

TEES VALLEY
LOCAL SKILLS IMPROVEMENT PLAN (LSIP)
PROGRESS REPORT
JUNE 2024



Contents

Who is the publication for	3
Summary of the LSIP	4
Strategic and economic context update	5
Priorities and actions (Roadmap): what has been achieved so far?	9
What still needs to be achieved?	19

IMPORTANT NOTES

This progress report has been prepared in accordance with Local Skills Improvement Plans: Stage 2 Guidance (dated November 2023) and is intended to review progress against the local skills improvement plan published in August 2023. This report was produced in June 2024 but publication was delayed due to the pre-election period.

Who is this publication for?

In July 2023 the Tees Valley Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) became a statutory document setting out 21 recommendations for change to skills provision in the Tees Valley. The LSIP was produced by the North East Chamber of Commerce acting as lead following in-depth consultation with 1470 employers drawn from all sectors. Employers shared their views on their future skill and provision needs based on industry expectations to 2026.

A significant amount of work has been undertaken by training providers, individual businesses, and business representative organisations to ensure training provision in the Tees Valley meets the requirements of employers. As a result of the feedback from employers, existing courses have been enhanced or changed and new courses added. In addition, £2.5million of funding from the Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF) has provided new state of the art facilities in the area's further education colleges. Provision has also been enhanced through providers utilising Levelling up funding and Hartlepool Towns Deal funding.

The LSIP has also helped foster greater collaboration between educational institutions, businesses, and stakeholders to strengthen the skills system in the Tees Valley and ensure employers could have the opportunity to provide a depth of insight to inform course design.

This document is the first of two annual reports detailing the progress made against those 21 recommendations. The aim is to inform but also encourage businesses to engage with existing and new provision and to continue to engage with the LSIP process to ensure skills provision in the Tees Valley remains relevant and meets employer needs.

In the first full year of delivery a lot has been achieved. However, there are areas where we still need to make progress, and some priorities which are more challenging to overcome where we need ongoing input and support from the business community.

The full Tees Valley Local Skills Improvement Plan document can be found [here](#).

Summary of the Tees Valley Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP)

The aim of the Tees Valley LSIP is to place employers at the heart of our local skills system by articulating the skills requirements of a large cross section of employers. Building on the initial 1,470 businesses engaged across the Tees Valley in the first phase of work, phase two has enabled deeper and wider engagement both within specific sector and across a wider business base.

The Tees Valley economy faces several challenges, including low business density, a skilled but ageing workforce, skills shortages in new and growing sectors, and attainment levels that are below national averages as well as further education funding constraints. The area also has a mobile workforce, particularly in construction and frequently loses skilled workers to other regions or overseas, often due to contract work or higher pay rates.

The creation of this strong skills base is a key part of the overall strategic economic plan for Tees Valley developed by the Tees Valley Combined Authority and supported by its responsibilities for Adult Education Budget commissioning, and is essential to attracting inward investment, developing key sectors, increasing job numbers, and increasing GDP. The findings of the LSIP and ongoing work will help support the aims of this plan by supporting the delivery of a better trained workforce with skills that are more closely match employer needs and the needs of Tees Valley's rapidly evolving economy.

The key criteria used for identifying the sectors that are the focus of this LSIP are those that will: experience significant growth over the next three years; sectors with an immediate skills shortage; and sectors where significant investment in the economy is likely to cause skills displacement.

Based on these criteria, this LSIP focused on the following sectors:

- Green energy/industrial decarbonisation and Net Zero: the LSIP assessment of the skills requirements for this overarching sector identifies needs across two phases:
 - Construction phase - constructing facilities and specialist infrastructure,
 - Operational phase – requiring skills in operations, maintenance, and new technologies.
- Health and social care.
- Business and professional services.

In addition to the three sectors outlined above, the LSIP also covers essential cross cutting themes, which were identified through analysis of current vacancies, as well as building on the work in the Tees Valley LSIP Trailblazer 2022.

- Digital skills (for non-digital sectors) – Digital skills are a requirement in all sectors of the economy. Whilst the digital sector itself in Tees Valley is set to grow by approximately 2,000 jobs over the next 10 years, there is an additional, significant shortage of digital skills in the wider economy.
- Professional development/business skills – Identified as a priority through the work on the LSIP Trailblazer and analysis of vacancy data as well as significant area-based investments expected or already occurring in the lifetime of the LSIP. Businesses highlighted skills gaps in areas such as project management and communication where there is a need for ongoing in-work training and development.

