



Staffordshire
Chambers of
Commerce.



Skills Hub
APPRENTICESHIP

STOKE-ON-TRENT AND STAFFORDSHIRE LOCAL SKILLS IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2026-2029

**An employer-led skills plan for
a more productive, inclusive and
future-ready regional economy**

This Local Skills Improvement Plan has been approved by the Secretary of State in accordance with the requirements of section 1 of the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022, and the relevant published statutory guidance.

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CONTENTS

3	9	11
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	INTRODUCTION	STRATEGIC AND ECONOMIC CONTEXT
25		34
SECTION 1: LOCAL SKILLS NEEDS		SECTION 2: AGREED CHANGES AND ACTIONS NEEDED
44		61
ANNEX A: FURTHER AND EXPLANATORY INFORMATION ON SKILLS NEEDS		ANNEX B: IMPLEMENTATION AND DELIVERY ACTIVITY TABLE
70	86	93
ANNEX C: BACKGROUND AND METHOD	ANNEX D: SUMMARY OF KEY LOCAL AND NATIONAL STRATEGIES	ANNEX E: GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) 2026–2029 sets out a bold, employer-led vision: that by 2029, this area will have shifted its skills profile, producing more higher-level technical talent, connecting more residents into good work, and earning a national reputation as a place where employers invest in their people and the skills system responds at pace.

This plan has been shaped in a collaborative manner, working with employers, providers and local authorities and through detailed qualitative and quantitative sector evidence reviews across eight priority sectors:

- **Advanced Manufacturing inc Engineering and Advanced Materials**
- **Clean Energy**
- **Creative Industries and Crea-Tech**
- **Digital and Technology**
- **Agriculture and Agri-Tech**
- **Construction**
- **Health and Social Care**
- **Advanced Logistics and Distribution**

Each review combined quantitative analysis (job posting data, Census 2021, Skills England national reports, Migration Advisory Committee shortage

data) with qualitative engagement through employer focus groups, surveys and Training Needs Analyses.

The plan is also set within two important strategic contexts. The FE estate in Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire is already operating at 96% average capacity and will exceed capacity at most sites by 2029 without sustained capital investment. Addressing this infrastructure gap is a critical enabler of the ambitions set out in Priority 1, and the case for investment in the FE estate is reflected throughout this plan. The area has also secured a Technical Excellence College designation in Advanced Manufacturing, providing a further anchor for the technical pipeline priorities in this plan and creating a hub-and-spoke centre of excellence through which curriculum, CPD and specialist facilities can be shared across the provider network.

The plan is equally explicit about the role of universities. The Skills Imperative projections indicate a net gain of 60,000 roles at RQF Level 4 and above in this area by 2035, alongside a loss of 40,000 roles below Level 3. The majority of that upward shift will require higher education, not further education.

The University of Staffordshire and Keele University are central to delivering this plan's ambitions, in digital, advanced materials, and leadership and management, and both face serious financial pressures that, if unaddressed, will constrain their ability to deliver. The financial pressures facing both universities represent a risk to delivery of this plan's higher-level skills ambitions, and the LSIP Governance Board will continue to raise this as a priority local workforce development issue through appropriate engagement channels.

Separately, the area's emerging Innovation Framework identifies four high-value cluster groupings where coordinated investment could unlock significant economic growth. An ambition to establish UK sovereign CMC manufacturing capability, which would require a new specialist advanced materials talent pipeline, remains a strategic priority for the area, and work to position Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire as a leading location for advanced materials will continue through alternative funding routes and partnership development.

This plan is built around a clear qualification ambition, not just more training, but training at the right levels to shift the area's skills profile over time.

Qualification levels run from Entry Level (basic literacy and numeracy) through to Level 8 (doctorate). Level 3 is equivalent to A Levels; Level 4/5 to the first and second years of a degree; Level 6 to a full degree. At Entry Level and Level 1, the focus is on foundational skills, ESOL and pre-employment provision: the gateway through which those furthest from the labour market begin their journey into work.

At Level 2, the plan targets sector entry routes across care, construction, logistics, agriculture and digital, the volume end of the technical pipeline. Level 3 encompasses T Levels, vocational programmes and apprenticeships across all eight priority sectors, forming the core of the area's technical offer.

Levels 4 and 5 represent the plan's most deliberate intervention: Higher Technical Qualifications, higher apprenticeships and the 'missing middle' provision that Priority 1 is specifically designed to address, the level at which the area currently underperforms most significantly against national averages.

At Levels 6 to 8, the plan works with the University of Staffordshire and Keele University on degree apprenticeships, postgraduate leadership development and research-linked skills in advanced materials and digital.

Our Key Six LSIP Priorities 2026–2029

PRIORITY 1: STRENGTHENING TECHNICAL SKILLS PIPELINES ACROSS PRIORITY SECTORS

PRIORITY 2: ACCELERATING DIGITAL SKILLS, ADOPTION AND WORKFORCE READINESS ACROSS THE ECONOMY

PRIORITY 3: IMPROVING ENTRY PATHWAYS, RAISING CORE SKILLS AND CREATING AN INCLUSIVE WORKFORCE

PRIORITY 4: EXPANDING LEADERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND WORKFORCE CAPABILITY ACROSS ALL SECTORS

PRIORITY 5: STIMULATING EMPLOYER DEMAND FOR SKILLS – THE OTHER HALF OF THE EQUATION

PRIORITY 6: STRENGTHENING OUR SKILLS SYSTEM – BUILDING ON STRONG FOUNDATIONS



Priority 1: Strengthening Technical Skills Pipelines Across Priority Sectors

Employers across every priority sector report worsening technical recruitment difficulties.

In Advanced Manufacturing, recruitment difficulties are reported to be worse than at any point in the past, with a wide range of Level 2–6 occupations hard to fill. Coupled with the need for specialist advanced materials talent pipeline in process engineering, materials science, additive manufacturing and digital twins, skills that must be built deliberately from scratch.

In Construction, project managers are consistently the most difficult occupation to recruit, and leadership and management is described as ‘a big problem’. In Health and Social Care, management vacancies (1,235) are approaching parity with

the total number of managers employed (1,215), representing a sector-wide governance crisis. It is important to be honest: no skills plan can fully resolve this through training alone. The primary driver of health and social care vacancy levels is pay, not provision. This plan supports workforce development in the sector while being clear that durable improvement requires a parallel national commitment to pay and working conditions that is outside its scope. In Advanced Logistics, current employer demand projects 30,000+ roles over the next decade¹, but this figure must be understood alongside the near-certainty of automation reshaping warehouse and distribution operations over the same period. The demand profile for volume entry-level logistics roles is likely to shift materially.



Priority 2: Accelerating Digital Skills, Adoption and Workforce Readiness Across the Economy

Digital skills are a horizontal need cutting across every sector.

Digital and Technology employers report that their top priority is programmers and software developers, and that most development happens in-house because external provision is too slow and inflexible.

In Advanced Manufacturing, automation and AI are the primary workforce development challenges. In Clean Energy, digital monitoring and smart building management are becoming core competencies for traditional trades. In Creative Industries, AI-enabled content production is reshaping every role. In Logistics, digitalisation and automation are reshaping warehouse operations. In Health and Social Care, computer literacy and the digitalisation of care services are pressing needs.

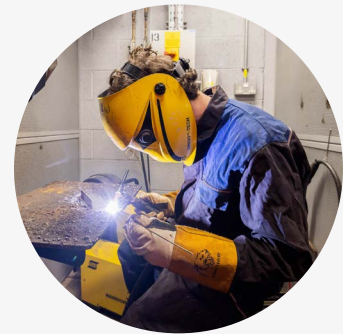
Employers across all sectors are actively waiting for Growth and Skills Levy short courses to help meet these needs, with further learning and training needed to address the technical skills gaps. This LSIP treats the Levy not as a background funding mechanism but as the single most important short-term lever for expanding employer-led apprenticeships/technical training at pace but without squeezing the apprenticeship budget.

¹ Skills Imperative 2020–35, LSIP projections via gov.uk/government/publications/labour-market-and-skills-projections-2020-to-2035

Priority 3: Improving Entry Pathways, Raising Core Skills and Creating an Inclusive Workforce

The area's talent pipeline is constrained from multiple directions simultaneously. 133,000 working-age residents are economically inactive², 49,500 due to long-term sickness, NEET rates have more than doubled since 2019, and in Stoke-on-Trent nearly 1 in 11 working-age adults has no qualifications at all, against a national average of 1 in 25³. These are not peripheral labour market issues; they represent a substantial pool of potential that the economy cannot afford to leave untapped.

Advanced Manufacturing, Construction, Agriculture/Agri-tech and Clean Energy all identify entry-level roles suited to Get Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Working Plan target groups, but the pathways connecting people to those opportunities are fragmented, poorly signposted and inconsistently supported and there are just not enough opportunities available. Closing that gap to the 80% target requires the skills system to work in genuine partnership with employment, health and community support services, while employers step up on inclusive recruitment, structured entry routes and visible career progression.



Priority 4: Expanding Leadership, Management and Workforce Capability Across All Sectors

Leadership and management skills are also a horizontal need, cutting across every sector, with people skills featuring as a significant gap in evidence reviews for all Advanced Manufacturing, Construction, Health and Social Care, Agriculture/Agri-tech and Clean Energy.

In Health and Social Care, employers identify development of new managers, mental health first aid and commercial skills (bid writing, funding literacy) as specific needs. In Construction, project management is the hardest role to fill. In Agriculture, farm business management and agri-environment scheme navigation are consistently cited gaps. In Clean Energy, project and programme management for retrofit and renewables delivery is in short supply. Changes to levy funding eligibility for management and leadership routes would directly reduce employer access to provision this LSIP identifies as a priority local need.

University of Staffordshire and Keele University are both partners to this LSIP, alongside providers across all levels of education and training, each playing a role in developing the leadership and management skills needed across the area. from foundational and technical pathways through to higher-level professional and strategic leadership development.

² staffsjobsandcareers.com/lmi/2-local-labour-market-challenges

³ ons.gov.uk/explore-local-statistics/areas/E06000021-stoke-on-trent

Priority 5: Stimulating Employer Demand for Skills – The Other Half of the Equation

Supply-side intervention alone will not transform this labour market.

Only 8% of businesses cite availability of training as a barrier to engagement. 59% cite staff release time and 48% cite cost. The problem is not what the system offers. It is that too many employers, particularly smaller ones, are not investing in their people at any level.

This priority commits to making the business case for skills investment at every level from L2 to L8, through a structured employer demand campaign, a Skills Investment Navigator function in the Skills Hub, and employer peer networks in every sector.

Priority 6: Strengthening Our Skills System – Building on Strong Foundations

Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire already have a strong, employer-engaged skills system, with committed HE and FE institutions, a growing independent provider network and established employer partnerships. This priority is about deepening those strengths, not rebuilding from scratch.

Where disengagement exists, in logistics, in clean energy's fragmented training market, in the time and cost barriers facing smaller care providers, the system needs to work harder to reach those it is missing. Building a more connected, better-signposted, employer-shaped system is the foundation on which every other priority in this plan depends.



Conclusion

The foundations laid by the first LSIP between 2023 and 2025 are strong, and this second plan is designed to deepen and extend them with more specific actions, stronger accountability and a clearer connection to the strategic investments that will shape the area's economy over the next decade. The first LSIP demonstrated that this system can deliver when it is well-led and employer focused.

This second LSIP builds explicitly on that track record. Its six priorities, technical pipeline, digital skills, entry pathways, generating employer demand, leadership and management, and system strengthening, are the areas where employer evidence is clearest, where the gap between need and provision is most acute, and where local and national policy most urgently calls for action.

With strong FE colleges, two universities and a growing independent provider network, Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire have an education and training infrastructure that many areas would envy. Our FE colleges bring deep employer relationships, technical expertise and community reach, connecting provision to the businesses and residents that need it most. The University of Staffordshire and Keele University bring research capability, higher-level technical programmes and the graduate pipeline that underpins the area's most productive sectors. Together, they form the backbone of everything this plan sets out to deliver.

That is not a claim about the status quo, it is a statement about potential. The FE estate is at capacity, and both universities face real financial pressures. Realising what this system is capable of requires investment to match the ambition: expanded FE and HE facilities, sustainable provision, and a skills infrastructure that can grow with the economy rather than strain against its own limits.

This plan will only deliver if employers are at the table – shaping provision, investing in their people, and holding the system to account. The structures to make that happen are in place. The ambition is clear. What follows is the work.



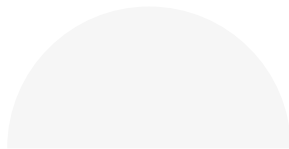
INTRODUCTION

Purpose and Scope

The Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) is a government-backed, employer-led plan ensuring that local education and training reflect what employers need. LSIPs are the primary mechanism through which employer intelligence is translated into actionable changes in provision, a commissioning and accountability tool, not just a strategic document.

This is the second LSIP for Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire. The first plan (2023–2025) established the foundations, stronger employer networks, improved data infrastructure and early evidence of where provision needed to change. This plan is more evidenced, more action-focused and more explicitly connected to the major strategic and investment decisions facing the area.

This document reflects the available evidence and employer intelligence at the point of publication; the LSIP is by design a dynamic plan, and successive annual reviews will allow it to develop its forward reach and sharpen its ambitions as the local economy, national policy and governance arrangements evolve.



How this Plan was Developed

Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce, as the employer representative body for the LSIP, commissioned detailed sector evidence reviews for the eight priority sectors, each combining quantitative analysis (job posting analytics, Census 2021 occupation data, Skills England 2025 national sector reports, Migration Advisory Committee shortage lists, Employer Skills Survey 2024 findings) with qualitative engagement through employer focus groups, surveys and structured Training Needs Analyses.

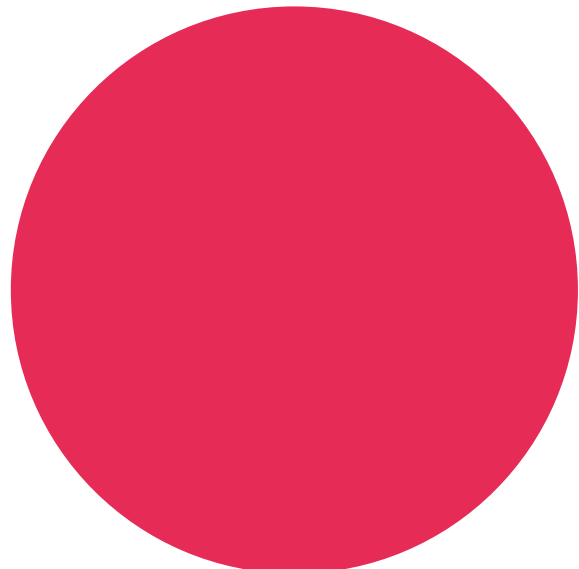
- Advanced Manufacturing inc Engineering and Advance Materials
- Clean Energy
- Creative Industries and Crea-Tech
- Digital and Technology
- Agriculture and Agri-Tech
- Construction
- Health and Social Care
- Advanced Logistics and Distribution

Provisional findings from each sector review were shared with employer groups and refined in response to feedback. The LSIP priorities and actions were then developed from a mixture of all sector evidence, aligned with the FE estate capacity analysis in the Skills for Growth investment proposal and with the cluster-level analysis in the emerging Innovation Framework for the area. The LSIP Governance Board has provided strategic direction and challenge throughout the development process, ensuring the plan reflects the breadth of local employer and provider expertise.

Who this Plan is For

This LSIP is for employers who need skilled people to grow and innovate — if you run a business in Stoke-on-Trent or Staffordshire and you are struggling to recruit, train your people, or understand what support is available, this plan is designed to change that.

It is for colleges, universities and training providers who want their provision to be relevant and well-used; for local authorities and public bodies investing in economic and workforce development; and for residents, particularly those facing barriers to accessing good work. It is also addressed to Skills England and DfE, whose investment decisions will determine whether the most significant interventions in this plan can be delivered.



STRATEGIC AND ECONOMIC CONTEXT

The Local Economy: Scale and Structure

Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire are home to 39,125 businesses, generating £29.9 billion in Gross Value Added (GVA) – a 24.3% increase between 2018 and 2023, slightly above the West Midlands average of 24.1% but below the UK average of 28.3%. 556,300 people are employed across the region⁴, and the economy is diverse, geographically spread and has demonstrated resilience through recent economic disruptions.

