Candidates also lacked knowledge, skills and behaviours expected of specific job roles.

Lack of pathway promotion: Social care employers feel that social care career pathways are promoted less prominently than clinical pathways within the health care sector.

Specialist local authority requirements: The social health workforce needs to be prepared for some of the specialist requirements of local authority roles, which make up a significant part of the health and social care system. This includes strong teamwork skills, as well as the ability to work 'relationally' making connections across several different organisations and teams. Staff also require a good general awareness of how external events such as the resettlement of refugees might impact on local provision and demands within the system.

Current Provision

The new Level 3 T Level Health does not contain a social care component. Until 2025 the legacy qualifications will cover social care, but after that apprenticeship routes will be the main provision available into social care professions specifically.

Priority changes needed

- **Career needs/expectations:** Employers recognise the importance of technical competence in the qualification syllabus and would like this strengthened, with more content on realities of the workplace (hours/shiftworking etc), professional behaviour in the workplace and teamwork skills.

- **Emphasis on social care as a valuable career:** Social care career pathways need to be given equal focus with health and clinical pathways by providers, emphasising the full spectrum of careers available within social care specifically.
- **Connecting health and social care disciplines:** Health and social care provision is based on predictions in future population needs and responses to external events. How services are created and adapted should be part of the context of health and social care learning. This should also include the common theories applied in practice such as relational, strength-based, and trauma-informed approaches.

Health and Social Care: Summary of issues and priority changes

Key issues and challenges	Description of change needed	Outcome for employers
Face-to-face communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More practical sessions within training involving communication strategies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More candidates with appropriate experience/ skills.
Interpersonal and telephone skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holistic mock-work settings covering more of the service user journey and related interactions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More “work-ready” staff with appropriate communication skills.
Written skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training to include more formal writing methods: emails, letters, reports. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater compliance with CQC standards.
General IT skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate foundational IT skills into mainstream courses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A more flexible and competent workforce.
Excel skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use opportunities in topics to practice Excel. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff with necessary enhanced IT skills.
Specialist digital skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning to include experience of specialist software and programs in sector. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More candidates with appropriate experience/ skills in case and resource management.
Mismatch between candidates’ expectations and realities of the sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early focusing on realities of sector, hours, shifts, conditions, patient care • More teamwork activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candidates with a more realistic view of sector career and demands.
Lack of career/pathway promotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holistic teaching in QCF courses to include importance of social care and careers. More teamwork activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater understanding of the sector and its’ component roles, to support better career choices.
Specialist Local Authority needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching of relational, strength-based, and trauma-informed approaches. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deeper understanding of care policy and its impact on regional provision.

2.4 BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

Employers across this sector reported recruitment issues, both in professional roles and support positions. Challenges include the planned move of government departments to the region, and the increased use of automation in the sector. Local training provision is needed to provide pathways and opportunities into the sector in response to these challenges.

2.4.1 BUSINESS AND EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

Key issues and challenges

Communication: Encompassing the ability to communicate with clients and presenting information clearly.

Ability to interpret information: This is a core skill within the sector, and is underpinned by research, analysis, and problem-solving skills.

Project management: Employers want candidates to demonstrate that they can plan and manage a project effectively.

Confidence: Employers reported that the confidence of new employees has declined since COVID-19.

Creativity: Candidates that can demonstrate creativity are attractive to employers in the sector as it is a skill that cannot be automated.

Current provision

Employers recognise these skills are transferable from different sectors, which existing provision such as customer service apprenticeships could address.

Priority changes needed

- **Practical professional business skills training:** Ensure communication, problem solving, and project management skills are central to relevant curricula, as well as exercises to practice the ability to apply them to the workplace.
- **Performing arts techniques:** Borrowing techniques from performing arts courses would help develop the confidence and creativity of trainees. For example, by supporting their public speaking skills.

2.4.2 DIGITAL SKILLS FOR PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

Professional service employers reported a strong need and anticipated growth for digital skills. There should be opportunities for digital upskilling that is tailored to professional services.

Key issues and challenges

Accountancy and financial digital needs: Ability to interpret data and create reports using accountancy software. Some employers reported that trainees had never used accountancy software prior to joining the workforce despite holding a relevant qualification.

IT roles: Employers were struggling to recruit into IT roles across the sector.

Legal digital skills: Artificial intelligence (AI), cyber security, and data protection are areas that are advancing rapidly. Legal services firms need to respond to clients' needs and requirements, e.g. insurance sector clients. Staff need to understand how these technologies are used by clients as well as how they could be implemented into firms to increase efficiency.

Current provision

There is one specific digital finance apprenticeship in North of Tyne which is a Finance Data Technician. For law and accountancy, there are no specific courses.

Priority changes needed

- **Digital financial training:** Ensure that training aligns with employers' needs by including data analytics and Excel experience within training, so that trainees have practical experience of software and skills needed to write effective reports.
- **Digital law training:** Update qualifications with both theoretical and practical content covering AI, data protection, and cyber security.