The geographical area of Tees Valley LSIP includes the areas of Hartlepool, Darlington, Middlesbrough, Stockton on Tees, and Redcar and Cleveland.

Strategic and economic context update

The sectors selected for inclusion into the Tees Valley LSIP were chosen based on either an elevated level of demand demonstrated by existing vacancy rates or where there was likely to be significant growth over the next three years due to investment and other interventions. Over the past twelve months, the Tees Valley economy has continued to grow in line with expectations outlined in the original LSIP, with key projects and place-based developments receiving significant government or private funding and relevant planning approvals.

The data below gives a brief snapshot of the Tees Valley economy. While currently slightly below the national average, job rates have increased in the Tees Valley since 2018, and are projected to steadily increase in the next five years. The LSIP focused on several key industrial sectors, described in the remainder of this section.

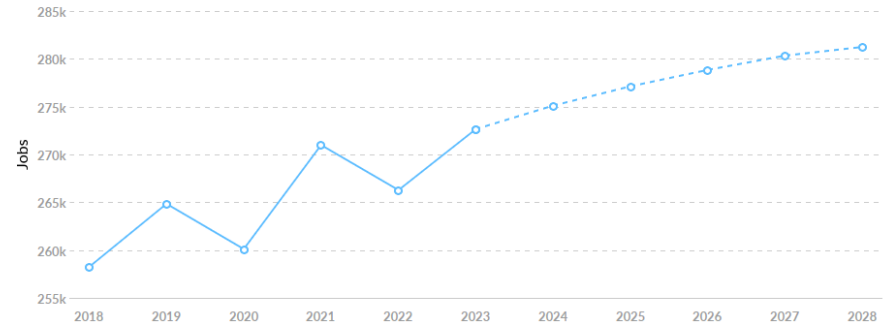
Figure 1

2023 Labour Force Breakdown



Figure 2

From 2018 to 2023, jobs increased by 5.6% in 5 North East Local Authorities from 258,244 to 272,651. This change fell short of the national growth rate of 6.5% by 0.9%.



Copyright 2024 Lightcast

The LSIP focused on several key sectors:

NET ZERO

There are several key Net Zero projects in the Tees Valley and all have progressed positively over the last 12 months. The sector is based around the Tees Works development with a significant supply chain across the wider Tees Valley area. The LSIP recognised that there would be a significant construction phase for the site and associated projects running through 2025 requiring many specialists' industrial construction skills. Once the infrastructure of the site was complete, there would be an operational phase commencing in 2026, as projects came to life and delivery of the core business activities within the area began. This second phase of activity will require a distinct set of skills, again recognised in the LSIP.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

The level of vacancies within the health and social care sector remains challenging and the original LSIP acknowledged that high vacancy rates were driven by a combination of factors including remuneration and working conditions. The tables below highlight this, showing that the Tees Valley is 20% above the national average in terms of health and social care job rates, with a projected 45.8% growth in the sector over a thirty-year period. The data also supports the reported difficulty in recruitment, with Figure 5 showing a job posting intensity of 5:1. This means employers need to post a

single job listing five times before someone is recruited. This outweighs the regional average of 2:1, demonstrating a significant challenge in terms of recruitment to this sector.

However, the LSIP also recognised the skills system has a part to play, particularly in promoting resilience and stability in the workforce and providing and promoting attractive career pathways.

Figure 3



Figure 4

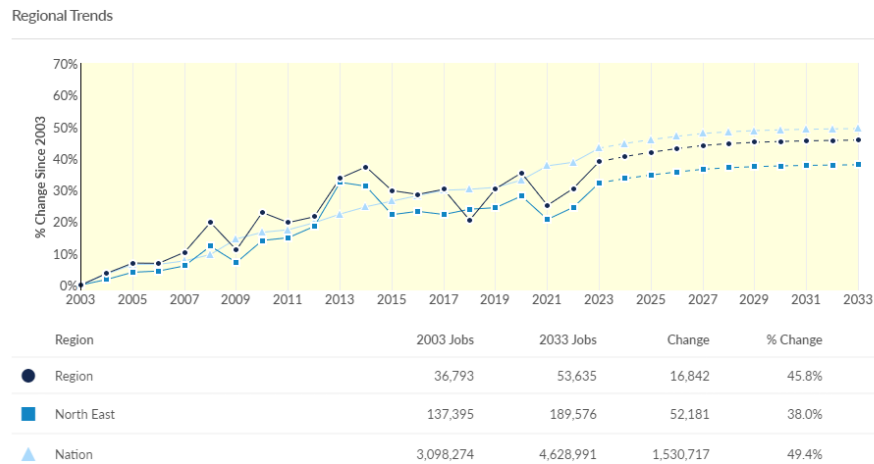
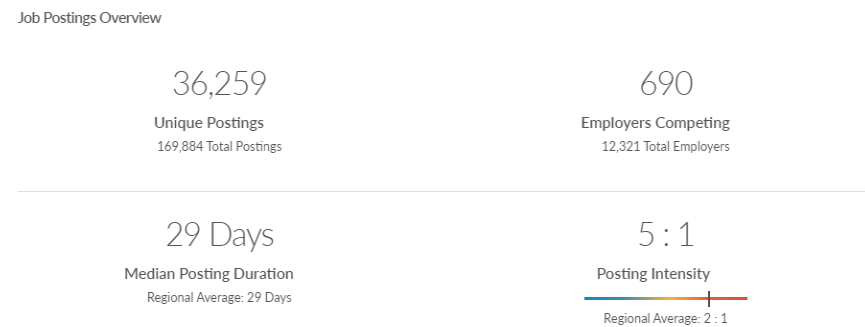