Manufacturing remains the single largest contributor to GVA at 14.7%, health and social work at 10.34%, construction at 7.82%, and the information and communication sector accounts for 12.6% of Stoke-on-Trent's GVA alone, which is skewed by Bet365 being a major company in the area, but still shows a concentration of digital activity that has significant implications for skills demand.

87% of the area's businesses employ fewer than 10 people. This characteristic deeply shapes how the skills system must operate: small businesses cannot easily release staff for extended training, have limited internal HR capacity, and need a skills system that comes to them, speaks their language, and offers provision that is short, modular and practical. The LSIP's design reflects this throughout.



⁴ NOTE: employment figures are drawn from the Annual Population Survey, which is a resident-based measure. As some residents commute to work outside the area and some local jobs are filled by workers from beyond the boundary, this figure does not directly correspond to the number of jobs located within Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire

£29.9BN

Combined GVA

556,300

People employed

39,125

Businesses

87%

Employ fewer than 10

GVA data for 2018–2023 shows Stoke-on-Trent as the dominant economic engine, generating £7.0 billion in 2023, up 25% from £5.6 billion in 2018. Across Staffordshire, which makes up £22.8bn or 76% of the local economy, district-level economies range from Staffordshire Moorlands (£1.9bn) to East Staffordshire (£4.4bn), with every district recording growth in this period, with some experience over 30% growth such as South Staffordshire (30%) and Lichfield (34%).

However, GVA growth does not automatically translate into improved outcomes for residents, lower qualification levels, skills gaps and travel-to-work patterns mean that economic gains can be captured by workers from outside the area rather than by the people who live here. Closing that gap between output growth and resident benefit is the central challenge this LSIP addresses.

GVA GROWTH BY DISTRICT 2018-2023

Stoke-on-Trent largest economy; all districts saw growth post-pandemic

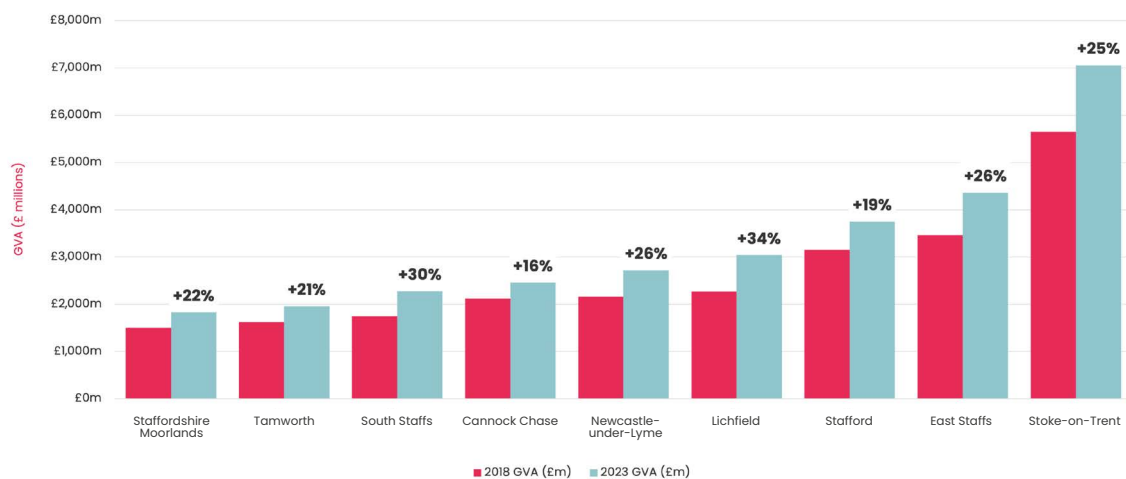


Figure 1: GVA by district 2018 vs 2023 — all districts grew, but from very different bases (Source: ONS)

The Economy We Are Building Towards

Not all economic activity is equal in its contribution to wages, productivity or long-term resilience. GVA per job varies substantially across the local economy: manufacturing generates approximately £74,000 of output per job, information and communication around £84,000, while health and social care averages around £42,000 and logistics around £39,000. (Productivity (GVA per Hour Worked) – ONS Productivity)

Agriculture, at approximately £24,000 per job, reflects both the structural characteristics of land-based work and the ongoing challenge of rural wages. These figures are not arguments against supporting any sector, health and logistics are essential to the local economy and its residents – but they are an argument for being deliberate about the mix.

A skills plan that simply meets current employer demand will tend to reproduce the existing occupational structure. This plan is designed to go further: to build technical pipelines in higher-productivity sectors, to push up the skill content of roles in every sector (including logistics, care and construction), and to support the transition from declining lower-value activity toward the advanced materials, digital and clean energy roles

that represent the area's highest long-term growth potential. Skills investment is a tool for economic transformation, not just a mechanism for filling today's vacancies.

By 2029, the goal is not just a skills system that responds to the economy, but one that helps create the economy this area deserves. Skills investment is the most powerful tool of economic transformation available to us.

The Skills Imperative 2020–35 baseline forecast projects that, under a status quo trajectory, employment growth to 2035 will be concentrated overwhelmingly in lower-productivity sectors: logistics (+3,300), hospitality (+5,600), support services (+3,200), health (+3,700), arts (+1,600) and education (+1,700), with a net loss of 4,300 manufacturing jobs and growth of only 1,000 in digital and technology.

This LSIP is designed to diverge from that trajectory. Its ambition is a different occupational mix by 2029: a larger share of residents in technical, digital and professional roles; measurable growth in the proportion holding Level 4+ qualifications; and a digital and advanced manufacturing sector that is larger, not static.



Key Priority Sectors

This LSIP focuses on eight sectors. These divide into two groups: those that are both nationally strategic, identified by the Industrial Strategy as frontier sectors for growth, and those that are critical to the local economy and labour market regardless of their national prominence.

Nationally Strategic Sectors

The Government's Industrial Strategy identifies eight frontier industries as priorities for UK economic growth. The following are all present and growing in the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire economy, and are priorities for this LSIP:

Advanced Manufacturing — a national and local strength

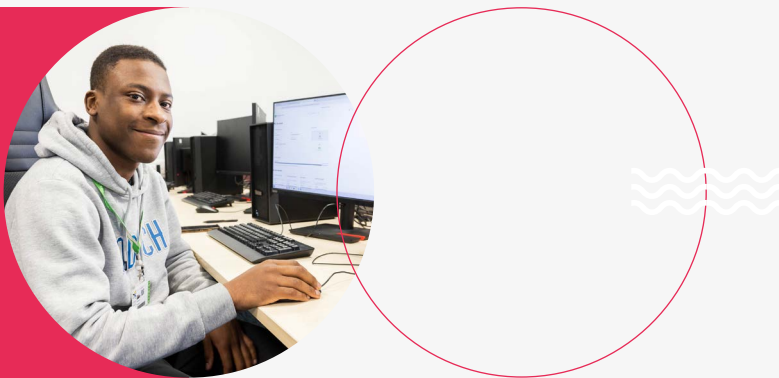
- Advanced manufacturing employment is the 10th highest concentration nationally at 3.6% of jobs – vs 3.5% West Midlands and 2.2% England⁵
- SIC 25 (metal products), SIC 27 (electrical equipment) and SIC 28 (machinery) all significantly above national averages
- Anchor strengths in ceramics, advanced materials, precision engineering and specialist composites
- Ceramics sector facing structural pressure: over 500 job losses due to closures and restructuring in 2024/25, high energy prices and global competition are accelerating the transition from traditional production toward advanced materials and technical ceramics
- CMC (Ceramic Matrix Composite) manufacturing represents the strategic direction for ceramics – the area is committed to establishing UK sovereign CMC manufacturing capability
- The ceramics heritage of Stoke-on-Trent remains a genuine competitive advantage in advanced materials, creative manufacturing and design, it is the foundation on which the next chapter of the sector is being built
- Each materials innovation job nationally supports up to 18 other roles, £3.1bn GVA already linked to materials innovation jobs.
- The South Staffordshire and Wolverhampton Economic Growth Zone (EGZ) creates additional advanced manufacturing and innovation investment opportunities in the south of the area, with a particular focus on highly skilled engineering and digital manufacturing roles
- Industrial Strategy Sector Plan prioritises STEM skills, materials science, flexible apprenticeships and school outreach.



⁵ Business Register and Employment Survey

Clean Energy – a national imperative with strong local relevance

- Government target: double the clean energy workforce from 440,000 to 860,000 by 2030
- 31 priority occupations identified in the Clean Energy Jobs Plan, many overlapping with local technical workforce
- Keele University SEND demonstrator and Stoke District Heat Network creating live skills demand in energy systems, engineering and digital decarbonisation
- Staffordshire Green Skills for Growth programme (Innovate UK) modelling Net Zero skills needs to 2050
- Growing demand for heat pump installers, solar PV engineers, energy system managers and retrofit coordinators
- Career change pathway from carbon-intensive industries is a key opportunity for the local workforce
- South Staffordshire College has opened a Net Zero Energy Training Centre at Rodbaston College (Penkridge), funded through a £1.6m Getting Building Fund, providing training facilities and courses aligned to solar PV, EV charging, heat pumps and hydrogen technologies
- Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group and the IoT have invested in Green Skills to support major employers in the sector.



Creative Industries – growing sector with strong anchor institutions

- Stoke-on-Trent has the strongest cluster of creative industries in the West Midlands region and represents the only cluster of this kind in the northern West Midlands
- Creative and cultural industries form a distinctive part of the local economy, with Stoke-on-Trent’s ceramics heritage providing a unique platform for creative manufacturing and design
- Design, digital media and cultural production are growing, particularly in Stoke-on-Trent
- Creative skills increasingly intersect with digital (UX, content, animation, games development)
- Graphic and multimedia designers identified as a specific LSIP occupation target
- Sector faces challenges in career pathway visibility and entry routes but has strong links to Digital and Technology sector.

Digital and Technology — fastest-growing local sector

- Digital roles up 29% since 2018 — the strongest growth of any occupational demand locally
- Median weekly pay of £863 — the highest-paid sector in the West Midlands by some margin
- Information and communication sector accounts for 12.6% of Stoke-on-Trent GVA, mainly due to Bet365
- IT user support: 1,533 job adverts; software developers the single highest employer priority
- Professional and business services, the most automation-disrupted sector in the UK (Skills England, 2025), is driving growing hybrid digital demand across all industries
- Significant employer frustration: skills development happens in-workplace because external provision is too slow and inflexible
- Digital skills are a horizontal need across every other priority sector
- University of Staffordshire's internationally recognised games design programmes generate a strong graduate pipeline for the Creative and Digital sectors. The LSIP will work with the university and local employers to improve graduate retention, ensuring that talent developed locally is more consistently converted into local employment.

Locally Critical Sectors

The following sectors are not classified as Industrial Strategy frontier industries but are essential to the local labour market, public services and economic resilience. They generate the majority of local employment and face some of the most severe skills shortages in the area:

Agriculture and Agri-Tech — Staffordshire's rural economy

- Staffordshire has a significant rural economy with land-based industries, food production and agri-tech innovation
- Agri-tech, anaerobic digestion, BioChar and precision agriculture are creating new technical skills demand
- The Staffordshire Rural Economic Strategy recognises the scale and diversity of rural business and the need for digital connectivity and skills
- South Staffordshire College's Rodbaston campus provides specialist land-based provision, and the Skills for Growth proposal includes investment to expand capacity through enhanced land-based, agriculture and rural training facilities (supporting growth in areas such as agricultural technology, animal management and environmental land management)
- Cross-cutting skills needs in digital, sustainability and business management are shared with other priority sectors.



Construction — essential infrastructure and replacement demand

- Construction accounts for 7.82% of local GVA and is a major employer across the county
- 17,000 construction workers expected to leave the sector by 2035 — a looming replacement demand crisis
- Major local developments in housing, transport infrastructure and HS2 legacy driving strong demand growth
- Green construction — heat pump installation, MMC, retrofit, net zero buildings — is transforming skills requirements
- Project managers are consistently the single most difficult role to fill across all local construction employers.

Health and Social Care — largest employer, facing transformational change

- Health and social care is the largest employment sector locally — 15% of total employment, rising to 22% in Stoke-on-Trent
- Majority of employers report difficulties with both recruitment and retention
- Management vacancies (1,235) are approaching parity with the number of managers employed (1,215)
- A shift from acute to community provision is reshaping the skills mix required, with increasing and increasingly complex care needs demanding new competencies across the workforce, alongside continuing NHS workforce pressures
- Stoke-on-Trent's significantly below-average healthy life expectancy creates localised additional demand pressure
- Barriers to training include access to suitable delivery models and funding arrangements — many employers cannot release frontline staff due to insufficient capacity to backfill, regardless of whether funding is available.



Logistics and Distribution — major employer along a strategic corridor

- The M6/A50/A500 corridor is one of the UK's most significant logistics clusters
- 7,690 LGV drivers and 13,295 warehouse operatives in the local workforce
- A projected 30,000+ combined logistics recruitment requirement over the next decade — though this figure reflects current employer demand and should be read alongside the near-certainty of continued automation in warehouse and distribution operations over the same period; the demand profile for volume entry-level roles is likely to shift materially
- Automation, digitalisation and EV fleet conversion are already reshaping skill requirements, with growing demand for data analysts, fleet management specialists and logistics systems operators — roles that currently lack clear local training pathways
- The sector is almost entirely disengaged from the formal skills system — only three TNA responses received — limiting the evidence base for provision planning
- High-volume training (LGV, warehouse) is well-supplied by independent providers; the LSIP's focus is on the supervisory, technical and systems roles where the labour market is evolving fastest and provision is weakest.



Workforce Challenges: Qualifications, Inactivity and the FE Estate

Across the area, only 42.8% of working-age adults hold a Level 4+ qualification, compared to 47.2% nationally. In Stoke-on-Trent, 8.7% of working-age adults have no formal qualifications at all, significantly above the national average of 6.8%. The employment rate stands at 78.4%; the Government's 80% target would require 11,000 additional residents in work.

Over 133,000 working-age residents are economically inactive, with 49,500 inactive due to long-term sickness, a figure that has been rising consistently and shows no sign of stabilising. Healthy life expectancy in Stoke-on-Trent has fallen sharply and is now substantially below national levels, directly driving this inactivity picture.

QUALIFICATION LEVELS: STOKE-ON-TRENT & STAFFORDSHIRE VS ENGLAND

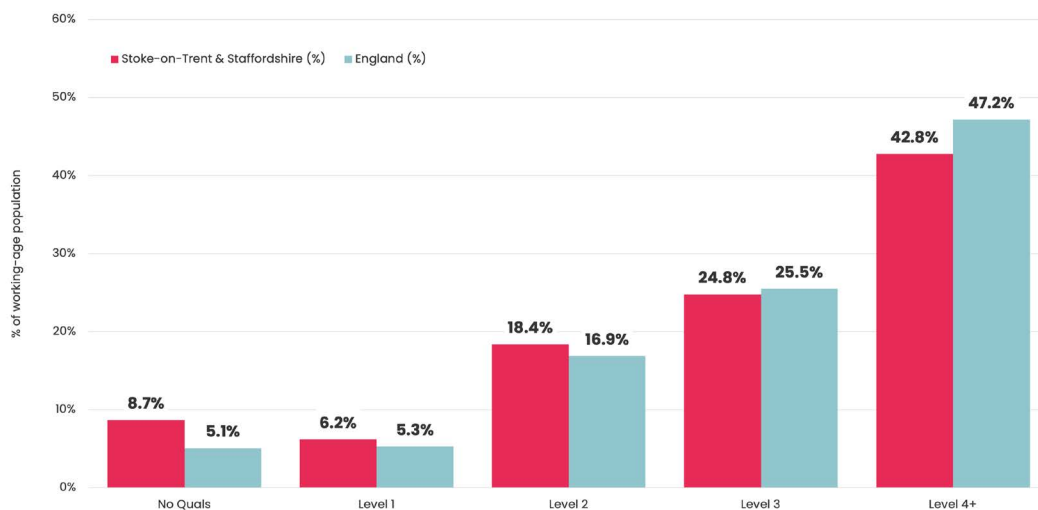


Figure 2: Qualification levels — Stoke-on-Trent & Staffordshire vs England average

These area-wide figures mask significant internal variation. ONS Census 2021 data reveals a stark qualification divide between districts: Stoke-on-Trent has 14.8% of its economically active population with no qualifications, nearly double the national average of 6.8%, while Stafford and Lichfield sit at 7.7%. Conversely, Level 4+ attainment ranges from just 28.5% in Tamworth to 43.6% in Lichfield. Apprenticeship qualifications, an indicator of technical pathway engagement range from 4.9% in Lichfield to 6.6% in Stoke-on-Trent, suggesting some areas are more dependent on employer-led technical routes.