2.4.3 SPECIFIC PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES

Key issues and challenges

Accountancy and financial services

- **Tax, auditing and high-level accountancy:** Firms typically prepare mid-management staff for progression via in-house training. This is at risk due to an ageing workforce and 'hollowing out' of mid-to-senior level roles, leaving a professional training gap.
- **Application of knowledge:** Employers identified a gap between academic knowledge and the ability to apply it within the workplace.

Legal

- **Management skills:** Law firms are independent businesses run by professionals. A development route for a lawyer would be into firm management or partnership. While general management courses do exist in the region, there are no local development opportunities that are tailored to running a professional service firm and the landscape of working in a law firm.
- **Specialisms:** Employers would like to see opportunities to upskill in specialisms relating to the North East client base, which could include life sciences, the green economy and offshore law.
- **Vacancy gap:** Legal firms reported vacancies in both legal and non-legal professions, including HR and marketing.

Public sector

- **Commissioners, planners, project and site management, quantity surveyors and retrofit assessors:** All were identified as professional service needs in the public sector.

Current provision

There are 29 Accountancy and Finance courses provided by local and national companies in North of Tyne. Seven of these relate specifically to financial services up to Level 3. Law upskilling courses are delivered nationally, however, there are none with a local focus or a management focus specifically for law firms. Of the public sector requirements, only one Quantity Surveyor course (Level 4 Northern Skills Group) and one Project Management course (Level 4 North Tyneside Council) were identified: both are apprenticeships.

Priority changes needed

- **Post-degree qualifications:** Work with providers to offer a variety of post-degree qualifications, which local businesses could fund as Continuing Professional Development (CPD), increasing their competitiveness within the market.
- **Upskilling tailored to professional service firms:** Upskilling tailored to knowledge of legal firms, including a legal management training option.
- **Clear pathways and training for professional service roles:** Employers and training providers to work together to create and promote non-traditional pathways into the professional services sector, building on the existing apprenticeship and NVQ offer.

Business and Professional Services: Summary of issues and priority changes

Key issues and challenges	Description of change needed	Outcome for employers
Core skills, communication, interpretation of information, project management.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure these skills are embedded within post-16 training, with practical methods. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employers can build on specific skills with these base skills.
Confidence and creativity for professional services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using performing arts techniques within training may help develop confidence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More 'work-ready' candidates with these skills.
Digital proficiency on accountancy systems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include spreadsheets and data analytics within training, giving practical experience. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced burden on recruitment if candidates are digitally enabled.
Challenge finding digital tech skills, particularly software development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Software development training provision to be promoted. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vacancy gap can be filled.
Produce digitally enabled lawyers - clients within the metaverse and other new technologies are becoming the norm.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge of tech in qualifications, including AI, data protection, cyber security. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Law firms can increase their technological offer.
Accountancy – tax and auditing skills gaps at senior level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High-level training offer in the region, that includes senior tax and auditing training. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employers can fill high level vacancy gaps.
Legal sector professional development for management roles or specialisms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Courses designed around management and business development in the legal sector. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased retention of staff in sector through progression opportunities.
The vacancy gap in legal sector for non-legal staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to training to upskill into roles, specific to working in a law environment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vacancies can be filled.
Recruitment difficulties regarding wage inflation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employers and training providers to work together to promote the sector, and pathways to employment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater retention of staff and vacancies filled.
Technical finance skills and business understanding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide trainees with business understanding with modules on financing, profit/loss, cashflow. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased recruitment options for employers.
Recruitment issues for commissioners, planners, project and site management, quantity surveyors and retrofit assessors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create pathways into these roles and training courses suitable for public sector employment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employers able to fill vacancy gaps.

2.5 CULTURE, CREATIVE, HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM

The culture, creative, hospitality and tourism sector is identified by the North of Tyne Strategic Skills Plan as a key economic asset with significant growth potential. However, it is also a sector still experiencing recovery from the effects of COVID-19. We acknowledge that there will be significant new investment in the region's screen industry, but the timing would suggest it is more appropriate to look at this subsector as a deep dive during Phase 2.

2.5.1 CULTURE AND CREATIVE

Key issues and challenges

Business skills: There is a high number of self-employed and freelancers working in the industry. Both organisations and individuals identified tailored business support as a priority, including choosing the most appropriate company structure for their business.

Technical skills: Theatres identified a gap in the availability of qualified and experienced technical staff. This shortage is leading companies to hire expensive staff from outside the region.

Current provision

A range of performing arts and production courses are available from both Newcastle and Gateshead colleges, but there is limited provision outside of the urban centre. To address the shortage of technical staff in theatres and venues, Generator (a creative and cultural business support agency), Newcastle College and NCFE have collaborated to create a Level 3 course Skills for Music and Performing Arts Professionals and Technicians. Susan French Events offers Bootcamps in live events staging to build on classroom-based technical courses. There does not appear to be any accredited learning connecting artistic practice and business development, although this may be available via business support agencies rather than education providers.