Figure 5



Copyright 2024 Lightcast

The sector will also be affected by national policy changes. In April 2024, the NHS produced its Long-Term Workforce Plan which set out key ambitions to:

Train: significantly increasing education and training to record levels.

Retain: retaining the trained workforce, we have within the health service by better supporting people throughout their careers.

Reform: building broader teams with flexible skills, changing education and training to deliver more staff in roles and services where they are needed most, and ensuring staff have the right skills to take advantage of recent technology.

These ambitions have aligned with the LSIP and, although there is still a requirement for a significant increase in new entrants to the health and social care sector, some progress is being made.

CHILDCARE

In 2023 the government committed to a significant policy to encourage more parents into work, recognising this was one of the major reasons for skilled workers either leaving work or reducing their hours. Several changes to the national entitlement for working parents to help with financing childcare are being made in the lifetime of this LSIP.

From April 2024, eligible working parents of two-year-olds can access 15 hours childcare support. By September 2025, most working families with children aged between nine months and five years old will be entitled to 30 hours of childcare support.

Whilst the original LSIP did not look at the childcare sector as a subsector of health and social care, we recognise that it is a significant change which has the potential to have a major impact on skills provision as demand for childcare places increases. As part of this progress report, we have undertaken a short consultation exercise with childcare providers in the Tees Valley area to ascertain the levels of increased demand for skills in the sector.

BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL

The business and professional sector in the Tees Valley continues to flourish and grow with several larger professional firms opening satellite offices in the area. There is an increasing demand for support from professional services firms across the growth sectors identified. Demand for qualified staff is strong and there remains intense competition for a skilled workforce from other parts of the country. The Tees Valley continues to lose many graduates to other regions. Many employers and providers are now looking to increase places for alternative pathways into the sector such as degree apprenticeships which are more likely to encourage individuals to remain in the area post-qualification.

A significant driver for this demand is the Darlington Economic Campus (DEC). DEC describes itself as a multi-department government hub bringing together a number of government departments, notably the Treasury, the Department for Business and Trade and the Department for Education. Established in 2021 DEC will eventually employ around 1,750 civil servants, both relocated and recruited from the local area. Planning permission has been granted for the new campus site and buildings and there is an ongoing commitment to growth in terms of departments and roles.

The campus has been a success story and there is evidence of strong local recruitment. Whilst this is incredibly positive, it appears to have created additional demand for professional and business skills such as legal, planning, financial and policy and strategy. Anecdotally this has made it harder for businesses and the public sector to recruit to these vacancies in an already tight labour market.

OTHER CHANGES

Investment zone – A £160million investment zone was announced for the Tees Valley in the 2024 budget. The zone will provide investment in skills and infrastructure to support the digital sector in the Tees Valley and aims to grow the sector by 2,000 jobs over a 10-year period. The investment zone is aimed at developing specialisms in higher level, industry specific digital skills in areas such as gaming and software development. The LSIP focuses on digital skills in the wider economy that are perhaps less specialised but no less important. In developing digital skills across the board, the LSIP is aimed at producing a wider pool of individuals with digital skills who may go on to develop more specialist skills in the sector.

Freeport – The Tees Freeport was established in 2021 and provides tax incentives and special customs arrangements to promote investment, growth, and jobs. The Freeport includes the Teesworks site, the area of Wilton, the port, and the airport as well as several smaller individual customs zones. The Freeport is based around engineering and manufacturing specialisms and at its peak is anticipated to employ 18,000 individuals. Whilst progress has been slower than expected, development is now beginning on the Teesworks site and is expected to increase significantly in 2025

Whilst a mixed development, the freeport is focused on growing the Net Zero and advanced manufacturing sectors in the Tees Valley and the LSIP has focused on developing the skills base to meet the anticipated demand the Freeport will bring.