QUALIFICATION LEVELS BY DISTRICT - LEVEL 4+ AND NO QUALIFICATIONS

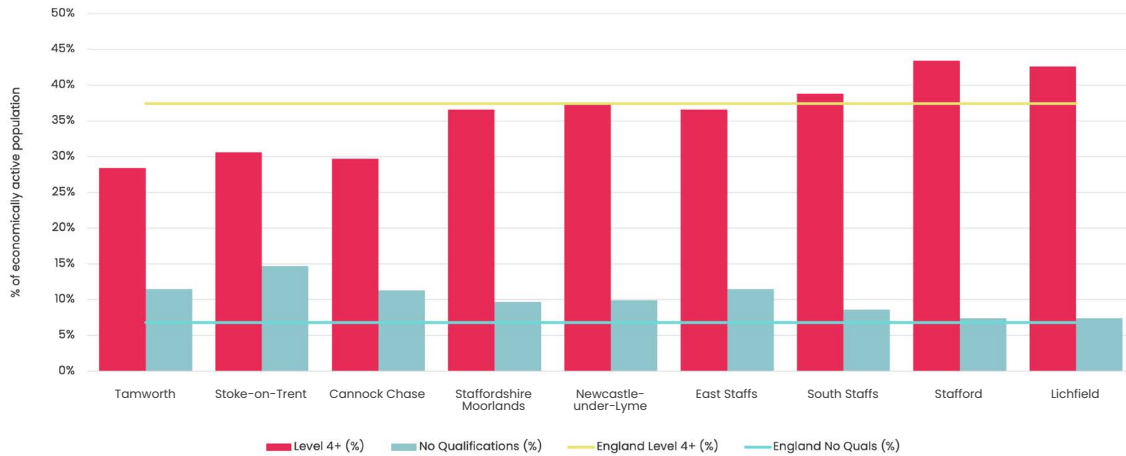


Figure 2a: Qualification levels by district – Level 4+ and no qualifications (Source: ONS Census 2021)

NEETs have more than doubled in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent since 2019, when they were at or below the national average. The FE estate that should be absorbing young people and adults into technical education is already at 96% average capacity and will be beyond capacity at all but one site by 2029 without urgent continued capital investment. This is a critical local investment priority that underpins the technical pipeline actions in Priority 1, and the LSIP Governance Board will continue to support local partners in progressing it.

NEET RATES 2019-2024: LOCAL VS NATIONAL TREND

(indicative – more than doubled since 2019)

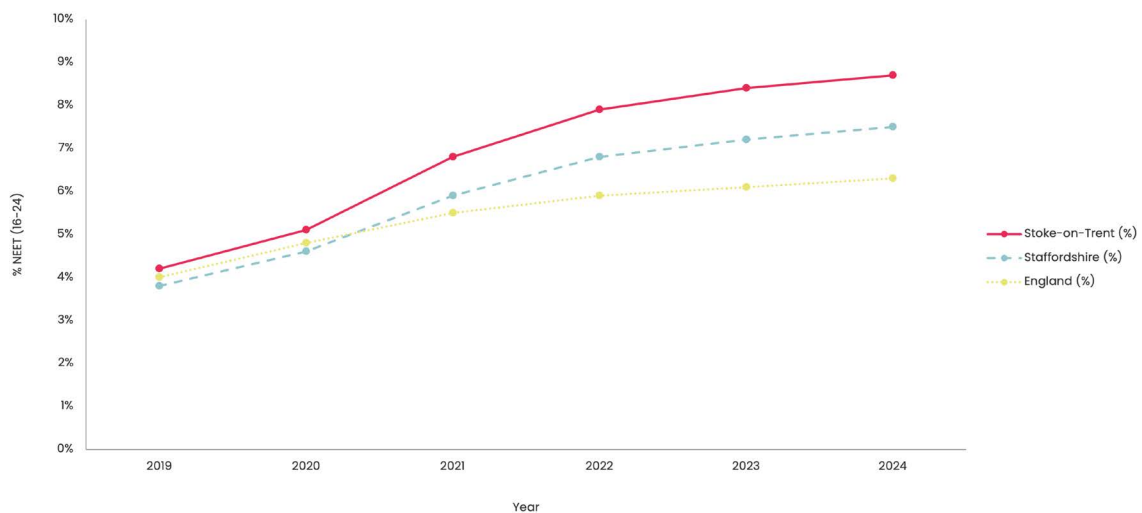


Figure 3: NEET rates 2019–2024 – local vs national trend (illustrative, based on reported doubling)

ECONOMIC INACTIVITY BY REASON - STOKE-ON-TRENT & STAFFORDSHIRE

Stoke-on-Trent & Staffordshire Working-Age Population

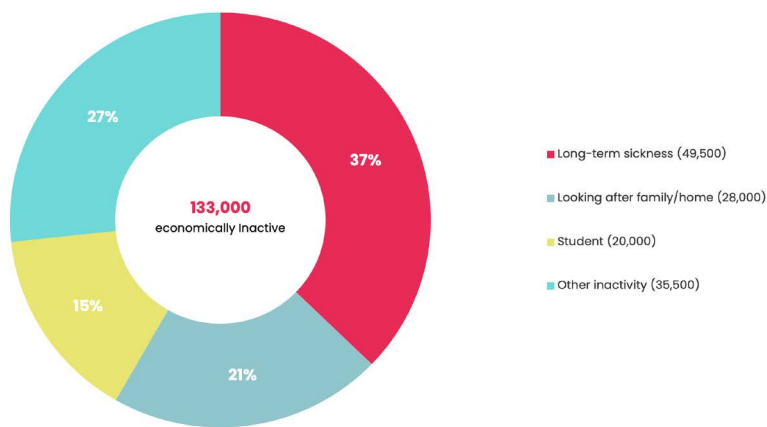


Figure 4: Economic inactivity by reason – 133,000 working-age residents

Inactivity is not evenly distributed. District-level data reveals rates ranging from 13.0% in Cannock Chase to 27.9% in Newcastle-under-Lyme, with Stoke-on-Trent at 22.7% and Staffordshire Moorlands at 23.3% both significantly above the England average of 20.9%. This geographic concentration means that place-based delivery of entry pathway support, through the JET Team, Job Centre Plus and the voluntary sector, is more effective than area-wide approaches. The LSIP's Priority 3 actions reflect this.

ECONOMIC INACTIVITY RATE BY DISTRICT

Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent significantly above England average

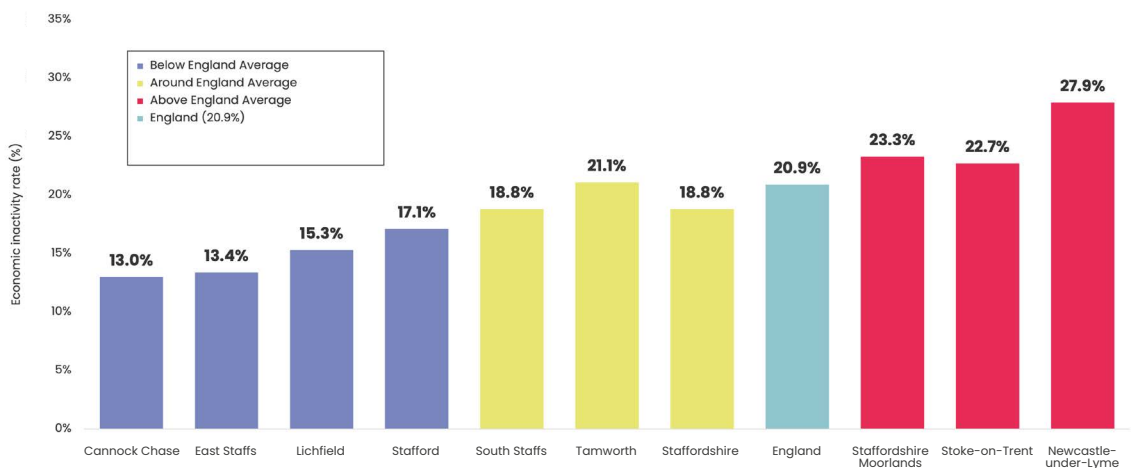


Figure 4a: Economic inactivity rate by district – wide variation with Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent highest (Source: ONS)

Occupational data reinforces the wage and productivity gap. Stoke-on-Trent has a significantly lower proportion of its workforce in professional occupations (21.8%) compared to the England average (27.2%), and notably higher proportions in caring and leisure occupations (13.0% vs 8.5% nationally) and process plant and machine operatives (7.7% vs 5.6%). Across Staffordshire, the occupational profile is somewhat closer to the national average: professional occupations account for around 24.5% of the workforce, above Stoke-on-Trent but still below the national figure, while the county has a higher concentration of skilled trades (12.1% vs 10.0% nationally), reflecting

the manufacturing and construction base across South Staffordshire, Cannock Chase and East Staffordshire. The combined area is therefore characterised by an occupational structure that under-represents professional and managerial roles relative to both the national and regional averages, with above-average concentrations in technical trades, operative and care roles. This occupational structure, shaped over decades by the area's industrial heritage, is precisely what skills investment must address. Higher-level technical qualifications, management development and digital upskilling are not just workforce ambitions; they are structural economic interventions.

What Lies Behind the Gaps

The skills shortages identified in this plan are real, but they do not all have the same cause, and treating them as if they do can risk allocating resources to problems that training alone cannot fix.

In Health and Social Care, pay is a structural driver of vacancy levels that no amount of qualification provision can resolve on its own. The average care worker wage in this area sits well below the national median, and in a labour market where residents have genuine choices, this suppresses both recruitment and retention. Skills investment in this sector is necessary but not sufficient: the system cannot train its way out of a pay problem.

In Advanced Logistics, the 30,000+ projected recruitment requirement over the next decade must be understood against a rapidly changing world. Firstly, automation and robotics are already reshaping the warehouse and distribution workforce, the demand profile for lower-skilled logistics roles is unlikely to remain stable over a ten-year period. Second, at current pay and conditions, these roles face persistent attraction challenges that are only partly addressable through careers guidance. This plan supports the upskilling of the logistics workforce into supervisory, technical and data roles – the higher-value end of a rapidly

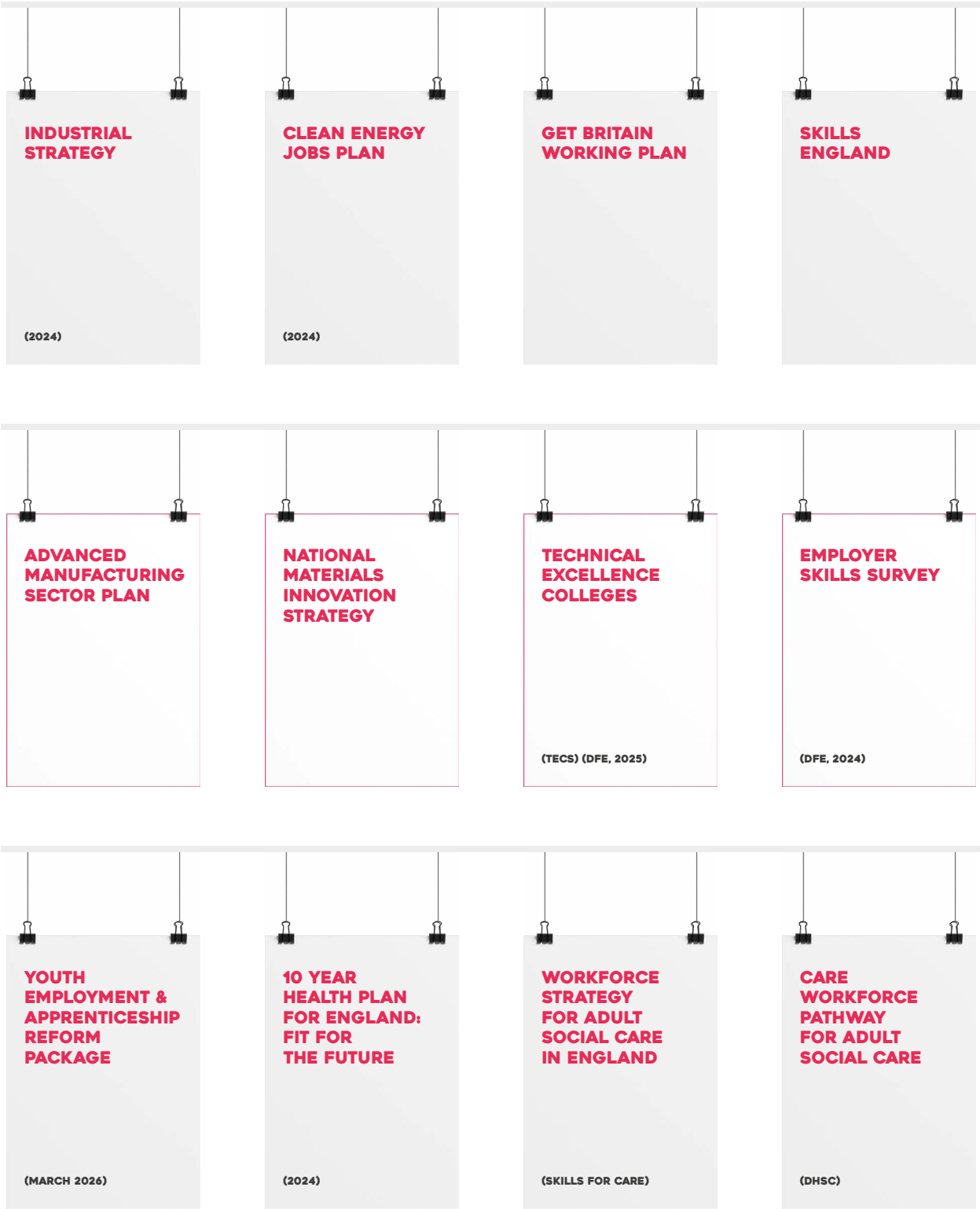
changing sector – while being honest that volume recruitment at entry level faces challenges beyond the skills system's reach.

In Agriculture, employment has been broadly flat at around 10,000 for a decade. Vacancy pressures in this sector partly reflect the structural impact of post-Brexit migration changes, which removed a significant proportion of seasonal and semi-skilled agricultural labour. This is a policy environment the local skills system cannot control. The LSIP's focus in this sector is therefore deliberately targeted: on agri-tech skills, farm business management and precision agriculture, the higher-value, longer-term workforce needs where investment is most likely to have durable impact.

More broadly, the area's rate of economic inactivity, 133,000 working-age residents, 49,500 of them due to long-term sickness, and a healthy life expectancy in Stoke-on-Trent that has fallen substantially below national levels, is not primarily a skills challenge. It is a public health challenge with labour market consequences. The LSIP can and should improve entry pathways and inclusive provision; it cannot address the underlying health conditions that are keeping a significant share of the working-age population out of the workforce entirely.

National and Local Policy Framework

The LSIP is situated within a clear and well-aligned national policy landscape. **The key frameworks and their specific relevance to local skills priorities are set out below:**



Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire are non-devolved areas with no Mayoral Strategic Authority and no Local Growth Plans currently in place.

The absence of a Mayoral Strategic Authority does not mean the strategic landscape is static. Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire’s move toward Foundation Strategic Authority arrangements represents the most significant shift in economic governance for a generation. This LSIP has been designed to be actionable now while remaining capable of evolving alongside those arrangements.