Priority changes needed

- **Business skills:** There was an interest in short modular business courses with an arts element, as well as bursaries to offset the cost of investing in business support training.
- **Technical skills:** More short courses/Bootcamps using local, experienced industry experts in different venues.

2.5.2 HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM

Key issues and challenges

Customer service and communication skills: Employers identified good customer service as a core attribute for the industry. This includes skills to support accessibility and contextualising content e.g. awareness of neurodiversity and addressing the colonial context to exhibits.

Catering skills: Lack of chefs and kitchen staff is leading employers to use expensive agency staff, generating wage inflation and businesses restricting their food offer. Training needs to be diverse and appropriate for the range of kitchens and cafés across the sector.

Security skills: Employers reported a shortage of security staff and significant variation in the quality of private training provision. Employers would like all Security Industry Authority (SIA) licence-linked qualifications to sufficiently test communication skills, particularly spoken English.

Careers guidance: Hospitality businesses identified a persistent stereotype that the industry provides short-term, part-time, or low paid casual 'jobs' rather than meaningful, long-term careers. Businesses offered examples of work in schools to address this.

Current provision

The major colleges serving the North of Tyne area offer Level 1-3 accredited certificates and diplomas in Travel and Tourism, Customer Service for Hospitality, and Professional Cookery. Catering apprenticeships are also available, and Newcastle and Gateshead colleges offer work experience internally or with local restaurants. Northumberland County Council regularly takes on apprentices to train and work within its catering facilities. There is a wide range of provision available for licence-linked qualifications via the SIA service.

Priority changes needed

- **Customer service and communication skills:** Enhanced teaching of soft skills such as customer service/communication skills.
- **Catering skills:** Teaching needs to be more hands on than classroom based, including more professional kitchen experience. Site visits and talks from current chefs/cooks could provide a more realistic perspective of the industry.
- **Security skills:** Framework to ensure SIA licence-linked qualifications test communication skills, including spoken English.
- **Careers guidance:** Industry organisations to promote the diverse range of roles available and career pathways in schools and further education.

Culture, Creative, Hospitality and Tourism: Summary of issues and priority changes

Key issues and challenges	Description of change needed	Outcome for employers
Lack of appropriate business courses tailored to needs of arts practitioners.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business courses e.g. marketing, fundraising, with an arts focus. • Training on alternative company structures e.g. charities or CICs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practitioners have stronger businesses built on appropriate governance structures.
Post COVID shortage of technical stage staff e.g. sound and lighting technicians, stage managers, scenery makers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More courses developed on the Generator-led Music and Performing Arts Professionals and Technicians Level 3. • More short courses/boot camps using local industry experts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performing arts venues will address a significant vacancy gap with regional staff.
A lack of customer service/communication skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced teaching of soft skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better staff and work ready candidates.
Insufficient qualified catering staff of all types.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short modular courses teaching core skills. Should include practical experience of a working environment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address staffing shortage and staff skilled to work in a professional kitchen.
Perception that hospitality only provides a short-term or casual jobs rather than career pathways.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Businesses themselves need to promote the diverse range of roles available, in schools and further education settings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More potential employees with a better understanding of hospitality as a career.
Shortage of security staff and quality of training provision varies significantly.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a framework to ensure SIA licence-linked qualifications test communication skills, including spoken English. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employers access staff with a consistency of training and skills in priority areas.

2.6 CROSSCUTTING THEMES

2.6.1 DIGITAL

The NTCA Strategic Skills Plan identifies digital skills as a key component of greater economic inclusion. NELEP research into digital exclusion identifies differing levels of access, connectivity, and digital literacy amongst the community. Employers endorsed these priorities throughout the LSIP research.

a) Digital literacy

Key issues and challenges

Basic IT skills: This was further defined as the ability to turn on the computer, use the internet and communicate using emails.

Microsoft suite: Most employers had a requirement for ability to use the Microsoft suite, with a particular focus on Excel.

Digital confidence: Some employers reported that there were upskilling issues with current employees who were less digitally able.

Current provision

There is a varied IT offer in North of Tyne, including IT basics courses delivered by colleges, local authorities and private providers (part of the Lifetime Skills Guarantee offer) and specialist Skills Bootcamps. Employers suggested that, as a crosscutting skills need, it should be integrated into all provision.

Priority changes needed

- **Emphasis on basic digital skills:** Some employers said that digital skills should sit alongside English and Maths as essential skills.
- **Focus on Microsoft and Excel:** Ensure that there is a focus on Microsoft and Excel in all training.
- **Access to equipment:** Employers recognised that access to hardware was as important as digital literacy. They recommended that training providers should support access to equipment, as well as supporting with literacy where possible.
- **Upskilling courses:** For current employees who lack confidence in using technology and key software packages such as Microsoft. Accessible, in-person courses were recommended rather than purely online training packages.

b) Advanced digital skills

Key issues and challenges

Digital marketing: Some companies were looking to grow their digital marketing presence and were facing a staffing shortage.