Priorities and actions (Roadmap): what has been achieved so far?

An overview of activity to date is contained in the tables below. For further details, please refer to the table in Annex A.

COMMUNICATION, CONFIDENCE AND EMPLOYABILITY

Whilst there are many sector-specific priorities in the Tees Valley LSIP, a key ask from employers was for better communication skills, confidence, and general 'employability' traits from the wider labour market. These topics were raised in interviews and surveys by every employer engaged in consultation.

Many skills providers build employability skills, often referred to as soft skills such as teamwork, taking initiative or good interpersonal skills, into existing courses. Following the publication of the LSIP and feedback from employers several education and learning providers are now looking to strengthen this skills base amongst their learners through the following measures:

- Embedding of formal presentation skills and experience in all courses.
- Role playing in virtual reality environments to be build communication and teamwork skills.
- Work-based communication skills added into adult education at level 1, particularly targeted at community courses.
- Employer-led mock interviews.
- Specialist employability and resilience programmes preparing students for life and work.

Whilst there is a significant amount of work going on to strengthen communication and employability skills, it is recognised that more can be done. All the colleges in the Tees Valley have committed to additional developments in their curriculum and provision in response to employer needs. In their Curriculum Review publication for 2024, the college principals and chairs as a collective have agreed to collaborate to:

“Develop further employability skills in our young people while strengthening their confidence and resilience.”

In addition, as part of our LSIP work, we have commissioned a deep dive research exercise to look at best practice in delivering communication and confidence skills training and what we can learn from other areas to apply in the Tees Valley.

Through these measures, individuals should be able to develop their overall communications skills and those relevant to their occupation: together this should lead to a better alignment of expectations between employers and their future staff at the point of recruitment and beyond. Embedding these skills into both the curriculum and the learner experience will take time, but this crucial issue highlighted by employers has now been clearly recognised and substantive actions have been identified.

Priority	Activity	Partners involved	Timescales	Method of implementation	Monitoring arrangements	Progress status
Communication skills - verbal, confidence, written business skills	Tees Valley colleges are embedding communication skills in existing provision, and engaging with a range of employers and stakeholders to ensure	A range of local employers are collaborating with the colleges in the Tees Valley.	Planned for completion in May 2025. Many of these recommendations have now been put in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LSIF • Employer engagement • Colleges reviewing existing courses 	There will be limited changes until the new academic year 24/25. ERB will then proceed with monitoring	On track to deliver

	these skills are aligned with employer need. LSIF funding will also enhance communication skills through simulated work settings.		place. Further activity will proceed in new academic year 24/25.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ERB commissioning research. Overseen by LSIP Advisory Group 	number of students enrolled on courses etc.	
Work-based skills - knowledge of behaviours, resilience, teamworking, confidence.	Tees Valley colleges have embedded employability skills in existing provision and enter students into competitions to boost confidence and resilience.	As above.	Original deadline projected for May 24 – May 25. No revisions to timescale needed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employer engagement • Colleges reviewing existing courses 	As above.	Completed

DIGITAL

Alongside communication skills, employers also raised general digital skills as a key priority for both new and existing employees. Whilst employers recognised that most people have some level of digital literacy e.g. smart phone use, they were particularly keen to see a strengthening of business skills in software packages such as MS Office. These are seen as fundamental to the workplace: employers would like to see provision which encourages people to regularly update their skills to keep pace with software changes.

- Full digital assessments for learners.
- Digital skills bootcamps delivered as part of the adult education offer commissioned the Tees Valley Combined Authority.
- Digital modules in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Courses.
- Essential digital skills referrals from Job Centres.
- Introduction to Microsoft 365 and Microsoft Teams courses.
- Artificial intelligence training developed.

In addition, all colleges have looked at their sector-specific courses and strengthened their digital elements where appropriate. The college principals as a collective have committed to improve digital skills across the board for all students.

Employers see the improvement in everyday digital skills as applied to business as being vital to the economy. The measures above will improve skills for people in training as well as those furthest away from the labour market, as digital skills increasingly become an essential requirement for nearly all jobs. These core skills need to be kept up to date and there must be an easy mechanism for employers and individuals to be able to do that.