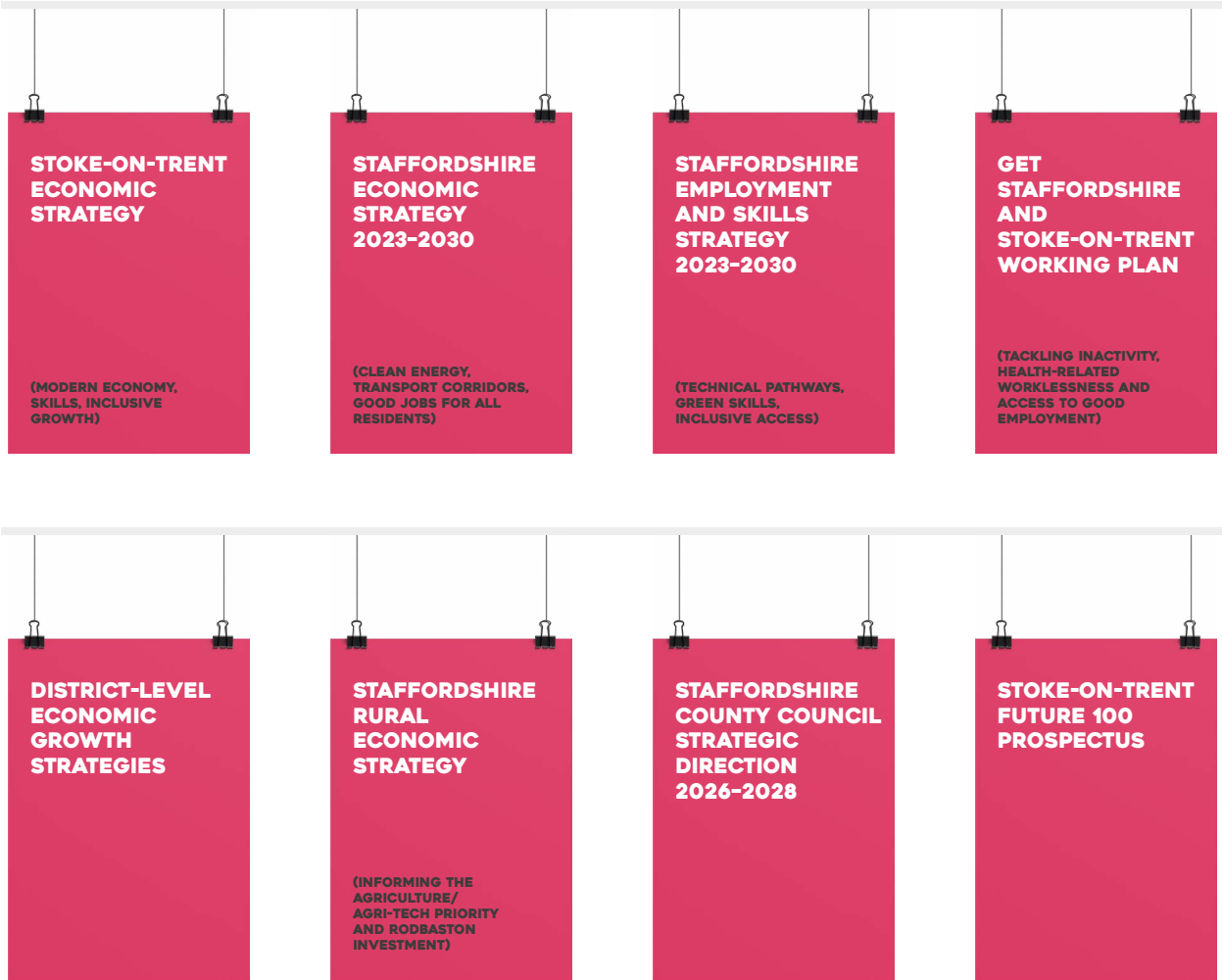
As the FSA takes shape, this plan should be understood as the skills intelligence and delivery mechanism that any emerging Local Growth Plan

will need, not a parallel track, but its workforce development foundation.

The LSIP Governance Board will ensure priorities and accountability arrangements keep pace with governance developments as they unfold.

This LSIP has been developed in active alignment with the full suite of local strategies from both councils, who are represented on the Governance Board. Together these frameworks provide a clear, mutually reinforcing mandate for this plan, full strategy summaries are in Annex C.

The LSIP’s priorities map directly to the ambitions of the:



This plan is not an isolated document. It is the skills delivery mechanism for an economy-wide set of ambitions, grounded in employer intelligence and accountable to both employers and residents.

Both councils are represented on the LSIP Governance Board and were engaged throughout development. More detail of the national and local policy frameworks is summarised in Annex C.

SECTION 1: LOCAL SKILLS NEEDS

This section sets out the six overarching skills priorities for Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire.

These are not simply a list of what employers say they need today, they are the strategic levers through which this area intends to close the gap with national averages, seize the investment opportunities in its pipeline, and position itself as one of England's most distinctive technical and industrial economies by the end of the decade.

Each priority is supported by the sector evidence shown in Annex A, which summarise the findings from the detailed evidence reviews commissioned for this LSIP – and by the cross-sector narrative that follows.

The six priorities were identified through a process of cross-sector analysis, looking for themes that appeared consistently across multiple sector reviews and were corroborated by the quantitative employer engagement data.



The Key Six LSIP Priorities:

Priority 1: Strengthening Technical Skills Pipelines Across Priority Sectors

Technical skills shortages are the single most consistent message from employers across all eight sector reviews, and the consequences of failing to address them are significant. An area that cannot produce sufficient engineers, electricians, heat pump installers, project managers or care managers will miss the major investments in its pipeline.

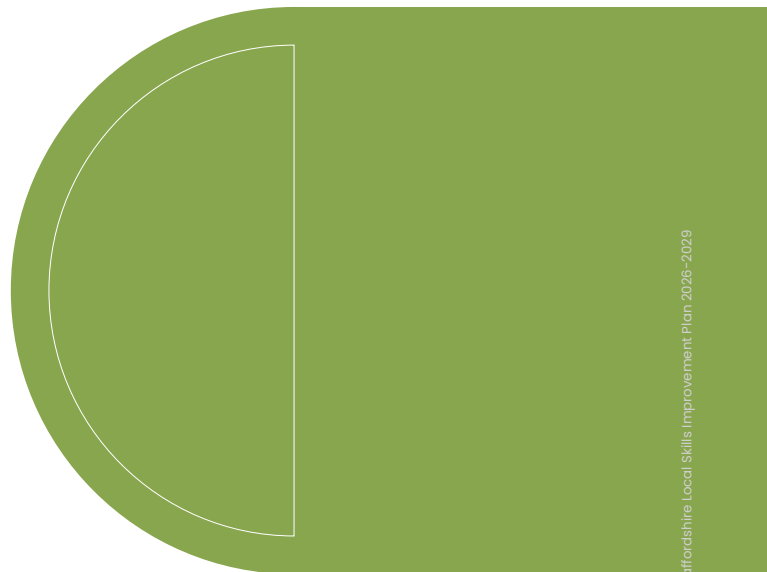
But meeting current employer demand is the floor, not the ceiling. The deeper ambition of this plan is to use skills investment as an instrument of economic change – to increase the share of residents in higher-skilled, better-paid roles; to build new technical capability in emerging sectors before employers are asking for it; and to shift the area’s occupational mix over time toward the digital, advanced manufacturing and clean energy roles that offer the strongest long-term wage and productivity outcomes. 73% of the 199 businesses surveyed reported partial or significant skills gaps, and 57% rated recruitment as difficult or very difficult.

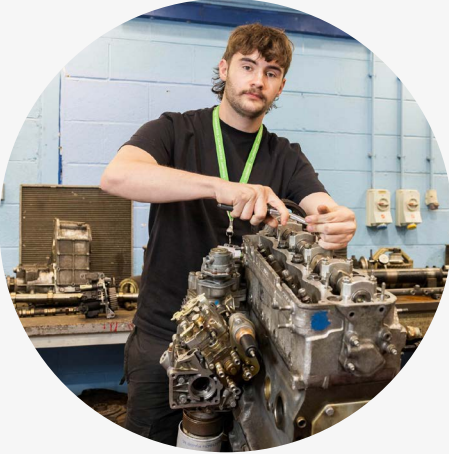
The shortages span every sector and are worsening. The work taking place around Advanced Materials highlights an urgent and unique requirement for process engineers, materials scientists and additive manufacturing specialists, roles that do not yet exist in formal local provision. In Agriculture/Agri-tech, 81% of Staffordshire’s land is agricultural and a significant proportion of the workforce is approaching retirement, while the shift toward precision farming, drone operation and automated systems is outpacing provision. In Health and Social Care, management vacancies are approaching parity with employed managers, a governance risk, not just a workforce one. In Clean Energy, the Government’s ambition to double the sector’s workforce by 2030 requires urgent development of roles that barely exist in formal local provision today.

Underpinning all of this is a physical constraint that cannot be wished away. As noted earlier, FE estate capacity constraints limit the ability to expand technical provision without investment. This is not a background planning concern; it is a direct ceiling on delivery. Even if every other condition for growing technical starts were in place, employer demand, curriculum design, qualified staff, learner awareness, the estate simply cannot

accommodate the volume of additional learners required. The area’s designation of a Technical Excellence College in Advanced Manufacturing is a significant asset in addressing this challenge, providing dedicated specialist capacity, nationally recognised curriculum and a structured mechanism for employer co-design in the sector where technical shortages are most acute.

Addressing this requires action on three fronts: continued capital investment to expand FE estate capacity; developing co-designed higher technical pathways where they are absent; and building the specialist talent pipelines, in advanced materials, agri-tech and clean energy, needed to underpin the opportunities that will define the area’s economic future and employer investment.





Priority 2: Accelerating Digital Skills, Adoption and Workforce Readiness

Digital skills are no longer a specialist concern – they are the common currency of every sector in the local economy. 63% of the 199 businesses surveyed identified IT and digital skills as a future priority, making it the single most cited need across the entire evidence base. But the strategic challenge is not simply one of supply: it is that the pace of digital change – automation, AI, data-driven operations, digital twins, is outrunning the ability of the formal training system to respond.

One particular uncertainty warrants explicit acknowledgement. AI and automation are simultaneously creating new skills demand and reducing demand for some of the roles currently being prioritised. The most automation-exposed occupations in the area include elements of quantity surveying, some programming and software development tasks, and volume data processing roles. This plan does not treat AI purely as a skills gap to fill: it also represents a risk to the relevance of provision we are investing in today.

The LSIP will work with providers and employers to build in regular demand-sensing, using job posting analytics and employer engagement, so that provision is adjusted as the AI impact on specific occupations becomes clearer. Training people for

roles that are disappearing is a waste of public resource and a disservice to the learners concerned.

Many employers are already developing digital skills in-house, which speaks to the urgency of the need, but it also means that smaller businesses without that internal capacity are being left behind, and the opportunity to build a shared, accessible local offer is not yet being fully realised.

Sectors that fail to digitise will lose competitiveness; workers who lack digital literacy will be left behind as roles are automated or reshaped; and SMEs, which make up 87% of the local business base, will fall further behind larger competitors who can invest in digital capability at scale.

Conversely, the Growth and Skills Levy, whose national priority areas include digital skills, AI literacy and cyber security, all directly mirroring the gaps identified in this LSIP, the Lifelong Learning Entitlement and the emerging modular provision landscape create a genuine window of opportunity to build a local digital skills offer that is fast, flexible and employer-led. The LSIP's role is to ensure that window is used deliberately and at pace, with Levy-eligible provision mapped and actively promoted, gaps closed, and SME digital adoption supported through the Growth Hub.

Priority 3: Improving Entry Pathways, Raising Core Skills and Creating an Inclusive Workforce

For Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire to capitalise on its economic opportunities, it needs to draw on the full range of its population's potential, and there is significant room to do more. 133,000 working-age residents are economically inactive, 49,500 of them due to long-term sickness. NEET rates have more than doubled since 2019. Only 42.8% of residents hold a Level 4+ qualification against a national figure of 47.2%, and in Stoke-on-Trent 8.7% of working-age adults have no qualifications at all, more than double the national average.

Closing this gap is central not only to the Post-16 White Paper's target of at least 10% of young people undertaking Level 4/5 study, including apprenticeships, by 2040, but to its wider ambition that two-thirds of young people are engaged in higher-level learning by age 25 — an ambition this LSIP's Priority 1 actions on technical pathways and higher apprenticeships are designed to support. These are not peripheral labour market statistics; they represent a substantial pool of potential that, with the right support and pathways, could make a real difference both to the economy and to the life chances of the individuals concerned.



The gap is felt on both sides. Employers – 24% of those surveyed identified improved careers guidance as a future skills priority to help attract staff. They find it difficult to connect with candidates who understand what local sectors offer and what routes into them exist. For many residents, particularly those facing health, caring or financial barriers, the path into work and training is far from straightforward. Employability skills were cited by 76 of 199 surveyed businesses as a future need, and English and maths by a further 62, a reminder that foundational skills challenges sit beneath the more visible sector-specific shortages.

Foundational skills gaps in English, maths and ESOL represent one of the most significant barriers to workforce development across the area. 62 of 199 surveyed businesses identified English and maths as a live recruitment and productivity barrier, while Stoke-on-Trent's working-age population has above-average concentrations of adults with no formal

qualifications (8.7%, against a national average of 6.8%) and below Level 1 literacy and numeracy. ESOL provision faces a parallel crisis: demand from the area’s significant and growing communities of non-first-language English speakers, across health, care, hospitality and food processing, far outstrips funded capacity, with waiting lists running to months at several providers. Without urgent investment in these gateway skills, progress across every other priority in this plan will remain constrained.

Advanced Manufacturing, Construction, Agriculture/ Agri-tech and Clean Energy all identify entry-level roles well-suited to Get Britain Working target groups, the demand is there, and so is the willingness across the system to do more. Realising that opportunity is a collective endeavour: it requires the skills system to work in close partnership with employment, health and community services; employers who are open to widening their recruitment and offering structured progression;

and careers guidance that gives young people and adults an honest, inspiring and well-informed picture of what the local economy has to offer.

What is needed is a structured and visible progression architecture, a ‘climbing frame’ approach, that sets out clearly how an individual, wherever they are starting from, can move from no or low qualifications into employment and then upward through the skills system. This means a broader and more flexible mix of routes: not only apprenticeships and T Levels, but pre-employment programmes, sector-specific tasters, supported internships for young people with SEND and other barriers, work experience, traineeship-equivalent provision and short qualifications that build confidence and employability skills as a first step. The system currently does too little to make these connections visible and consistent, and too many people fall through the gaps between employment support, community services and formal education.