Software development: Employers reported a shortage of experienced software developers in the North of Tyne. This has been caused in part by greater hybrid and remote working enabled by the pandemic, causing displacement of skills and people to employers outside of the region.

Current provision

Three Digital Marketing courses were identified in North of Tyne's accredited courses and apprenticeships at Level 2-3. Five software development apprenticeships were identified, provided by both national and local providers and all at Level 3.

Priority changes needed

- **Practical experience for trainees:** When hiring, employers reported looking for people with commercial experience from internships or a 'hands-on' experience as part of their learning. The traineeship model already exists: employers and providers could work together to explore.
- **Collaboration to align teaching:** The sector is dynamic, due to new technologies emerging, meaning that employers and providers should have a close relationship to ensure the relevance of the curriculum. Shorter courses were also a preferred way of delivering up-to-date training.
- **Upskilling courses:** Clear pathways and upskilling provision for senior roles could support employers to make a more competitive offer against national companies, addressing skills displacement and shortages.

c) Digital sector crosscutting needs

IT employers are generally satisfied with the availability and quality of technical training but identified communication as a skill need, highlighting a mismatch between technical skills and candidates' abilities to communicate with clients, which is an essential part of many roles, for example IT support.

Current provision

Some current apprenticeships specifically targeted at support roles: it is unclear whether/where communication skills feature within these courses.

Priority changes needed

- **Client experience for trainees:** Include client communication training and experience within training provision.

Crosscutting Themes (Digital): Summary of issues and priority changes

Key issues and challenges	Description of change needed	Outcome for employers
Integrate digital skills into technical education – basic skills and sector specific.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital should be integral to technical education. • Greater awareness of provision to refresh skills or upskill. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital skills of candidates keep pace with employer needs.
Practical business digital skills including Microsoft suite, with emphasis on Excel.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Microsoft programmes included within current training. Emphasis on individuals refreshing skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candidates will be more 'work-ready' with core digital skills.
Marketing businesses facing digital skills gap over the next 6-18 months.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional training for digital marketing and design skills, delivered through short courses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business growth can be supported through the provision of marketing skills.
Short refresher provision aligned to rapid industry changes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater awareness of current digital Bootcamp offer. • Communication between employers and providers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candidates with up-to-date knowledge.
Skills gap at higher, more experienced level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providers and employers collaborate on a comprehensive upskilling offer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved retention of staff.
Opportunities for trainees to gain practical, hands-on experience in tech.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration to deliver practical work experience, e.g. 'Hackathons'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Work-ready' candidates.
Communication skills for IT support roles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build communication skills into digital training. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IT companies improve customer service.

2.6.2 CORE AND PROFESSIONAL SKILLS

a) Core skills

Key issues and challenges

Communication: Interpersonal skills and the ability to communicate well verbally and in writing were cited by employers as important, but lacking in many candidates.

Critical thinking, planning and problem solving: When candidates could demonstrate these skills, employers said they would be more likely to recruit them without sector-specific expertise, which they felt could be developed within the workplace.

Current provision

Employers would expect the above skills to be an essential part of all courses. It is likely that many providers offer these skills within their existing offer, therefore the priority changes are broad recommendations aligned to employer needs.

Priority changes needed

- **Emphasis on core skills:** Ensure that communication skills are integral to all provision, practising both written and verbal techniques, including using these skills in client-based scenarios. Using work-based scenarios could also support critical thinking and problem-solving abilities.

b) Professional skills

Key issues and challenges

Sales: Employers reported a lack of sales skills, which they also related to poor communication skills.

Fundraising, bid writing and grant writing: Employers reported being unable to source people with these skillsets.

Project management: These skills are in high demand from employers.

Business management, HR, finance and marketing: Small businesses reported being unable to source training locally and having to use online resources or asking staff to self-teach.

Current provision

No local fully funded sales, fundraising, bid writing or grant writing specific training was identified in the North of Tyne. There is one project management apprenticeship available, delivered by North Tyneside Council. Various business management and marketing courses available, delivered by Elisha Training Ltd in Newcastle, national providers and North Tyneside Council. There is some financial training available but none in the short course format and no HR training.

Priority changes needed

- **Short courses:** Offer the above as short courses, such as Skills Bootcamps or delivered on a modular basis to upskills or retrain experienced professionals. This could also underpin businesses' wider CPD offer.

c) Provision and delivery of courses

Employers also provided general comments which are out of scope of the LSIP but provide important context to their experience of the skills system.