Priority	Activity	Partners involved	Timescales	Method of implementation	Monitoring arrangements	Progress status
Digital literacy / digital refresher	Tees Valley colleges have embedded digital literacy / refresher skills in existing provision. Employers and other stakeholders have been consulted to ensure that skills are aligned with employer need.	A range of local employers and stakeholders are collaborating with the colleges in the Tees Valley.	Original deadline projected for May 24 – May 25. No revisions to timescale needed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colleges reviewing existing courses • Employer engagement • Engagement with DWP 	As above.	On track to deliver
Sector-specific digital skills	Digital skills have been embedded across learning and skills provision in the Tees Valley, including health and social care, engineering, digital, and retrofit courses.	As above.	Original deadline projected for May 24 – May 25. No revisions to timescale needed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LSIF • Employer engagement • Colleges reviewing existing courses 	As above.	On track to deliver

NET ZERO – CONSTRUCTION

The LSIP focused on the Net Zero sector in the Tees Valley because of the incredibly significant impact it will have on the economy over the next five years. The LSIP focused on construction skills for large-scale industrial developments and retrofit as two key sub-sets of growth. Both Redcar and Hartlepool colleges already have Construction Centres of Excellence and this provision builds on that longstanding expertise.

Case Study: The Clean Energy Education Hub is the centre of excellence supporting the engineering construction industry skills development.

Redcar and Cleveland College are extremely ambitious in its commitment to supporting the engineering construction industry in the development of skills training for the clean and renewables sector. Working with industry experts such as BP, Parker Hannofin and Sembcorp, has enabled the rapid development of the resources and understanding of skills needs to support the engineering construction industry. Alongside the industrial demands, the College has also committed to supporting the development of the domestic market in retrofit skills training, including solar PV installation, retrofit assessor and air source heat pump installation. Partnering with Norther Renewables has enabled the College to ensure its skills training is aligned to the domestic market skills needs.

The industrial developments in clean and renewable energy, along with the domestic market in retrofit developments provide an exciting future for the communities of Redcar and Cleveland and wider Tees Valley.

Jason Faulkner - Executive Principal

WELDING

Welding provision is central to the Net Zero future of the Tees Valley. The building and maintenance of complex systems including hydrogen plants and carbon capture and storage facilities need specialist welding provision tailored to an industrial setting. The LSIP recognised that the Tees Valley has a shortage of general and specialist welders and providers responded to this by using LSIF funding to purchase new equipment and industry specific training.

Providers have worked with industry to develop intensive courses to upskill new and existing welders and, given the level of predicted demand, are also looking to develop short courses to help employers upskill their current workforce or trial those currently unemployed who are looking to move into the workforce.

Employers made it clear that there will need to be a substantial number of specialist welders to enable the construction of these large projects. These facilities will ensure a strong supply working in proximity to the Teesworks site.

RETROFIT

Recognising the anticipated growth in this skills subsector providers in the Tees Valley have responded very positively to the priorities set out in the LSIP and have used Local Skills Improvement Fund money for a centre of excellence, new facilities, and training to meet employer needs. They have also engaged extensively with employers in the sector for more granular input to courses and design of the facilities. For example, specific feedback from employers led to a specialist module being included on retrofit software in all retrofit courses and new learner provision in retrofit assessment and co-ordination at Levels 3, 4 and 5.

The retrofit facilities funded by the LSIF will significantly increase the capacity of providers to offer courses and increase the pipeline of trainees.

Priority	Activity	Partners involved	Timescales	Method of implementation	Monitoring arrangements	Progress status
Flexible apprenticeship schemes	Tees Valley colleges are currently investigating flexible apprenticeships in construction. ERB will be conducting deep dive research into shared apprenticeship model towards the end of 2024.	All colleges have begun initial conversation with local employers.	Original deadline projected for May 25 – May 26. No revisions to timescale needed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ERB research deep-dive. 	As above.	On track to deliver.