EMPLOYER SURVEY 2025: KEY SKILLS PRIORITIES

% of 99 surveyed employers identifying each as a priority

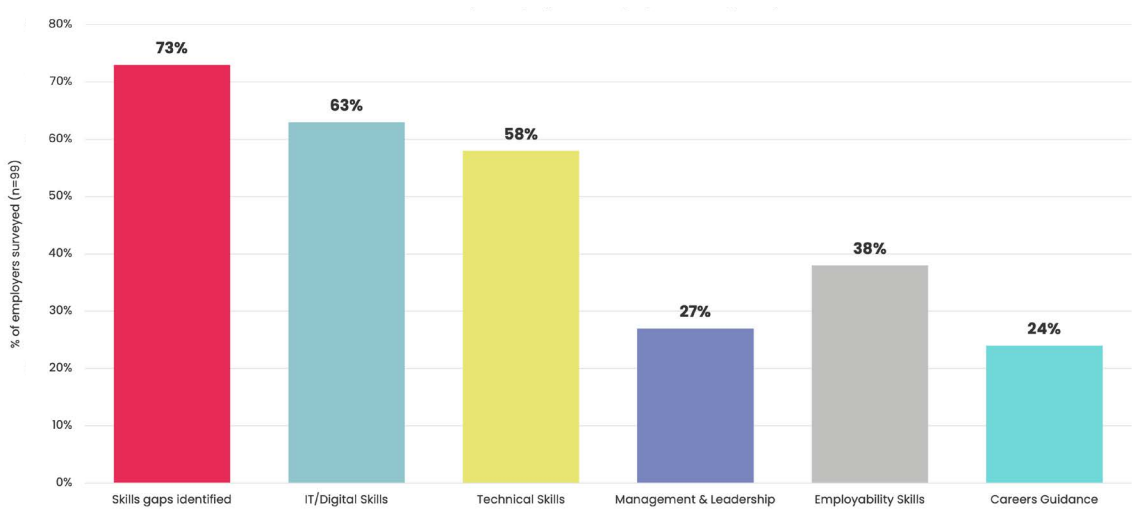


Figure 5: Employer Survey 2025 – key skills priorities (% of 99 respondents)

TRAINING NEEDS ANALYSIS: BUSINESSES BY SECTOR

185 TNAs completed; top 6 LSIP priority sectors shown individually

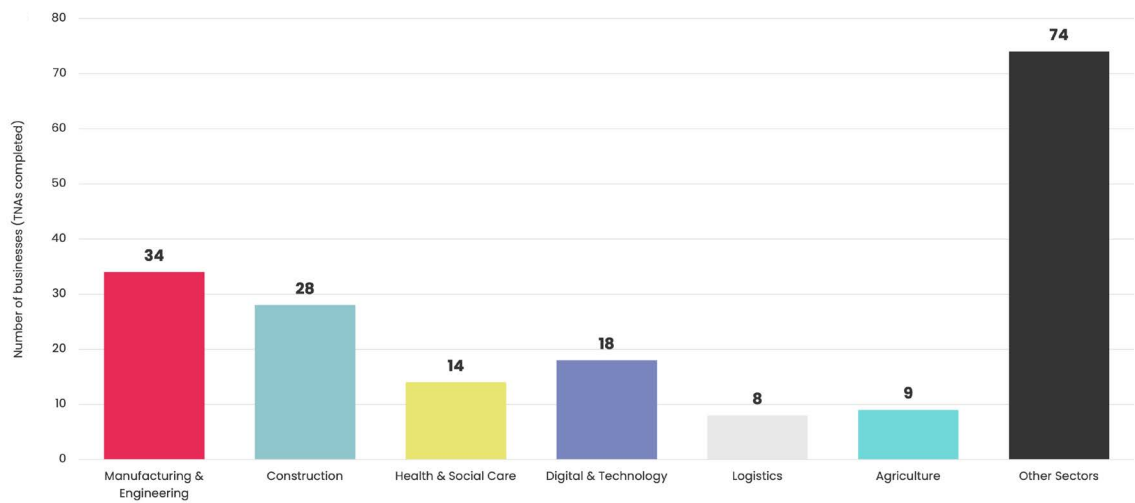


Figure 6: Training Needs Analysis – businesses by sector (185 TNAs completed)



Priority 4: Expanding Leadership, Management and Workforce Capability

Good leadership and management are the foundations for every sector. Businesses with strong managers invest more in their people, retain staff more effectively and engage more confidently with training and apprenticeships. Yet across the area it remains one of the most consistently cited workforce gaps, 27% of businesses completing a Training Needs Analysis identified management training as a need, and 68% reported retention challenges closely linked to management quality.

In Construction, project management is the hardest single role to fill. In Health and Social Care, developing new managers is an immediate priority under significant operational pressure. In Agriculture/Agri-tech and Clean Energy, business management and programme delivery capability are constraining the sectors' ability to respond to major policy and investment opportunities.

The solution is not to create new qualifications, appropriate courses and qualification at all levels and intensities exist. The challenge is accessibility: making provision affordable, flexible and relevant for the SMEs, care providers and rural businesses that need it most. That challenge is made more pressing by proposed changes to the apprenticeship system which, in seeking to prioritise younger learners, risk curtailing management and leadership apprenticeships – among the most valued and most accessed routes for working adults in this area.

The evidence points clearly to a layered need. First-line management development, for care supervisors, site foremen, farm managers, is well within the scope of FE-delivered provision and Level 3–5 apprenticeships. But the leadership gaps identified in Advanced Manufacturing, the governance crisis in Health and Social Care management, and the programme delivery capability shortage in Clean Energy increasingly require Level 6, 7 and 8 provision – degree-level management education, executive development and postgraduate leadership programmes that sit primarily within Higher Education. This plan is explicit that Priority 4 requires both: FE for accessible, work-based first-line management development, and stronger HE-employer partnerships for senior leadership capability. The University of Staffordshire and Keele University are both partners to this LSIP, and both have a role in delivering the higher end of the leadership development this area needs. The LSIP will facilitate joint employer engagement between FE and HE providers on management pathways to ensure learners can progress through levels without falling into gaps between systems.

The LSIP will work with the Growth Hub, Skills Hub and sector partners to ensure local provision remains as accessible and impactful as possible, including through the development of shorter management programmes, and will raise employer evidence on the importance of these routes through Skills England and DfE engagement channels.





Priority 5: Stimulating Employer Demand for Skills – The Other Half of the Equation

The preceding priorities are all, to varying degrees, supply-side interventions. They set out what the system will provide and how partners will make training more accessible. That work is essential. But a skills system that improves its offer while employer demand stagnates will not transform this labour market.

Only 8% of businesses cite availability of training as a barrier to engagement. 59% cite staff release time and 48% cite cost (LSIP Employer Survey, 2025). This area's occupational structure, under-represented in professional and managerial roles, over-represented in operative and caring roles, is not simply the product of what the skills system has provided. It is also the product of what employers have historically asked for and invested in. An economy where employers consistently recruit to their current operating model and reach for volume labour rather than skilled labour will reproduce that structure regardless of what colleges and providers do. Changing the labour market requires changing employer behaviour, not just provider behaviour.

There is a further dimension that this plan must address directly: the skills needed not just to fill roles within businesses, but to create and grow them. With 87% of local businesses employing fewer than 10 people, this is an economy with significant entrepreneurial potential, but only if aspiring founders and growing owner-managers have

access to the commercial, financial and leadership skills they need to succeed. The Growth Hub, local authorities and Staffordshire Chambers' business support programmes, coupled with the regional investment landscape provide the business support infrastructure. This plan's role is to ensure the skills system actively feeds that pipeline: developing entrepreneurial capability in young people, equipping owner-managers with accessible leadership development, and treating business creation and growth as skills outcomes in their own right.

The response has three strands. First, an active employer demand campaign, making the business case for skills investment at every level from L2 to L8, led with outcomes rather than qualifications, and reaching the 41% of businesses that have never accessed formal training. Second, a Skills Investment Navigator function through the Skills Hub: not a signposting service but an active brokerage that converts employer interest into training starts, with particular focus on the L4+ routes that are consistently under-used by SMEs. Third, an Entrepreneurship and Business Leadership offer, working with Growth Hub and FE and HE partners to provide modular, accessible development for start-ups, scale-ups and SME owner-managers, linked to the wider business support ecosystem and ensuring that skills provision actively enables business creation and growth alongside workforce development.

Priority 6: Strengthening Our Skills System — Building on Strong Foundations

Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire already have many of the ingredients of a strong skills system, nationally recognised FE colleges, a growing independent provider network, and an employer engagement infrastructure that consistently outperforms comparable areas. The first LSIP delivered 207 Training Needs Analyses against a target of 80, 53 employer engagement events against a target of 40. The Staffordshire Providers Network has 31 active members and continues to grow.

The strategic challenge is not to fix what is broken but to ensure that what works reaches everyone who needs it. The evidence points clearly to where the gaps are: 59% of businesses state staff time as a barrier to training engagement and 48% state cost, yet only 8% mention availability, confirming that the barriers are structural and financial rather than geographic.

Whole sectors, notably Advanced Logistics, remain largely disengaged from the formal skills system despite their economic scale. Smaller contractors in Construction need short modular upskilling that the system does not yet provide at pace. In Clean Energy, a fragmented national accreditation landscape means there is no clear local entry point for employers or learners.

Closing these gaps requires deliberate system design. The Growth and Skills Levy, the Lifelong Learning Entitlement and the emerging modular provision landscape create an opportunity to build a more flexible, better-connected and more accountable skills system that reaches every employer, responds to emerging needs in real time, and earns the confidence of the businesses and residents it serves.



SECTION 2: AGREED CHANGES AND ACTIONS NEEDED

This section sets out the agreed changes and actions required to address each of the six priorities. For each priority it describes the change needed, the agreed actions, expected outcomes and how progress will be measured. Actions have been developed through employer consultation, provider engagement and alignment with national and local strategy. A full delivery activity table with partners, timescales, outcomes and monitoring arrangements is in Annex B.

These actions and priorities will be reviewed regularly and evolve over the next 3 years. Each review cycle is an opportunity not only to assess progress but to extend the plan's horizon ensuring that as intelligence deepens and the strategic landscape develops, the LSIP looks progressively further into the future rather than simply accounting for the period already under way.



Priority 1: Strengthening Technical Skills Pipelines Across Priority Sectors

Change Needed

The area faces a compounding technical skills challenge on three fronts. First, is the FE estate capacity issue, the physical infrastructure to train the next generation of technical workers does not exist at the scale required. Second, there are Level 4/5 provision gaps across engineering, construction management, advanced materials, digital manufacturing and clean energy, the “missing middle” that prevents workers progressing and leaves employers unable to find candidates at the level they need. Third, the area’s major strategic developments — WMI, i54, Chatterley Park, fifty500 and the South Staffordshire EGZ — represent sustained long-term demand that the current pipeline is not configured to meet. Establishing UK sovereign CMC manufacturing capability remains a strategic ambition for the area; the case for developing a specialist advanced materials talent pipeline remains strong and the area is committed to pursuing this through alternative routes.

Agreed Actions

- Grow technical education for 16–19 year-olds through study programmes aligned to priority sector needs, working with schools and colleges to expand T Level and vocational programme uptake in engineering, construction, digital, clean energy and health
- Support additional capital investment in FE and HE infrastructure and support eligible local FE colleges in pursuing Technical Excellence College designation in future Wave sectors, working closely with successful providers to maximise the implications for local provision
- Establish a Technical Pathways Working Group to map provision gaps and co-design new provision offers in engineering, construction management, advanced materials, health and care management, digital manufacturing and clean energy systems
- Grow apprenticeships in identified shortage occupations at every level from 2 to 8, removing barriers to take-up in partnership with employers, colleges and the NHS
- Work with schools and colleges across Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire to deepen understanding of local labour market needs, including through Teacher Encounters where school staff spend time in local workplaces.

Expected Outcomes and Measures

- Expanded FE and HE estate capacity in priority sectors through continued capital investment
- Learner starts in technical education growing year-on-year by sector and level, with increased enrolment in Level 3–5 provision and growth in Level 4/5 HTQ and higher apprenticeship starts
- Technical Pathways Working Group operational by end of Year 1, new or expanded provision confirmed in at least three priority sectors by end of Year 2, with decreased incidence of skills gaps in those sectors
- Advanced Materials talent pipeline established in partnership with providers, universities, AMRICC and local manufacturers, first cohort enrolled by end of Year 2
- Growth in Level 3+ apprenticeship starts in shortage occupations tracked annually against a Year 1 baseline, with increased uptake of higher and degree apprenticeships at Level 4–8 by 2029. Level 4+ attainment across Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire currently stands at 42.8%, against a national average of 47.2%; this LSIP targets measurable progress toward closing that gap by 2029, with progress reviewed annually
- At least 20 schools with active employer partnerships by end of Year 2, increased progression of young people into Level 2 and Level 3 technical pathways tracked annually.

Priority 2: Accelerating Digital Skills, Adoption and Workforce Readiness

Change Needed

Digital skills are a horizontal need running through every sector, yet the local offer is fragmented, hard to navigate and too slow to respond to the pace of change. Employers across manufacturing, health, logistics, clean energy, creative industries and agriculture all identify digital capability gaps, but most development is happening informally and in-house because formal provision is too inflexible and too slow. Given the SME-dominated structure of the local economy, they are at greatest risk: they lack the internal capacity to upskill their workforce and are falling further behind larger competitors investing in digital capability at scale.

Beyond general workforce digital capability, this plan recognises the need to develop an expert digital workforce, individuals who do not merely use digital tools but design, build and deploy them. In areas such as AI model application, automation engineering, advanced data analytics and the development of digital twins, the gap between employer need and formal provision is acute. Without deliberate investment in this higher-end pipeline, the area risks being a consumer of digital innovation rather than a creator of it, importing specialist talent rather than developing it locally.

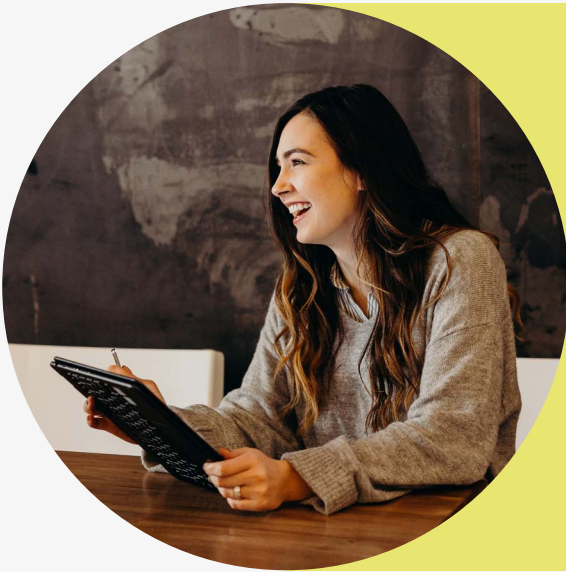
The Growth and Skills Levy, the Lifelong Learning Entitlement and the emerging short modular provision landscape create opportunities to build a visible, accessible and employer-led digital skills offer.

Agreed Actions

- Establish a coherent Local Digital Skills Offer that maps, rationalises and makes accessible all digital provision across providers
- Expand short, modular digital upskilling targeting Level 2 digital skills for those with no prior qualification, Level 3 for existing workforce upskilling, and Level 4/5 AI, cyber and data modules under the Lifelong Learning Entitlement and Growth and Skills Levy
- Launch a structured SME Digital Adoption Programme to close the capability gap between large employers and the SME-dominated local economy
- Establish clear progression routes from foundational digital skills to specialist roles in AI, automation and advanced data analytics, working with the University of Staffordshire, Keele University.

Expected Outcomes and Measures

- Local Digital Skills Offer published by end of Year 1, usage data and employer survey tracking proportion able to identify relevant local provision, with increased participation in Level 2–5 digital provision year-on-year
- Short modular digital courses available across at least five priority areas by end of Year 1, completions tracked annually by level and sector, with growth in Level 3+ digital certifications and attainment
- At least 25% of participating SMEs reporting improved digital capability by 2027, against a baseline established through the Year 1 digital adoption survey, with annual tracking thereafter
- Progression routes to specialist Level 4+ digital roles operational by end of Year 2, tracked through learner starts on HTQs, degree apprenticeships and employer co-designed short courses in AI, automation and advanced data analytics
- Reduction in employer-reported digital skills gaps measured through annual employer survey, baseline Year 1, with measurable reduction by 2029.



Priority 3: Improving Entry Pathways, Raising Core Skills and Creating an Inclusive Workforce

Change Needed

Many residents of Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire face barriers preventing them from accessing the skills system. 133,000 working-age residents are economically inactive, NEET rates have more than doubled since 2019, and 8.7% of Stoke-on-Trent adults have no qualifications whatsoever.

The challenge lies in connection over provision. The JET Team, Job Centre Plus, NHS, VCSE sector and Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Careers Hub all contribute, and the LSIP's role is to ensure the skills system complements and connects with those structures rather than operating in parallel to them. Specific gaps that must be addressed include: the absence of systematic destinations tracking for learners leaving FE and ASF programmes; an Adult Skills Fund offer that is not consistently aligned to the occupational areas of greatest shortage; inconsistent careers guidance that leaves many young people unaware of the opportunities in local priority sectors; and persistent practical barriers, transport, digital access, health and caring responsibilities, that stop people engaging with existing provision.

Agreed Actions

- Support the actions and delivery partners of the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Get Britain Working Plan and the Connect to Work Programme as the key delivery arm, to support its ambitions to reduce economic inactivity and ensure growth benefits reach residents furthest from the labour market
- Commission a cross-sector Destinations Tracking System, to track where 16-19 learners and Adult Skills Fund (ASF) participants progress after their programme, by sector and occupation
- Review and strengthen the local Adult Skills Fund (ASF) offer at 19+ to ensure it is delivering sufficient volumes of provision for unemployed, economically inactive and career-changing adults in the occupational areas where shortages are greatest
- Develop a Foundational Pathways Framework, mapping and publishing the full range of entry-level routes across priority sectors, including pre-employment programmes, supported internships, work experience and traineeship-equivalent provision, with clear progression steps accessible to advisors, employers and individuals
- Champion employer openness to non-traditional candidates through supporting the local support programme to encourage more employers to commit to inclusive recruitment, modern work experience hosting and structured progression opportunities
- Raise the quality and consistency of careers guidance so every young person understands the full range of local technical and professional opportunities.