Key issues and challenges

Apprenticeship Levy: Employers find it difficult to navigate the apprenticeship levy as they find the language used is complex.

T Levels: Similarly, employers understanding of T Levels was low as a relatively new form of provision.

Communication: While most employers reported positive experiences with training providers, there was a general sentiment that it would be mutually beneficial to introduce more communication between industry and training.

Direct employment pathways: Some businesses reported a perceived decline in people post-19 moving directly from training and education into employment because provider support is not as intensive for adults as for 16-19 year olds. The Restart programme was positively identified as an example pathway to support older people in work or returning to work.

Unsure which providers to use: Due to the large amount of provision, employers do not feel confident navigating local provision.

Priority changes needed

- **Increased communication between providers and employers:** With the aim of generating valuable work experience for people in training, careers days to gain knowledge of different industries, and ultimately streamline the recruitment process for employers.
- **Awareness raising of the Apprenticeship Levy and T Levels:** Case studies to support the promotion of the Levy and further support in understanding T Levels. This should address how T Levels facilitate learning without reducing the efficiency of the current workforce.
- **Specialist offers:** Employers would like to see more differentiation between training providers, so that they could navigate the local training matrix easier. It would be preferable for colleges to focus on specialist, quality courses, provided by teachers with industrial experience.

Crosscutting Themes (Core and Professional Skills): Summary of issues and priority changes

Key issues and challenges	Description of change needed	Outcome for employers
Communication skills below employer expectations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis on communication skills in training provision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More 'Work-ready' candidates.
Provision of critical thinking, planning and problem-solving skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop these skills across provision for different courses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced recruitment and training burden for employers.
Perceived/actual gap in market for fully funded provision in a number of key areas e.g. sales, project management, HR and finance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater awareness of low-cost alternative courses e.g. Help to Grow. • Short, add-on courses along the Bootcamp model for businesses and individuals to upskill in these areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to upskill existing workforce and fill key vacancies.
Direct pathways into employment for older workers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Streamlined pathways into sectors from training providers and support for older people to retrain. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workforce gained directly from training providers.
Poor awareness of the Apprenticeship Levy and T Levels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplified Apprenticeship Levy and more communication to businesses about how to use it. • An incentive for businesses to train staff or take on T Level students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater and more effective use of the Levy and stronger demand for T Levels.
Greater co-ordination of offer, less competition. Teaching delivered by sector specialists.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incentives to teach, or collaboration with industry for teaching purposes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training aligned with business needs and clearer to navigate.

2.6.3 EMPLOYABILITY

a) Non-technical skills and behaviours

Key issues and challenges

Communication: Of the non-technical skills identified, communication was one of the skills most commonly cited by employers, particularly in terms of people skills, relationship management and interpersonal communication.

Interview techniques: Employers who had recently recruited, reported that the quality of interviewees was below what they would expect. To improve interview skills, providers could focus on interview techniques and teaching individuals how to sell their skills, as well as 'what not to do' in interviews.

Teamwork, time management and organisational skills: These skills were identified as 'soft' skills that employers look for in candidates.

Confidence and resilience: Businesses reported issues with low confidence amongst new recruits, and that at times they experienced difficulties in dealing effectively with new scenarios.

Current provision

No specific courses but skills are embedded into a range of employability courses, many supported by NTCA's AEB funding and offered by various training providers, up to Level 3. They usually support people out of work to re-enter the jobs market. No specific courses were identified in confidence building: Release Potential Ltd offers Level 1 and 2 courses in Resilience. National schemes such as Restart, Sector Based Work Academies and Skills Bootcamps offer guaranteed interviews so these courses do address some of employers' preferred non-technical skills and behaviours.

Priority changes needed

- **Communication skills development:** Provision could include practice with handling client scenarios, speaking on the telephone and sending professional emails.
- **Interview skills:** Training could focus on different interview techniques, core behaviours and teaching individuals how to sell their skills. Some employers recognise that the recruitment culture should be shifted to support candidates who have been out of the labour market for a long time. In these cases, they believe learners should be supported to translate life skills into appropriate interview answers.
- **Industry workshops:** Increase confidence by holding workshop days with industry, where trainees could roleplay and learn to network.
- **Performing arts techniques and scenario training:** Use performing arts techniques to improve confidence in trainees and to roleplay common workplace scenarios, including challenging situations, to develop soft skills such as adaptability.
- **Co-working hubs:** Some employers suggested that it would be beneficial for training to be delivered in hubs, instead of a remote approach, to promote interaction between learners, shared knowledge, and promote confidence building.

b) Knowledge of workplace

Key issues and challenges

Expectations of employers: Some employers reported candidates had little knowledge about the workplace and employer expectations of professional behaviours.

Promotion of different sectors: Employers want opportunities to promote their sectors, especially to people currently in education and training, to better match potential candidates to available opportunities.

Current provision

EFSA guidance for post-16 provision recommends that employability skills and competencies should be included within funded training. However, currently there is no statutory requirement for non-qualification hours, which can include enrichment and employment support.