Industry tutor and mentor programme	Tees Valley colleges have strong links to industry and are delivering masterclasses. Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) offering products, grants, and services to support this LSIP priority.	A range of local employers and stakeholders are collaborating with the colleges in the Tees Valley.	Original deadline projected for May 24 – May 26. No revisions to timescale needed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employer engagement 	As above.	On track to deliver.
Centre for Excellence for advanced construction skills related to the construction of new Net Zero facilities	A Centre for Excellence located in Tees Valley in partnership with Seymour Civil Engineering. New provision is also being invested in. CITB offering products, grants, and services to support this LSIP priority.	As above.	Original deadline projected for May 24 – May 26. No revisions to timescale needed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investment in new provision 	As above.	On track to deliver
Provision of training on high and low voltage electrical engineering	LSIF funding and the introduction of new provision in the Tees Valley facilitating training on high and low voltage engineering for Level 3 and Level 5. CITB offering products, grants, and services to support this LSIP priority.	As above.	Original deadline projected for May 24 – May 26. No revisions to timescale needed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LSIF • Introduction of new course and accreditation to provision from TV college. 	As above.	On track to deliver.
Provision of advanced specialist welding for construction of hydrogen and other industrial decarbonisation facilities	LSIF funding and employer collaboration in the Tees Valley has led to new welding facility and a bespoke welding programme. CITB offering products, grants, and services to support this LSIP priority.	As above.	Original deadline projected for May 24 – May 26. No revisions to timescale needed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LSIF • Employer engagement 	As above.	On track to deliver.
Recognition of qualifications and transferable skills from	Cross-sector transferable skills have been embedded in Tees Valley provision. CITB offering products, grants, and services to support this LSIP priority.	N/A	Original deadline projected for May 24 – May 25. No revisions to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New provision • Colleges continuing to 	As above.	On track to deliver.

alternative sectors			timescale needed.	deliver provision		
Work and site experience	Tees Valley colleges maintain strong relationships with local employers. Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland Levelling up Partnerships funding has been used to develop facilities to simulate onsite construction experience.	As above.	Original deadline projected for May 24 – May 25. No revisions to timescale needed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Levelling up funding • Employer engagement 	As above.	On track to deliver.
Collaboration with electrolyser manufacturers to develop training	LSIF funding has been used to build a simulated electrolyser. Tees Valley colleges also working in partnership to develop virtual reality content to simulate electrolyser processing. CITB offering products, grants, and services to support this LSIP priority.	As above.	Original deadline projected for May 24 – May 26. No revisions to timescale needed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LSIF • Employer engagement • New resources and facilities 	As above.	On track to deliver.

Quote: Wes McGeeney, Net Zero Technical Manager at Thirteen Group:

“These excellent local facilities will offer us comprehensive green skills training for our internal/external employees as we aim to achieve our Net Zero targets. It also has a positive impact on the local economy and the Tees Valley area and wider North East as we continue to develop a strong skilled workforce for the future.”

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

The response from providers across the Tees Valley to the priorities identified in the LSIP has been very strong, demonstrating both high levels of engagement with the ambitions and intent of the LSIP as well as significant levels of local collaboration to enable the delivery of its recommendations. Working as a consortium the colleges and private training providers have come together to use LSIF, Towns Deal and Levelling Up funding for new facilities and training courses as well as making additions to existing courses to fit with employer priorities. This represents a comprehensive, co-ordinated package of change responding to employer requirements. The measures include:

- Expansion of ward facilities at Middlesbrough, Hartlepool, and Darlington colleges to include improved physical work environments for learning e.g. ward, care home and domiciliary settings.
- Full immersion digital suites and virtual reality systems to present real life, interactive scenarios to students.
- Artificially intelligent (AI) robot mannequins responding in real time to students to aid the development of communication skills and allow for scenario role play.
- A suite of new short, specialist courses in hydration and UTI prevention; nutrition for the older person; treating pressure ulcers; recognising deterioration and understanding sepsis.

Providers have also looked at the key issues raised around communication skills and have adapted course teaching by adding in extra sessions on communication skills to respond to this specific issue highlighted by employers.

The package of measures put together by providers in the Tees Valley meet all the recommendations set out in the LSIP. Private and public sectors Employers have given extremely positive feedback on the facilities and the programmes and have contributed to the fine tuning of the training scenarios and the courses to help them match real-world experience and expectations. Implementation will be from the new academic year.

Priority	Activity	Partners involved	Timescales	Method of implementation	Monitoring arrangements	Progress status
Review of careers advice and provision of short taster courses	A new Health & Social Care Academy in the Tees Valley will afford greater opportunities for prospective employees to gain a deeper understanding of careers in the sector. New provision and employer engagement will also give important insight into the sector for learners.	Close links with North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Trust and Hartlepool Borough Council.	Original deadline projected for May 24 – May 26. No revisions to timescale needed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LSIF • Employer engagement 	As above.	On track to deliver.
Patient-focused communication skills	AI mannequins and a simulated ward setting have been introduced using LSIF funding, providing opportunity to build patient-focused communication skills. VR labs	A range of local employers and stakeholders are collaborating with the colleges in the Tees Valley.	Original deadline projected for November 24 – May 26. No revisions to timescale needed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LSIF • Colleges reviewing provision and continuing to deliver 	As above.	On track to deliver.

	and reviewed provision also boost communication skills.			existing provision		
--	---	--	--	--------------------	--	--

Quote: Gary Wright, deputy chief people officer, for North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust:

“The Local Skills Improvement Fund has been a key enabler in the development of the Health and Social Care Academy in the heart of University Hospital of Hartlepool. “The funding will play an important part in supporting the ambitions of the academy to inspire future generations to train to become a highly skilled, sustainable workforce which will support our community for decades to come. “The academy offers a learner access to the latest immersive technology, ensuring a realistic and safe environment to develop their skills. Access to LSIF funding via our partnerships with local colleges has strengthened our ability to attract, develop and retain talent for the future.”