Expected Outcomes and Measures

- Employment rate and economic inactivity rate tracked quarterly, target of 11,000 additional residents in work by 2029, with increased progression from non-accredited learning into Level 1 and Level 2 qualifications
- Level 4+ attainment ranges from 28.5% (Tamworth) to 43.6% (Lichfield) across the area's districts (Census 2021 baseline); this LSIP targets a narrowing of this gap, with district-level progress tracked annually from Year 1
- Destinations Tracking System pilot commissioned Year 1, operational Year 2, first data published Year 3, proportion of 16+ FE leavers and ASF completers tracked to a known destination, with progression rates into Level 2+ employment or further learning improving year-on-year
- Foundational Pathways Framework published by end of Year 1, number of advisors, employers and individuals accessing the framework tracked annually, with increased progression from Entry Level and Level 1 into Level 2 qualifications in priority sectors
- ASF starts by occupation area tracked annually from Year 1, progression-to-employment rate by sector improving from Year 2, with a decrease in the share of residents with no qualifications or Level 1
- Gatsby Benchmark scores tracked annually across all schools, increased apprenticeship participation among young people and improved progression into Level 2 and Level 3 technical pathways by 2029
- Number of employers signed up to inclusive recruitment annually, number of individuals from underrepresented groups supported into employment tracked from Year 1.



Priority 4: Expanding Leadership, Management and Workforce Capability Across All Sectors

Change Needed

Leadership and management capability is the single most consistent gap across the area that is not being systematically addressed. 27% of TNA respondents identified management training as a need and 68% reported retention challenges, a figure that research consistently links to management quality. Yet in the sectors where the gap is most acute, construction, health and social care, agriculture, logistics and clean energy, management development has historically been informal, reactive and inaccessible to smaller organisations.

The Growth and Skills Levy short courses and the Lifelong Learning Entitlement represent the primary funding mechanisms through which this priority can be delivered at scale, providing a route to affordable, modular management development that does not require employers to commit to full apprenticeship frameworks. However, for SMEs, even co-investment requirements can act as a barrier, and the LSIP will work with providers to develop accessible co-investment models that bring management development within reach of the smallest businesses.

Proposed changes to apprenticeship funding and standards present a risk to the availability of management and leadership routes that are among the most accessed by working adults in this area.

Leadership and management capability is not only a retention and productivity issue for established businesses, but also foundational to business creation and growth. Developing entrepreneurial skills, strengthening the leadership capability of owner-managers, and linking skills provision more explicitly to the wider business support ecosystem, including the Growth Hub, local authority and wider business support programmes, represents both an economic growth opportunity and an underused lever for raising SME productivity.

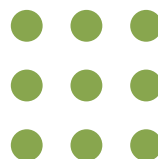
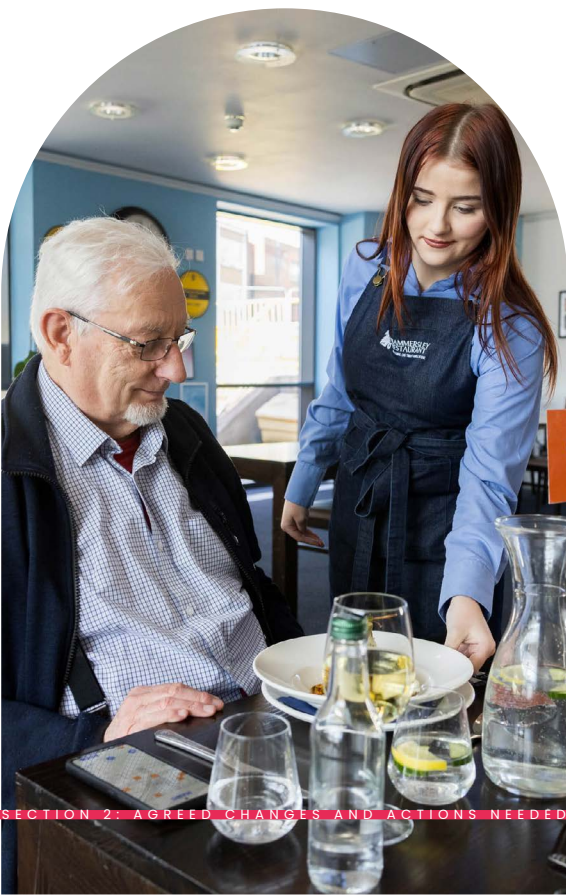


Agreed Actions

- Create a flexible, modular Leadership and Management programme accessible to SMEs in sectors where management qualification rates are historically lowest, targeting Level 3 first-line management provision for supervisors and team leaders, Level 4/5 for middle managers and senior leaders in SMEs, and Level 6/7 for senior leadership development in partnership with the University of Staffordshire and Keele University
- Expand management development pathways in the care sector, addressing the chronic gap between supervisory need and affordable provision
- Embed project and programme management skills into Level 4+ technical qualifications across construction, clean energy and digital
- Develop an Entrepreneurship and Business Leadership pathway, working with the Growth Hub, Staffordshire Chambers and education providers to offer accessible, modular entrepreneurship and leadership development for start-ups, scale-ups and SME owner-managers.

Expected Outcomes and Measures

- Flexible Leadership and Management programme operational by end of Year 1, at least 200 SME manager enrolments by end of Year 2, tracked by sector and business size, with increased workforce attainment at Level 3+ leadership and management
- Management vacancy rates in health and social care currently stand at 1,235 vacancies against 1,215 employed managers (a vacancy-to-employment ratio of approximately 102%); this LSIP targets a reduction in this ratio to below 90% by 2029, tracked annually through the Skills for Care report, alongside growth in Level 4/5 management apprenticeship starts in the care sector
- Project management components embedded in Level 4+ qualifications across construction, clean energy and digital by end of Year 2, learner starts in PM-inclusive provision and employer satisfaction with graduate readiness tracked annually
- Number of individuals accessing Entrepreneurship and Business Leadership development tracked annually from Year 1, number of new businesses formed or supported tracked from Year 2, with year-on-year growth targeted by 2029.



Priority 5: Stimulating Employer Demand for Skills — The Other Half of the Equation

Change Needed

The evidence is unambiguous. Only 8% of businesses cite availability of training as a barrier. 59% cite staff release time and 48% cite cost. These are demand-side challenges that this plan addresses directly through evidence-based employer engagement.

Changing this labour market requires changing employer behaviour, not just provider behaviour. This priority sets out to do that directly, by making the business case for skills investment from L2 to L8 and reducing the structural barriers that suppress demand.

Agreed Actions

- Develop and deliver a sector-specific employer demand campaign making the business case for skills investment at every level from L2 to L8
- Develop a free Workforce Planning Toolkit, backed up with a Training Needs Analysis (TNA), giving every SME a clear route from latent interest to training starts
- Strengthen local employer engagement with graduate talent to improve retention and career progression opportunities
- Maximise uptake of the Government's apprenticeship incentive package among non-levy SMEs.

Expected Outcomes and Measures

- Employer demand campaign operational by end of Year 1, at least 100 SMEs engaged annually through the Skills Hub, with year-on-year growth in businesses newly accessing formal training
- Workforce Planning Toolkit published by end of Year 1, SMEs converting from TNA to confirmed training starts tracked annually, with a decrease in skills gaps across priority occupations by 2029
- Graduate retention rate baseline established Year 1, measurable improvement in graduates entering local priority sector employment targeted by 2029, with growth in Level 6+ employment tracked year-on-year
- Growth in Level 3+ apprenticeship starts among non-levy SMEs tracked annually against Year 1 baseline, increased uptake of Level 4+ higher apprenticeships by smaller employers targeted by 2029
- Annual employer survey: proportion reporting increased training investment, Year 1 baseline, with measurable improvement by Year 3.



Priority 6: Strengthening Our Skills System — Building on Strong Foundations

Change Needed

The skills system in Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire is strong but lacks reach. The evidence points clearly to a system that works well for employers who are already engaged, but has not yet consistently reached the sectors, businesses or learners with the greatest need.

Logistics remains largely disengaged from formal provision despite employing tens of thousands of people. Construction's experienced workforce needs short modular upskilling the system does not yet provide at scale. Smaller care providers are locked out of apprenticeship growth by cost and backfill barriers. And 73% of surveyed employers report skills gaps while 36% are asking for bespoke training that the system is not yet configured to deliver flexibly enough.

At the same time, the system faces structural pressures, the growing challenge of recruiting skilled staff into FE teaching roles, the need to track and improve graduate retention, and the opportunity presented by devolution to commission provision more directly aligned with local employer need. What is required is not reinvention but reinforcement: deeper employer co-design, stronger connectivity between the system's parts, and in a targeted number of areas, new structures that lock in the accountability and responsiveness the plan's next chapter demands.

Agreed Actions

- Establish a permanent sector employer engagement mechanism to hold provision accountable to real-time intelligence
- Develop the Skills Hub into the single point of access for all training and funding navigation across the area
- Create a Skills Intelligence Group to generate shared, real-time labour market insight across employers, providers and local authorities.

Expected Outcomes and Measures

- Sector employer engagement boards operational by end of Year 1, quarterly meetings with published outputs, employer participation rates tracked, and decreased incidence of skills gaps across priority sectors over time
- Skills Hub usage data tracked year-on-year, employer satisfaction survey baseline established Year 1, with growth in businesses converting from enquiry to training start tracked annually
- Skills Intelligence Group operational by end of Year 1, Local Skills Dashboard live and publicly accessible by end of Year 2, with usage data and frequency of provision adjustments tracked in response to intelligence.



Conclusion

The six priorities in this plan form an interconnected system with a specific delivery sequence. Priority 6 (system strengthening) is the foundation: establishment of a sector engagement process, Skills Intelligence Group and Skills Hub infrastructure must be operational early in Year 1 because every other priority depends on them for employer engagement, intelligence and navigation.

Priority 1 (technical pipeline) is the most capital-dependent priority and the one with the longest lead times and establishing the Level 4/5 Technical Pathways Working Group must begin immediately, even though the full impact of capital investment will not be felt until Year 2 or 3.

Priority 3 (entry pathways) is upstream of Priority 1: improving the pipeline of new entrants into the labour market feeds directly into technical starts, meaning that progress on inactivity, NEETs and careers guidance in Years 1 and 2 will translate

into better technical recruitment in Years 2 and 3. Priority 2 (digital) and Priority 4 (leadership and management) operate in parallel throughout the plan period and are less sequentially dependent, though both benefit from the SME engagement infrastructure established under Priority 6.

Ultimately, this plan depends as much on what employers do as on what the system provides.

In practice, this means the plan's first year should be weighted toward infrastructure and advocacy, getting the governance boards operational, supporting partners in progressing the capital investment case, launching the Skills Hub and beginning the employer engagement programme, while Years 2 and 3 shift toward delivery, measurement and continuous improvement.

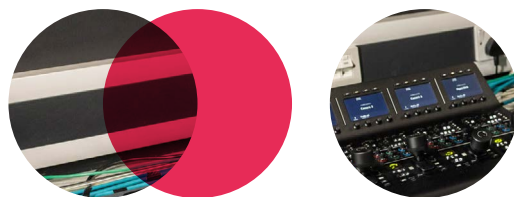
The test of this plan is not what it says but what changes — for employers, for residents, and for the area's economy — by 2029.



ANNEX A: FURTHER AND EXPLANATORY INFORMATION ON SKILLS NEEDS

This annex provides additional detail on the skills needs identified in the main body of the LSIP. It maps key target occupations and industries to Standard Occupational Classification (SOC 2020) and Standard Industrial Classification (SIC 2007) codes in line with Skills England guidance, to support consistent national analysis. It also identifies roles where standard SOC codes do not fully capture emerging or specialist functions, providing qualitative definitions for those roles as required by the guidance.

While SOC codes remain essential for consistent cross-area analysis, they were designed to reflect established occupational structures and do not always capture the full breadth of emerging or highly specialised roles, particularly in sectors such as digital, clean energy and advanced materials where the pace of change exceeds the revision cycle of classification frameworks. Where roles are not adequately described by existing SOC codes, this annex provides clear definitions and sets out the rationale for the limitation, so that these roles can be accurately represented in qualitative reporting.



AI: Sector Evidence Tables

The following tables summarise the sector overview and key facts, priority occupations (where training-led recruitment responses are needed), workforce development needs (upskilling of existing staff), and notes on the relevance and gaps in current provision.

The evidence draws on job posting analytics, Census 2021 occupation data, Skills England 2025 national reports, the Migration Advisory Committee's shortage occupation data, and qualitative evidence from employer focus groups, surveys and Training Needs Analyses carried out by Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce.

Priority occupations in each sector table were determined through a structured three-stage process.

First, Lightcast job posting data was used to identify the occupations generating the highest volume of vacancies locally, filtered to roles where postings had grown year-on-year and where time-to-fill data indicated persistent recruitment difficulty. Second, this quantitative longlist was cross-referenced against the Migration Advisory Committee's shortage occupation indicators and Skills England 2025 sector report findings to identify where local patterns aligned with or diverged from national shortage trends. Third, the resulting shortlist was tested through sector-specific employer focus groups and TNA conversations, where employers were asked to rank occupations by recruitment difficulty and skills gap severity.

Occupations were included in the final priority tables where they met at least two of the three criteria: high local vacancy volume, national shortage recognition, or employer-confirmed recruitment difficulty. Where very small employer sample sizes in a sector limited confidence in the qualitative findings, notably in Agriculture and Creative Industries, greater weight was placed on quantitative and national evidence, and this is noted in the relevant sector tables.

Tables are included for all eight priority sectors: Advanced Manufacturing, Digital and Technology, Construction, Health and Social Care, Advanced Logistics and Distribution, Clean Energy, Creative Industries and Creative Tech, and Agriculture/Agri-tech.