Priority changes needed

- **Focus on application of skills to the workplace:** Professional scenarios could support the transition from training to employment.
- **Collaboration with employers and training providers:** Employers to work alongside providers to promote different sectors and pathways into employment. This could also include provision of work experience. Forging these links could also support routes from training into employment.
- **Measure of ‘Skills, Knowledge and Attitude’ in qualifications:** To give employers a more rounded picture of an individual’s employability. Could also support individuals who are neurodivergent, disabled or suffer from anxiety, and may face additional barriers in a traditional interview environment. Employers identified a specific need to support neurodiversity in the workplace and create inclusive pathways into employment.

Employability: Summary of issues and priority changes

Key issues and challenges	Description of change needed	Outcome for employers
Communication, interpersonal, team working, and problem-solving.	• Emphasis on skills, including work-based scenarios. Review existing provision, ensure employer alignment.	• ‘Work-ready’ candidates.
Application of soft skills in a workplace/ professional setting.	• Professional behaviour and, expectations in work. Review existing provision, ensure alignment with employer needs.	• Easier transition from training into employment.
Reduce barriers to work experience.	• Collaborate to find models to reduce barriers to delivering work experience.	• Relationships forged can support retention of candidates locally.
Confidence and resilience.	• Practical exercises and using techniques from performing arts. Consider, co-working hubs.	• Easier transition from training into employment.
Recruitment processes could be more streamlined.	• Showcase the overall employability of candidates. Particular support for SEND applications.	• Reduced recruitment burden and more inclusive practice.
Employability to be mandatory in training.	• Clear demand for employability training to become mandatory to prepare candidates for employment.	• Easier transition from training into employment.

PART 3: DELIVERING THE LSIP PRIORITIES

3.1 DELIVERING CHANGE

Delivering the changes employers have articulated as part of the LSIP consultation process will require a partnership between providers, stakeholders, and employers. Delivering the actionable priorities set out below will create a more relevant and accessible skills offer for employers, whilst also ensuring that individuals are equipped with up-to-date and relevant sector skills alongside broader workplace skills.

The North of Tyne economy is growing and evolving, with a new phase of devolution likely to accelerate many of the priority areas identified by strategic partners and confirmed through our employer engagement. Collaborating to build a workforce with a broad and up-to-date skillset will enable employers in the North of Tyne to fully exploit the opportunities available and maximise their impact for the local economy.

This does not require wholesale change. Wherever possible, measures should seek to develop existing provision. As identified in Annex A, stakeholders are driving in the same direction, with NTCA's investment in adult skills activity aligning closely with the findings of this LSIP.

The proposed activities and interventions therefore should not duplicate existing measures, programmes, or funding streams. The large body of evidence collected from employers as part of this LSIP is intended to inform and enhance the overall skills picture, providing the granular detail to drive more inclusive economic growth.

3.1.1 DRIVING COLLABORATION

This LSIP aims to address the mismatch between skill supply and employer demand. Often a result of timing rather than lack of provision, there is an insufficient supply of suitably qualified individuals at the point at which job vacancies arise. The LSIP focus on short to medium term demand for skills from projects and investments in the next three years will create greater alignment between the demand for and supply of skills across the North of Tyne.

Collaboration between providers and employers is vital to the successful delivery of the plan, alongside greater collaboration between individual providers. For example, where the LSIP recommends a sector specific measure such as oil and gas "bridging" qualifications, the ERB will bring together employers and operators running the project with providers, to ascertain timescales and specifically design the provision required. For cross-cutting themes, the ERB will encourage providers to work together to plan changes and to test those changes with employers before implementation.

3.1.2 DRIVING DEMAND

Employers

Successful implementation of the LSIP does not simply sit with providers and stakeholders. Employers have a significant role to play and must continue to engage with the process. This initial phase of LSIP activity has begun to lay the foundations for this involvement. We will work with stakeholders, providers and other relevant partners to develop arrangements which support the ongoing feedback of employer insight and action into the wider governance arrangements for skills in the area, as well as identifying ways to feed that wider employer voice into national skills policy.

The LSIP has identified how employers will demonstrate commitment and support to help design and shape provision. As ERB, the Chamber will continue to work with employers to bring them together with providers and stakeholders to provide more insight into the granular detail of the qualifications, skills and outcomes they would like to see, what they can do to support provision and to set realistic timetables for it to happen. Employers will also need to drive demand from learners through greater engagement with schools, careers provision and through other stakeholders such as Jobcentre Plus.

The evidence base has identified that there is provision available that employers are either not currently aware of or do not understand how to engage with effectively. For example, alternative routes into professional services include adult apprenticeships and T Levels, but the research identified barriers to employers' engagement with this provision. Where more can be done to promote existing provision the Chamber as ERB will seek to collaborate on ways to promote this while avoiding duplication.