Quote: Diane Reynolds, Skills for Care

Skills for Care is the strategic workforce development and planning body working with adult social care (ASC) employers, government entities and partners whose mission is to ensure social care has the right people, skills, attributes required to deliver the highest quality care and support.

I was invited to engage with the Chamber at the initial sector engagement pre-bid stage with the ask to provide sector insight, and to put the LSIP team in front of local care sector partners to provide opportunities to have real conversations with ASC providers to gain an insight into what training is available in Teesside , what are the gaps and what are the challenges.

Providers fed back to me that they felt listened to and that they [providers are] across the key challenge[s] that students leaving college do not have, the necessary reliance, life skills, attributes and understanding of the range of roles within the care sector to succeed and that the lack of work -ready workforce is having an impact on employers ability to maintain the high quality of care they aspire to deliver, to continually improve and grow their businesses.

Furthermore, providers recognise that “things are not going to improve over night but feel reassured and positive that their comments and needs have been considered” during this process for the first time.

On a personal note, I have been encouraged by the ambition of the LSIP team to be inclusive and genuine desire to hear and learn from the sector (providers) and associated stakeholders throughout programme to date.

BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

There has been some progress in the LSIP priorities in business and professional services sector, building on the existing offer at levels 2 and 3. Accountancy (AAT) and Legal (CILEX) are delivered in the area and there is higher level provision available in the universities, however there is still a shortage.

There is still a gap in the system in delivering high quality, local continuous professional development (CPD) provision which is tailored to the local economy. University departments have begun to look at this issue and are considering developing CPD modules and commercial seminars aligned to the local economy, but these is in the initial stages of development.

Priority	Activity	Partners involved	Timescales	Method of implementation	Monitoring arrangements	Progress status
Sector-specific training	Tees Valley colleges delivering provision with core skills for training in business and professional services. CILEX programmes and AAT L2 & L3 are delivered by colleges.	A range of local employers and stakeholders are collaborating with the colleges in the Tees Valley.	Original deadline projected for November 24 – May 26. No revisions to timescale needed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employer engagement • Colleges reviewing existing courses • ERB assisting with development 	As above.	On track to deliver.
Local CPD and development provision for professional services	Bespoke confidence and teamwork skills are delivered to local employers. Bootcamps in leadership and management are also being introduced.	As above.	Original deadline projected for May 24. Deadline will need to be extended.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employer engagement. • New provision from colleges • Marketing and promotion 	As above.	Not on track to deliver.
Financial services provision	AAT provision at L1 – L4.	As above.	Original deadline projected for November 24 – May 26. No revisions to timescale needed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuing to deliver financial services courses 	As above.	Completed.
Greater guidance on use of T Levels for professional services	T-Level taster days delivered to schools. New T-Level in management and administration introduced.	As above.	Original deadline projected for May 24. No revisions to timescale needed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New provision from colleges • Marketing and promotion • Engagement with local schools 	As above.	Completed.

Availability of accountancy qualifications to L7 in Tees Valley	Tees Valley colleges are investigating expanding provision to L7.	As above.	Original deadline projected for May 24. The deadline will need to be extended.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal conversations at colleges. 	As above.	Not on track to deliver.
Promotion of entry-level roles in legal services	Tees Valley colleges promote entry level roles during Careers Week.	As above.	Original deadline projected for November 24 – May 26. No revisions to timescale needed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marketing and promotion 	As above.	On track to deliver.
Technical training in public sector regulatory services matched to Tees Valley economy	Careers Week events promote technical training.	As above.	Original deadline projected for May 25 – May 26. No revisions to timescale needed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviewing existing courses Marketing and promotion 	As above.	Completed.

What still needs to be achieved?

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT WITH THE SKILLS SYSTEM

In Phase 2 of the LSIP we have conducted a deep dive piece of research into employer engagement with the skills system. As Phase 1 focused on skills needs, this research explores the experience of accessing the skills system overall, and common barriers to engagement across industry sectors. Fieldwork was carried out between January and May 2024, with 153 Tees Valley businesses sharing their views.