Advanced Manufacturing (including Engineering and Advanced Materials)

Priority Occupations	Workforce Development Needs	Local Provision Notes
• Metal production/maintenance fitters (SOC 5215) • Welders and allied trades (SOC 5223) • Machinists and related (SOC 5224) • Mechanical engineers (SOC 2121) • Engineering technicians (SOC 3114) • Production/operations managers (SOC 1122) • Process engineers/materials scientists • Additive manufacturing/CMC specialists	• Automation and digital adoption skills • Digital and AI use in production environments • Leadership and management • Robotics and AI (national evidence) • Data analytics and virtual design • Electrical/electronic system design • Sustainability and net zero skills • Technical sales • CMC/advanced ceramics specialist skills • Process engineering for scale-up	• Good L2–4 apprenticeship uptake • Limited L4/5 provision in advanced materials • No dedicated CMC/ceramics training pathway locally • Short modular upskilling provision underdeveloped • The Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Institute of Technology (IoT) – technical provision in Advanced Engineering and High Value Manufacturing, covering HNC/HND-levels • Advanced Manufacturing Technical Excellence College designated locally – providing specialist capacity, employer co-designed curriculum and a hub-and-spoke model for sharing expertise and facilities across the provider network • Digital manufacturing skills provision has identified gaps • Good progress on T Levels – a structured pathway from T Level through apprenticeship into welding and engineering roles needs to be developed, with T Level placement employers engaged as potential apprenticeship sponsors • Apprenticeship gap: electrical engineering (non-construction) and welding apprenticeships at L3+ are under-developed relative to sector demand – priority growth areas • Higher-level apprenticeships at L4/5 in engineering and manufacturing management remain undersubscribed – employer awareness and flexibility of standards are barriers • HTQ offer requires review against identified shortage occupations, particularly in advanced materials, precision engineering and automation • Destinations from HE engineering programmes into local manufacturing roles are not systematically tracked – HEI partnerships needed to establish destination data and improve graduate retention in the sector • Laboratory Technician and Laboratory Scientist Apprenticeships recently launched for delivery at the IoT

Digital and Technology

Priority Occupations	Workforce Development Needs	Local Provision Notes
• Software developers and programmers — top employer priority (SOC 2136) • Cyber security professional (SOC 2134) • Data analysts and data scientists (SOC 2137) • IT managers and directors (SOC 1136) • IT operations technicians (SOC 3131) • Cloud architects and DevOps engineers • Games developers / CreaTech specialists	• Specialist skills within roles • Complex problem solving • Programming languages (Python, Java, etc.) • Machine learning and AI development • Cyber security and information security • User experience (UX) design • Big data / data architecture • Knowledge of products and services in market	• Skills dev. mainly in-workplace; external provision rarely accessed • Short modular provision very limited and frustrating for employers • L4/5 apprenticeships well used for upskilling existing staff • No fast-track AI/ML upskilling provision locally • Flexible, modular short courses in digital specialisms urgently needed • Good progress on T Levels — T Level placements should be actively used as a progression route into employment as well as into HE • Apprenticeship gap: L3/4/5 apprenticeships in digital shortage occupations need growth — a 'hearts and minds' campaign with employers and a programme-led or work trial approach to apprenticeship starts would help overcome employer reluctance • HE digital programme destinations not systematically tracked by sector and occupation — review needed to assess whether graduates are entering local digital employment or leaving the area • HE digital programme content should be reviewed in relation to specific occupational shortages — in particular, alignment with in-demand programming languages, machine learning and cybersecurity specialisms • Some national skills gaps (programming languages, advanced machine learning) may not be addressable through local provision — upskilling in-work is the primary response, and the LSIP should not over-claim local provision can solve all gaps

Construction

Priority Occupations	Workforce Development Needs	Local Provision Notes
• Project managers – single most difficult role to recruit (SOC 2461) • Qualified electricians with industrial/commercial experience (SOC 5241) • Plumbers and heating engineers (SOC 5314) • Heat pump / low-carbon heating engineers • Bricklayers (SOC 5319) and carpenters (SOC 5321) • Site managers and forepersons (SOC 5330) • Civil engineers and quantity surveyors (SOC 2462)	• Project management – major priority • Leadership, management and people skills • Renewables: solar PV, heat pumps, battery storage, air source heat pumps • EV charging infrastructure installation (NICEIC accreditation) • Modern Methods of Construction and off-site prefabrication • Digital skills and Building Information Modelling • Dumper/digger plant operation and site safety • Health and safety regulatory compliance	• Good L2/3 apprenticeship provision in main trades • Project management provision limited at Level 4+ – project management apprenticeship should be a growth priority • Heat pump and solar PV training provided locally. • EV charging (NIC EIC) and 18th Edition courses accessed via national ITPs – not available locally • Time commitment of apprenticeships is the main barrier for smaller contractors who need modular upskilling • South Staffordshire College has expanded capacity through its new Tamworth College town-centre campus and targeted investment in Cannock College facilities (including the Innovation and Skills Hub), helping address local capacity constraints alongside provision from independent training providers. Provision also provided by Rebus Training locally • Tracking gap: 16–19 FE enrolments in construction are large but apprenticeship take-up by employers at L3 for electricians and plumbers is low by comparison – improving destinations tracking and progression from FE into apprenticeships and related employment is a priority • Provision gap: no local provision for roofing and scaffolding apprenticeships – However, South Staffordshire Colleges are bidding for a Civil and Construction Training Hub at Rodbaston which will cover this provision • Growth opportunity: plumbing apprenticeship numbers need significant growth; a property maintenance/multi-skills apprenticeship would support multi-skilling and is being used creatively by some employers already • Need to explore whether a local higher education surveying programme is viable – AI may reduce quantity surveying demand but project, commercial and building surveying remain growth occupations • Trainers and assessors: difficulty recruiting practitioners from industry into teaching roles is a growing risk in construction – a Gatsby Industry Associates model or grow-your-own assessor programme should be explored • The LSIP will work closely with any locally designated Construction Technical Excellence College (TEC) to align facility investment and provision with identified gaps – the Construction TEC programme (Wave 1, launched August 2025) is a direct mechanism to address specialist provision shortfalls • Local authority procurement: Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire local authorities should be encouraged to strengthen mandatory training in construction procurement – a review of existing social value and skills clauses in local contracts is needed • Employer skills planning: a sector-wide initiative to support construction employers – particularly SMEs – in developing structured workforce and succession plans would improve training pipeline visibility and engagement • Renewables: active intervention needed to ensure sufficient demand and funding for upskilling in renewables installation; demand for modular construction (MMC) should be periodically checked given shifting market conditions

Health and Social Care

Priority Occupations	Workforce Development Needs	Local Provision Notes
• Care workers and senior care workers (SOC 6141, 6145) • Residential and domiciliary care managers (SOC 1184) • Registered nurses (SOC 2231) and nursing associates • Mental health support workers (SOC 6146) • Occupational therapists (SOC 2442) • Social workers (SOC 2442) • Healthcare science technicians (SOC 3562)	• Computer literacy and basic IT skills • Digitalisation of care services and mobile monitoring • Data analytics in health settings • Client safety and wellbeing management • Mental health (including first aid) • Leadership, management and supervisory development • Commercial skills: bid writing and funding literacy • AI use in health and care settings • Communication skills	• L2/3 care apprenticeships available but demand outstrips capacity of providers • Management development provision not tailored to care sector • Digital skills provision poorly aligned to real care settings • Cost remains major barrier to accessing any external provision • The Institute of Technology delivers Health and Life Sciences provision — including HNC-level Healthcare Professions Support — at NSCG and partner sites, with NSCG's health curriculum co-designed with Royal Stoke University Hospital and MPFT • Good progress on T Levels in Health and Social Care — T Level placements should be used to develop clear progression routes into employment and care apprenticeships • Tracking gap: progression from 16–19 health T Levels and L2 ASF courses into care employment and apprenticeships is not consistently tracked — improving this is a priority • ASF L2 care provision: a significant adult skills offer exists at Level 2 for care workers — improving progression tracking from these programmes into related employment (care workers, support workers) is a specific action needed • Apprenticeship breadth: apprenticeships from L2 care worker through to L6 nursing, social work and allied health (speech and language therapist, occupational therapist) need to grow significantly — the full pathway exists but uptake at higher levels is low • 'Inspired to Care' (Leicestershire): this employer-led initiative to generate learner demand for care careers has produced strong results — the LSIP should explore transferable learning and consider a similar local model • Career pathways communication: work with Skills for Care and FE colleges to align and better communicate career progression routes in health and social care through IAG channels, reaching more young people and career changers • Laboratory Technician and Laboratory Scientist Apprenticeships recently launched for delivery at the IoT • The Care Workforce Pathway, the Skills for Care Workforce Strategy and the 10 Year Health Plan together provide a nationally recognised framework for career development and sector transformation that local provision should align with — and which the LSIP will use to inform priority actions in this sector

Advanced Logistics and Distribution

Priority Occupations	Workforce Development Needs	Local Provision Notes
• LGV/HGV drivers (SOC 8211) — hard to recruit; ageing workforce • Managers in transport and distribution (SOC 1241) • Managers in storage and warehousing (SOC 1242) • Transport and distribution clerks and assistants (SOC 4134) • Warehouse operatives (SOC 9252) • Fleet maintenance technicians • EV fleet maintenance specialists (emerging)	• Digitalisation and warehouse management systems • Automation and robotics in warehousing • Data analysis and supply chain management • Net zero / EV fleet conversion • Leadership and supervisory management • Robotics and computer programming (growing need nationally)	• LGV training well supplied by independent providers (Road Haulage Association, ROSPA, RHA DCPC) • Warehouse technician pathways very limited • No structured supervisory/management pathway for logistics — despite strong employer need • EV fleet maintenance provision does not yet exist locally • Sector almost entirely disengaged from formal skills system — must be actively re-engaged • ASF 19+ offer needs review to ensure it is targeted effectively at unemployed and career changers seeking logistics roles, with clear links to employer recruitment pipelines • LGV apprenticeship: significant scope to grow employer-sponsored LGV apprenticeships — currently underdeveloped relative to sector demand and employer size • Warehouse apprenticeships: there is scope for much higher volumes of young people entering warehouse apprenticeships, but the ASF offer may be substituting for apprenticeship starts — this tension needs to be understood and resolved • Management apprenticeships: logistics employers should be encouraged to use management apprenticeships at L3–5 for supervisory and operations management development • A sector-wide awareness campaign about career opportunities, progression routes and the range of roles available in logistics — targeting young people, schools and career changers — is needed to improve the sector's image and recruitment pipeline • IoT offers Robotics and Automation provision to include modular short courses offered to working adults one evening per week

Clean Energy

Priority Occupations	Workforce Development Needs	Local Provision Notes
- Electricians and electrical installation (SOC 5241) - Heat pump engineers and low-carbon heating technicians (SOC 5314) - Energy systems engineers and integrators (SOC 2121 / 2123) - Retrofit coordinators and assessors (no dedicated SOC — see Annex A) - Renewables project managers (SOC 2461) - Solar PV installers and commissioning engineers (SOC 5315) - Carbon accounting and sustainability advisors (SOC 2419)	- Heat pump installation and maintenance - Solar PV installation, commissioning and maintenance - Building fabric retrofit and insulation (EWI, loft, underfloor) - Energy systems monitoring, BMS and smart controls - Hydrogen and alternative fuels technologies - Carbon literacy and net zero strategy - EV charging infrastructure installation and maintenance - Green finance and carbon accounting - Digital monitoring and environmental data management	- MCS-accredited heat pump training available nationally and locally - Stoke-on-Trent College is opening a £2.3 million Advanced Green Technologies (AGT) Hub at its Burslem campus (Spring 2026), funded through Levelling Up capital from Stoke-on-Trent City Council — delivering hands-on training from Level 2 to Level 5 in retrofitting, heat pumps, solar energy systems, drone technology and robotics; will also act as an incubation hub for green technology employer partners - South Staffordshire College, funded through a £1.6m Getting Building Fund, operates a Net Zero Energy Training Centre at Rodbaston — a state-of-the-art facility equipped with solar PV, EV charging, air and ground source heat pumps and hydrogen boilers: offering BPEC-accredited courses in heat pump installation, solar PV, EV charging installation, hydrogen fuelled car training and energy storage systems for electricians, plumbers and vehicle technicians - Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group and the IoT have invested in Green Skills to support major employers in the sector. - No dedicated local reskilling pathway for career changers into clean energy — beyond what these new facilities will provide - Retrofit coordination training (PAS 2035 standard) not widely available locally - Short modular upskilling provision for existing tradespersons largely absent outside the new college facilities - EV installation training available but fragmented — no clear local progression pathway - Staffordshire Green Skills for Growth programme expected to inform new curriculum design - To be aware and work collaboratively with any local/region TEC providers

Creative Industries and Crea-Tech

Priority Occupations	Workforce Development Needs	Local Provision Notes
• Video games designers and developers (SOC 2136 / 2141) • Graphic and multimedia designers (SOC 2142) • Animation and VFX artists (SOC 3417) • UX/UI designers (SOC 2141) • Digital marketing and content specialists (SOC 3545) • CreaTech developers – AI-enabled creative tools (no dedicated SOC – see Annex A) • Ceramics designers and creative manufacturing technicians (SOC 3411 / 5444)	• AI-enabled creative content production • 3D modelling, animation and visual effects • UX/UI design and digital product development • Games design, narrative and production • Digital marketing, SEO and content strategy • Creative business skills: pitching, IP, commercial development • Ceramics and materials design for advanced manufacturing crossover • E-learning design, instructional design and LXD	• Strong L6/7 provision at the University of Staffordshire in games design, digital arts and design – internationally recognised for games education • Limited L4/5 technical pathway into creative sector for non-degree routes • No clear T Level or apprenticeship pathway into animation, VFX or games development locally • Graduate retention support largely absent – employer/university link needs strengthening • Creative business skills and commercial development support underdeveloped for micro-businesses • Ceramics-to-creative-manufacturing pathway has potential but is currently informal and unstructured

Agriculture/Agri-tech

Priority Occupations	Workforce Development Needs	Local Provision Notes
• Agricultural engineers and machinery operatives (SOC 5212 / 9111) • Farm managers and agricultural business managers (SOC 1211) • Precision agriculture and agri-tech technicians (no dedicated SOC – see Annex A) • Horticulture and crop production specialists (SOC 5111) • Veterinary nurses and animal health technicians (SOC 3216) • Environmental land management advisors (SOC 2419 / 5111) • Rural tourism and hospitality operators (SOC 1221 / 9272)	• Precision farming: GPS guidance, soil sensors, yield mapping, drone operation • AgriTech systems: automated feeding, robotic milking, environmental monitoring • Anaerobic digestion, BioChar and renewable energy from agricultural waste • Environmental land management and agri-environment scheme compliance • Farm business management, grant applications and rural diversification • Animal health, biosecurity and welfare • Digital record-keeping and farm data management • Net Zero and sustainable farming practices	• Strong land-based provision at Rodbaston (South Staffordshire College) spanning Entry Level through Level 6, including land-based and specialist pathways with progression into higher education • Limited L4/5 higher technical provision in AgriTech and precision farming nationally and locally • Agri-Tech crossover with digital and engineering sectors poorly served by current qualification frameworks • Farm business management and rural enterprise skills largely dependent on AHDB and industry bodies • Environmental land management skills need growing rapidly – ELM scheme rollout driving new demand

A2: Occupation and Industry Mapping Table

The table below maps the key occupations targeted by this LSIP, through the data gathered through to Sector Evidence Tables to their most relevant SOC 2020 and SIC 2007 codes, together with the qualification level at which training is typically delivered and the LSIP priorities to which the occupation most directly connects.

These SIC and SOC codes were checked against the UK SIC 2007 – Office for National Statistics and SOC 2020 – Office for National Statistics.

LSPI Sector	Occupation/Role	SOC2020	SIC2007	Definition with LSIP	Level	Priority
Adv. Manufacturing	Metal production and maintenance fitters	5215	SIC 25, 28	Skilled workers maintaining, repairing and operating metal production machinery in manufacturing environments	2–3	P1
Adv. Manufacturing	Welders and allied trades	5223	SIC 25	Workers who join, cut and shape metal components using welding, soldering and related processes	2–3	P1
Adv. Manufacturing	Mechanical engineers	2121	SIC 28	Engineers designing, developing and maintaining mechanical systems and machinery in production environments	4–6	P1, P4
Adv. Manufacturing	Engineering technicians	3114	SIC 28	Technicians providing technical support in engineering environments, including testing, quality and maintenance	3–4	P1
Adv. Manufacturing	Production and operations managers	1122	SIC 25–28	Managers overseeing production processes, quality, efficiency and workforce in manufacturing operations	5–6	P1, P4

Continued >

LSPI Sector	Occupation/Role	SOC2020	SIC2007	Definition with LSIP	Level	Priority
Advanced Materials	Materials scientists and process engineers	2127 / 2122	SIC 23, 20	Specialists in the science and engineering of materials, including ceramics, composites and advanced alloys – including CMC process engineers	5–7	P1
Advanced Materials	Additive manufacturing / CMC technicians	3114	SIC 23	Technicians operating additive manufacturing and ceramic composite fabrication processes. Note: no dedicated SOC code exists for CMC-specific roles – see A2 below	3–5	P1
Digital	Software developers and programmers	2136	SIC 62	Professionals designing, writing, testing and maintaining software applications and systems	4–6	P1, P2
Digital	Cyber security professionals	2134	SIC 62	Specialists protecting computer systems, networks and data from unauthorised access and attack	4–6	P2
Digital	Data analysts and data scientists	2137	SIC 62, 63	Professionals collecting, processing and analysing data to generate insights and support decision-making	4–6	P2
Digital	IT operations technicians	3131	SIC 61, 62	Technicians installing, maintaining and supporting IT systems and infrastructure	2–3	P2
Digital	Games developers / CreaTech specialists	2136	SIC 58, 62	Developers working in interactive media, gaming, immersive technologies and real-time 3D. Note: SOC 2136 is the closest code but does not fully capture the CreaTech specialism – see A2 below	4–6	P1, P2