Learners

The provision of Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) was consistently identified by employers as an issue underpinning their sector-specific concerns. While employers recognise the need to do more to attract new recruits, especially into new industries, they often feel they have limited ability to do this effectively on their own. Whilst the provision of CEIAG in schools is out of scope of the LSIP, we will seek to work in partnership with the appropriate stakeholders to inform their work, using the employer evidence base and the ongoing engagement of employers to shape this important part of the skills system.

In addition, we will work with providers to support the upskilling and re-skilling of the adult workforce, helping to articulate employer skills needs and promoting the benefits of courses to individuals in terms of their job progression. We will also support and encourage employers to invest in the upskilling and re-skilling of their workforce, rather than placing the onus for this on individual employees.

3.2 ROADMAP

Actionable Priorities	Sector (if ATE Grouping)	Responsibility	Specific Actions	When	Potential Barriers
Communication skills – verbal, confidence, written business skills	Cross cutting (Digital; Sales, Marketing and procurement; Legal, Finance and Accounting Business & Administration)	Providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review existing qualifications, teaching and pastoral practice to identify good practice and employer alignment. Embed skills into existing courses. 	8-12 months	Action sits across qualification and training provision so providers may interpret differently.
Work based skills – knowledge of workplace behaviours, resilience, teamwork, confidence	Cross cutting (Digital; Sales, Marketing and procurement; Legal, Finance and Accounting Business & Administration)	Providers Employers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providers and employers work together to identify how this could be added to 19+ offer e.g. extending the Gatsby benchmarks model. 	12-24 months	Action sits across qualification and training provision so providers may interpret and apply inconsistently (or not at all).
Digital literacy/ digital refresher	Cross Cutting (Digital; Sales, Marketing and procurement; Legal; Finance and Accounting; Business & Administration)	NTCA Providers Employers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand current Bootcamp provision, subject to future funding. To include MS Office suite particularly Excel. 	12-24 months	No additional Bootcamp funding is made available.
Sector specific digital skills	H&S; Green Energy/ Net Zero Construction; Prof Services (Construction and the built environment)	Providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review existing provision and identify how it can be adapted for priority sectors e.g. integrating CAD, BIM or Lidar experience for construction ERB to work with employers to understand sectoral needs. 	12-24 months	Providers lack the funding/capacity to adapt and deliver a sector-specific approach.

	Engineering & Manufacturing; Legal, Finance and Accounting)				
Retrofit provision	Construction Green Energy/ Net Zero (Construction and the built environment; Engineering & Manufacturing)	Providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design and deliver flexible retrofit bolt-on courses to enhance traditional trades. 	12 months	Lack of incentives for providers to respond to new market.
Wind and renewables provision	Green Energy/ Net Zero (Construction and the built environment Engineering & Manufacturing)	Providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Add-on” courses model. Add to welding, electrical and engineering courses to allow transition to wind and renewables sector. • Bridging course to battery manufacture. 	12 months 24-36 months	Lack of incentives for providers to respond to new market.
Flexible Apprenticeship Schemes	Green Energy/ Net Zero Construction (Construction and the built environment; Engineering & Manufacturing)	Providers Employers NTCA/NELEP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providers to work with employers, NTCA/NELEP and other stakeholders to develop and implement a pilot scheme to test effectiveness. Explore how Apprenticeship Levy could support this. 	12-24 months	Cost pressures affecting employer demand for apprenticeships. Lack of incentives for providers to respond to new market.
Industry Tutor and Mentor programme	Green Energy/ Net Zero (Construction and the built environment; Engineering & Manufacturing)	Employers Providers NTCA/NELEP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ERB to bring together providers and employers to scope the parameters of a pilot scheme. • ERB to work with NTCA/NELEP on development and implementation of an emerging model. 	6-12 months 12-24 months	Lack of capacity/appetite from employers to release staff. Lack of support from providers to engage available staff effectively.
Skills ‘passport’	Green Energy/ Net Zero (Construction and the built environment; Engineering & Manufacturing)	Providers Employers NTCA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review/compare oil/gas core qualifications against green industry requirements. • Develop a “bridging” qualification to address gaps. Potential utilisation of AEB. • Develop a skills passport pilot with small number of providers and employers. • Assess market impact. 	6-12 months 12-24 months 24-36 months	Insufficient overlap between core skills and accreditations. Pilot not viable due to lack of demand/costs/relevance to market.
Recognition of qualifications and transferable skills from alternative sectors	Green Energy/ Net Zero Construction (Construction and the built environment; Engineering & Manufacturing)	Employers Providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and promote case studies to highlight the priority. • Explore potential for a longer-term awareness-raising campaign. 	6-12 months 12-18 months	Limited case studies available. Limited impact on employer behaviour e.g. diversifying recruitment practices.
Work and site experience	Green Energy/ Net Zero Construction; Health and Social Care; Culture and Creative; (Construction and the built environment; Engineering & Manufacturing; Care Services; Health and	Employers Providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ERB to bring together providers and employers to explore how on-site experience could be better built into existing training and where employers could support this activity. • ERB to work with NTCA/NELEP and other relevant specialists to explore existing models. 	6-12 months 12-36 months	Regulatory, health and safety or safeguarding requirements limit employers’ capacity to support an ‘on-site’ offer. Cost, time and complexity affect viability of specialist academy approach.