The findings of this research will be used to identify key wide-scale barriers, with a view to make active changes to the skills landscape, building on the successful collaborations between providers and other stakeholders so far. This will ensure that training for the skills needs identified in Phase 1 can be easily accessed, resulting in a skilled Tees Valley workforce that meets employer needs.

We are in the process of analysing this data and will be able to make recommendations based on these findings once this has been completed in June.

DIGITAL SKILLS

Whilst considerable progress has been made in embedding digital skills into course provision, progress is still required in encouraging people in work to update and refresh their digital business skills including Excel and the Microsoft Office suite.

A substantial proportion of the workforce use business software, including Excel in some form yet have had no, regular substantive training to update those skills. For example, Excel has major current updates on average every two years and has moved from being a spreadsheet and accountancy programme to being a powerful data analysis tool.

There are courses available online, however more needs to be done to encourage employers to schedule regular refreshers for their workforce and for individuals to bring their own skills up to date.

BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

Whilst some progress has been made in the provision of business and professional courses and CPD, there is further work to do. Work with the area's universities is progressing, and we continue to liaise with employers to provide more detail on their requirements and funding needs.

INDUSTRY TUTORS

The shortage of tutors in key sectors remains an issue with high vacancy rates in key sectors such as construction and engineering. There are several schemes in place encouraging individuals into teaching and to entice retirees to teach part-time, but they have had a limited impact so far. High levels of private sector pay, and industry demand are among the factors contributing to the issue.

During the LSIP fieldwork several of the larger private sector employers suggested there may be potential for schemes where they can lend employee time to teach in specialist areas. This is a complex area and slow to progress because of construction project timing and the level of co-ordination required; however, we would like to bring employers, providers, and stakeholders together to see if this may be a feasible option.

WORK EXPERIENCE

When conducting the field work for the LSIP many employers were clear that they value relevant work experience alongside qualifications. This was a particular feature in the construction, engineering and health and social care sectors. Analysis of job advertisements bears this out with many employers asking for three-five years' experience.

Employers also recognise the issue of skills shortages in their sector and the need to attract more people to strengthen the workforce pipeline, but it is often difficult for newly qualified individuals to gain entry due to the common requirement for experience. In the construction and engineering sectors figures from the Tees Valley FE+ Group, a partnership of all the Tees Valley Colleges, suggests enough individuals for vacancies and projected vacancies are in training, however the obstacle to progression remains relevant site experience.

When challenged on this issue, many employers then acknowledge that they do not offer work experience or onsite training programmes themselves to address this mismatch. The reasons for this were varied ranging from time constraints, insurance issues or health and safety concerns.

This is a complicated issue to tackle and for a long time has often been seen as "too difficult" to crack. There are some small initiatives such as the CITB's employer bursary the [Into Work Grant](#), but they tend to be smaller scale and insufficient to meet likely demand.

Over the next 10 months we would like to look at work experience in the Tees Valley working with employers and providers to look at how the barriers to site experience might be overcome. We will look to work with employers, providers and stakeholders on this issue, with the intention of commissioning further research later in the year.

CHILDCARE

As part of the LSIP review process, it is incumbent upon the ERB to look at further changes in the economy and whether there is a requirement to add further priorities to the LSIP Roadmap.

2024 will see significant changes to childcare funding with free nursery hours being significantly expanded to 30 hours per week available from 9 months old for the majority of working parents. This measure could have a significant impact on skills demand for a sector which already experiences significant shortages. To gauge potential demand, we contacted all 239 early years providers in the Tees Valley who are direct employers (rather than sole traders such as childminders). Whilst some employers declined to take part, we did receive significant feedback from 20% of the survey population.

24% of providers said that they would be looking to increase their workforce with the reason given that they would need to increase the number of Level 2 and 3 qualified staff. 72% said they would not be looking to increase their workforce and 4% answered that they may need to increase their workforce.

Only 2% were looking to recruit an apprentice and 52% would be seeking to recruit experienced staff through job advertisements.

In terms of skills needs, 39% of respondents identified a skills gap in their sector. 67% sought soft skills such as communication and a passion for work. 33% identified a need for SEND education for staff.

Based on the figures and current provision in the Tees Valley, we are not making any recommendations for further LSIP priorities at this stage. This is because the overall response from the Tees Valley is too small to be significant. We will, however, pass these findings to providers, and continue to monitor how communication skills as a cross-sector priority are embedded into Tees Valley provision.