	Science; Catering & Hospitality; Creative & Design)				
Career pathway promotion	Health and Social Care (Care Services Health and Science)	Employers Stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awareness-raising campaign to promote the range of careers available in HSC field. 	0-6 months	Duplication of existing national or regional activity.
Review of careers advice and provision of short taster courses	Health and Social Care (Care Services Health and Science)	Providers Stakeholders Employers DWP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review of CIAG by stakeholders. Provision to be added/ strengthened for existing courses. Stakeholders (e.g. Job Centre Plus) to actively promote offer. 	0-6 months 6-12 months 0-12 months	19 years+ CIAG is the responsibility of a variety of providers so proposed changes are difficult to implement consistently.
Patient-focused communication skills	Health and Social Care (Care Services Health and Science)	Providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provision to be added/ strengthened for existing courses. 	6-12 months	Pace of implementation of changes does not occur quickly enough to address sector skills' shortages.
Communication skills training	Digital	Providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review relevant courses and consider communications component for IT support environment. 	6-12 months	Lack of sufficient demand to justify upfront investment.
Sector-specific training	Professional Services – Accountancy (Legal, Finance and Accounting)	Providers Employers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providers to explore developing new provision, especially shorter pathways for mid-career professionals looking to 'pivot' and change sector. 	12-36 months	Lack of sufficient demand to justify upfront investment.
Local CPD and development provision for professional services	Professional Services (Legal, Finance and Accounting)	Providers Employers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ERB to bring together providers and employers to explore requirements. Scheme supported by NTCA/NELEP. 	12-18 months	Lack of sufficient demand to justify upfront investment.
Financial services provision	Professional Services (Legal, Finance and Accounting)	Providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providers explore design and implementation of relevant course provision. 	12-36 months	Lack of sufficient demand to justify upfront investment.
AI and cyber security training and skills	Professional Services - Legal (Legal, Finance and Accounting)	Providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design and develop new/emerging technologies content for existing courses. 	12-36 months	Lack of sufficient demand to justify upfront investment.
Employer/college co-working	Employability	Providers Employers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and showcase examples of employer/college partnership on work-based experience. 	12-24 months	Limited examples of good practice available.
Specialist catering provision	Hospitality (Catering and Hospitality)	Providers Employers Stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pipeline review of current student cohort and match with existing/projected vacancies. 	6-12 months	Data is insufficient to give full picture.
Security staff training	Hospitality (Catering and Hospitality)	Providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provision to be added/ strengthened for existing courses. 	12-36 months	Lack of incentive/demand to justify investment.
Business courses – alternative company structures	Culture and Creative (Creative and Design)	Providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providers to development and devise course provision, potentially working with business support providers locally. 	12-36 months	Lack of incentive/demand to justify investment. Duplication of business support provision.
Greater practical provision for technical and stage staff	Culture and Creative (Creative and Design)	Providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore development of short courses, developed on the Bootcamp model, using real-life venues and industry experts. 	12-36 months	Lack of sufficient incentive/demand to justify investment.

3.3 MONITORING AND REVIEW

The LSIP runs until March 2025 and will be subject to an annual review and refresh process which will include monitoring and a report to the Secretary of State for Education detailing progress against identified actions.

3.3.1 KEY INDICATORS

To support the monitoring and review of our LSIP implementation, we have identified the following key indicators of success.

- **Employer engagement:** Have employers been effectively and sustainably engaged by providers, stakeholders and the ERB to design provision and aid implementation?
- **Employer satisfaction:** Have employers identified improvements in skills provision and how satisfied are they with these changes?
- **Changes to existing provision:** What changes have providers made to deliver on the measures identified in the LSIP?
- **New provision:** What new provision has been created as a result of LSIP actions?
- **Learner engagement:** How many learners have been engaged in activities arising from LSIP implementation?

3.3.2 REVIEW

The following criteria will be used to regularly review the progress of LSIP implementation on a quarterly basis:

- Which of the actions/changes set out in the LSIP have been achieved to date?
- What has been the impact and benefits of the actions and changes implemented e.g. the number of new courses offered?
- Are any of the actions behind schedule or experiencing significant delivery risks and what action needs to be taken to address this?
- What still needs to be delivered and is there additional/more granular intelligence or more specific actions that will help to achieve this?

A steering group of providers, stakeholders and employers will be established to steer activity and representatives will include the MCA and organisations such as DWP and the Careers Service.