Continued >

LSPI Sector	Occupation/Role	SOC2020	SIC2007	Definition with LSIP	Level	Priority
Clean Energy	Electricians and heat pump engineers	5241 / 5314	SIC 35, 43	Tradespeople installing, maintaining and commissioning electrical systems and low-carbon heating technologies	2–4	P1
Clean Energy	Energy engineers and systems integrators	2121 / 2123	SIC 35	Engineers designing and integrating energy generation, storage and distribution systems including renewables and hydrogen	5–7	P1
Clean Energy	Renewables project managers	2461	SIC 35, 42	Managers overseeing the delivery of renewable energy and decarbonisation infrastructure projects. Note: SOC 2461 covers project managers generally – no clean energy-specific code exists; see A2	5–6	P1, P4
Construction	Electricians, plumbers and specialist trades	5241 / 5314	SIC 43	Tradespeople installing and maintaining electrical, plumbing, heating and ventilation systems in buildings	2–3	P1
Construction	Bricklayers, carpenters, scaffolders	5313 / 5319 / 5321	SIC 43	Skilled construction trades workers involved in structural building work	2–3	P1
Construction	Project managers, QS and civil engineers	2461 / 2462	SIC 41, 42	Professionals managing construction projects, costs and civil engineering works – the single hardest role to fill in the sector	5–7	P1, P4
Health and Social Care	Care workers and senior care workers	6141 / 6145	SIC 87, 88	Staff providing personal and social care to adults and older people in residential and community settings	2–3	P1, P3

Continued >

LSPI Sector	Occupation/Role	SOC2020	SIC2007	Definition with LSIP	Level	Priority
Health and Social Care	Registered nurses and nursing associates	2231 / 2232	SIC 86	Clinical professionals providing nursing care and health assessments in NHS and independent settings	6	P1
Health and Social Care	Residential and domiciliary care managers	1184	SIC 87, 88	Managers responsible for the delivery, quality and governance of residential and home care services	4–5	P1, P4
Health and Social Care	Social workers and occupational therapists	2442	SIC 88	Qualified professionals supporting individuals with complex social care and health-related needs	6	P1
Health and Social Care	Mental health support workers	6146	SIC 86, 87	Workers providing structured support to people experiencing mental health difficulties in clinical and community settings	2–3	P1, P3
Logistics	LGV / HGV drivers	9221	SIC 49	Drivers operating large goods and heavy goods vehicles for freight, distribution and logistics operations	2	P1, P3
Logistics	Warehouse operatives	9210	SIC 52	Workers carrying out goods receipt, storage, picking, packing and dispatch in warehouse and distribution environments	1–2	P1, P3
Logistics	Transport and distribution managers	1161	SIC 49, 52	Managers responsible for planning, coordinating and optimising transport and distribution operations	4–5	P1, P4

Continued >

LSPI Sector	Occupation/Role	SOC2020	SIC2007	Definition with LSIP	Level	Priority
Prof. & Bus. Svcs	Business and IT project managers	2461	SIC 70, 74	Professionals managing change and transformation projects across business and technology functions	5–6	P4
Prof. & Bus. Svcs	Marketing and sales professionals	1132 / 3543	SIC 73	Professionals developing and implementing marketing strategies and managing sales activities	4–6	P4
Graphic and multimedia designers	Graphic and multimedia designers	2142	SIC 74.10	Creative professionals skilled in digital content creation for marketing, branding and user experience across digital platforms. SIC 74.10 is specific to graphic design; other multimedia roles may fall under different SIC codes	3–5	P1, P2

A2: Emerging and Specialist Roles Without Full SOC Coverage

The following roles are identified in the LSIP's sector evidence as priority skills needs but are not fully or adequately described by existing SOC 2020 codes.

This reflects the pace of change in sectors such as digital, clean energy and advanced materials, where new occupational functions are emerging faster than national classification frameworks are revised. Definitions are provided below for use as qualitative insights in LSIP reporting.

Role Title	Sector	Rationale for No SOC Code	Definition for LSIP Purposes
CMC Process Engineer / Advanced Ceramics Technician	Advanced Materials	CMC manufacturing is an emerging specialism not yet reflected in SOC 2020. The closest codes (2122, 2127, 3114) cover engineering and materials science broadly but do not distinguish ceramic matrix composite fabrication as a discrete occupational function.	A specialist who designs, develops and optimises manufacturing processes for ceramic matrix composite components, including fibre preparation, matrix infiltration, quality assurance and scale-up. Skills include ceramic chemistry, process modelling, machine learning for design of experiment (DoE), and quality control to aerospace/defence standards.
Clean Energy Transition Specialist / Net Zero Technician	Clean Energy	SOC codes for energy-related occupations (SOC 2123, 5241, 5314) reflect established trades and engineering roles but do not capture the cross-disciplinary, systems-level competency needed for net zero delivery roles that combine construction, electrical, digital and carbon literacy skills.	A practitioner who designs, installs or manages low-carbon energy systems at building or neighbourhood scale, combining skills from construction trades, electrical engineering, digital monitoring and carbon accounting. Includes roles in heat pump installation, retrofit coordination, solar PV commissioning and energy performance management.
AI / Machine Learning Specialist (applied to manufacturing or health)	Digital / Advanced Manufacturing / Health and Care	SOC 2136 (software developers) is the closest available code but does not adequately distinguish applied AI and machine learning roles embedded in non-digital sectors, which require both domain knowledge and AI/data skills.	A professional who develops, deploys and maintains AI and machine learning models within a specific sector context – such as predictive maintenance in manufacturing, automated diagnostics in health settings, or demand forecasting in logistics. Requires both specialist AI/data skills and applied sector knowledge.

Continued >

Role Title	Sector	Rationale for No SOC Code	Definition for LSIP Purposes
CreaTech Developer / Immersive Experience Specialist	Creative Industries / Digital	SOC 2136 covers software developers generally but does not distinguish the creative technology specialism that combines artistic, narrative and technical skills in gaming, immersive media, real-time 3D and AR/VR environments.	A developer or designer working at the intersection of creative practice and digital technology – creating interactive experiences, games, virtual and augmented reality environments, or real-time 3D visualisations. Requires skills in creative software, game engines, UX design, 3D modelling and storytelling.
Digital Health and Care Facilitator	Health and Social Care	No SOC code currently captures the emerging role of a clinically informed digital champion who supports the adoption of digital tools within health and care settings, distinct from IT support (SOC 3131) and clinical roles.	A practitioner who supports the adoption and effective use of digital technologies within health and care settings – including electronic care records, remote monitoring platforms, AI-assisted triage tools and data dashboards. Requires both care sector knowledge and applied digital skills, typically at Level 3–4.

Note: These definitions will be used as qualitative insights within LSIP reporting and submitted to Skills England to inform future revisions to occupational classification frameworks.

ANNEX B: IMPLEMENTATION AND DELIVERY ACTIVITY TABLE

This annex sets out the specific activities required to implement each of the agreed changes and actions in Section 2. For each activity it identifies the lead organisation(s), supporting partners, timescales and key milestones, expected outcomes, and how progress will be monitored and measured.

For a number of activities, particularly those relating to changes in provision, this table identifies a category of provider (for example, “FE Colleges” or “Universities”) rather than a single named organisation. This reflects the fact that delivery of these activities will depend on engagement with multiple providers across the area, and that the appropriate lead(s) will vary by sector and activity. Engagement with providers on these activities has already commenced. As the LSIP moves into the delivery phase, specific lead organisation(s) will be agreed and assigned for each of these activities, and this table will be updated accordingly as part of the quarterly governance review process.

This table should be treated as a live document. It will be reviewed and updated at each quarterly meeting of the LSIP Governance Meeting and formally refreshed as part of the annual LSIP progress report. Activities may be amended, added or closed as delivery progresses and as new intelligence about employer needs or system capacity emerges.

Where a numerical baseline already exists from published data (Census 2021, ONS, Skills for Care, or sector evidence gathered for this LSIP), that figure is used as the Year 1 starting point. Where no such data currently exists, a baseline will be established through the relevant Year 1 survey or data collection exercise identified against each measure, with progress tracked against that baseline in subsequent years.



Priority 1: Strengthening Technical Skills Pipelines Across Priority Sectors

Activity	Lead Organisation(s)	Supporting Partners	Timescale	Expected Outcomes	Monitoring and Measurement
Grow technical education for 16–19-year-olds through study programmes aligned to priority sector needs, working with colleges to expand T Level and vocational programme uptake in engineering, construction, digital, clean energy and health.	FE Colleges/ITPs	Staffordshire Chambers	Ongoing	Increased technical education courses/provision.	Increase in learner starts by sector and level.
Support additional capital investment in FE and HE infrastructure — while supporting eligible local FE colleges pursuing Technical Excellence College designation in future funding Waves.	FE Colleges/Universities/Local Authorities	Local Political Leaders	Ongoing	Expanded FE and HE estate capacity in priority sectors. Increased availability of technical education through the FE and HE. Stronger employer co-design of technical provision across the provider network.	Increase in Capital investment linked to LSIP priorities. Increased enrolment in Level 3–5 technical education in priority sectors. Growth in Level 4/5 HTQ and higher apprenticeship starts.
Establish a Technical Pathways Working Group — map provision gaps and co-design new provision.	FE Colleges/Universities/ITPs/Employers	LSIP Board	Year 1 gap map; new provision from Year 2	Provision gaps identified and addressed across priority sectors. New or expanded technical pathways operational in at least three sectors by end of Year 2. Stronger alignment between employer demand and local provision.	Increase in of new programmes launched by sector and level and Learner starts on new provision tracked annually. Decreased incidence of skills gaps in sectors where new provision is introduced. Increased delivery of provision at Level 4/5 aligned to employer demand.

Continued >

Activity	Lead Organisation(s)	Supporting Partners	Timescale	Expected Outcomes	Monitoring and Measurement
Grow apprenticeships in identified shortage occupations at every level from 2 to 8, removing barriers to take-up in partnership with employers, colleges and the NHS.	FE Colleges/ Universities/ ITPs/ Employers	Staffordshire Chambers/ Apprenticeship Ambassador Network	Year 1–3 ongoing	Year-on-year growth in apprenticeship starts in shortage occupations across all priority sectors. Increased employer confidence in and uptake of apprenticeship routes.	Growth in Level 3+ apprenticeship starts in shortage occupations. Increased uptake of higher and degree apprenticeships (Level 4–8). Employer survey on barriers and satisfaction.
Work with schools and colleges across Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire to deepen understanding of local labour market needs — including through Teacher Encounters.	Staffordshire Chambers/ Careers Hub	Schools/ Employers/ Local Authorities	Ongoing	More young people with sustained employer contact and improved understanding of local technical careers. School staff with stronger labour market knowledge informing careers guidance.	Number of schools with active employer partnerships. Increased Teacher Encounters delivered annually. Increase in rate of participation in work-based learning and technical routes among young people. Increased progression into Level 2 and Level 3 technical pathways.

Priority 2: Accelerating Digital Skills, Adoption and Workforce Readiness

Activity	Lead Organisation(s)	Supporting Partners	Timescale	Expected Outcomes	Monitoring and Measurement
Establish a coherent Local Digital Skills Offer that maps, rationalises and makes accessible all digital provision across providers.	FE Colleges/ Universities/ Staffordshire Chambers/ Skills Hub	ITPs/Employers	Year 1 – directory published by end of Year 1	Businesses and individuals able to navigate the full local digital training offer. Reduced duplication across providers. Increased take-up of digital provision across all levels.	Directory published and usage data tracked from Year 1. Employer survey: proportion able to identify relevant local digital provision. Increased participation in Level 2–5 digital provision.
Expand short, modular digital upskilling aligned to the Growth and Skills Levy and Lifelong Learning Entitlement, prioritising AI literacy, cyber security and data skills.	FE Colleges/ Universities/ ITPs	Employers	Year 1–3 ongoing	Increased availability of short, targeted digital training aligned to employer demand. Growth in workforce capability in AI literacy, cyber security and data skills.	Number of short course completions by area, level and sector annually. Increased attainment of Level 3–5 digital qualifications. Growth in short-cycle Level 3+ digital certifications. Employer satisfaction with course relevance.
Launch a structured SME Digital Adoption Programme to close the capability gap between large employers and the SME-dominated local economy.	Growth Hub/ Skills Hub	FE Colleges/ Universities/ ITPs/Skills Hub	Year 1–3 ongoing	Reduced digital capability gap between large employers and SMEs. Increased employer investment in digital skills development.	Number of SMEs supported annually. Digital adoption survey: baseline Year 1, annual thereafter. Proportion of participating SMEs reporting improved digital capability. Increased workforce attainment at Level 3–5 digital skills.

Priority 3: Improving Entry Pathways, Raising Core Skills and Creating an Inclusive Workforce

Activity	Lead Organisation(s)	Supporting Partners	Timescale	Expected Outcomes	Monitoring and Measurement
Support the actions and delivery partners of the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Get Britain Working Plan and the Connect to Work Programme as the key delivery arm; to support its ambitions to reduce economic inactivity and ensure growth benefits reach residents furthest from the labour market.	Local Authorities/ JET Team/ Staffordshire Jobs and Careers	NHS/VCSE/ Job Centre Plus/Skills Hub	Year 1 ongoing	Alignment of work, health and skills systems. Increased employment rate toward Government 80% target. Growth in residents furthest from the labour market accessing and sustaining employment.	Employment rate and economic inactivity rate tracked quarterly (DWP/ONS NOMIS). Participant outcomes and progression into Level 2 qualifications or employment. Increased progression from non-accredited learning into Level 1 and Level 2 qualifications.
Commission a cross-sector Destinations Tracking System – to track where 16+ learners and Adult Skills Fund (ASF) participants progress after their programme, by sector and occupation.	FE Colleges/ Universities/ Independent Providers	DfE/Employers	Year 1–3 ongoing	Systematic evidence on learner destinations by sector and occupation. Provision improvement informed by real destination data rather than assumption.	System pilot commissioned Year 1; operational Year 2; first data published Year 3. Proportion of 16+ FE leavers and ASF completers tracked to a known destination. Progression rates into Level 2+ employment or further learning in priority sectors.
Develop a Foundational Pathways Framework	FE Colleges/ Universities/ Independent Providers/ Chamber	DfE/Employers	Year 1–3 ongoing	Foundational Pathways Framework published and accessible to advisors, employers and individuals by end of Year 1. Full range of entry-level routes across priority sectors mapped and visible in one place, including pre-employment programmes, supported internships, work experience and traineeship-equivalent provision. Clearer progression steps reducing the number of residents falling through gaps between employment support, community services and formal education. Increased take-up of entry-level provision in priority sectors by residents furthest from the labour market.	Framework published by end of Year 1. Number of advisors, employers and individuals accessing the framework tracked annually from Year 2. Proportion of 16+ FE leavers and ASF completers tracked to a known destination – baseline Year 1, with improvement targeted by Year 3. Increased progression from Entry Level and Level 1 into Level 2 qualifications in priority sectors. Number of supported internship placements established annually, tracked against a Year 1 baseline. Employer survey: proportion of employers reporting improved understanding of entry-level routes and candidate readiness, tracked annually from Year 2.

Activity	Lead Organisation(s)	Supporting Partners	Timescale	Expected Outcomes	Monitoring and Measurement
Review and strengthen Adult Skills Fund (ASF) offer at 19+, with a focus on L2 care, logistics, construction trades and digital entry-level programmes	FE Colleges/ Staffordshire Chambers/ Skills Hub/Local Authorities	Employers/ Skills Hub	Year 1 review; improvements from Year 2	ASF provision better aligned to shortage occupations. Improved progression-to-employment rates for adults completing funded programmes.	ASF starts by occupation area tracked annually. Progression-to-employment rate by sector from Year 2. Decrease in share of residents with no qualifications or Level 1. Increased progression from Level 1 into Level 2 qualifications in priority sectors.
Raise the quality and consistency of careers guidance so every young person understands the full range of local technical and professional opportunities.	Careers Hub / Schools	FE Colleges/ Employers/ JET Team/ Staffordshire Jobs and Careers Team	Year 1–3	Every young person with access to high-quality, accurate information about local technical and professional opportunities. Increased progression into technical routes and apprenticeships.	Gatsby Benchmark scores across schools (annual CEC Compass data). Increase in rate of apprenticeship participation among young people. Increased progression into Level 2 and Level 3 pathways (apprenticeships and technical routes). Clear progression routes from Entry/Level 2 to Level 3–8.
Champion employer openness to non-traditional candidates through supporting the adoption of local support scheme.	Staffordshire Chambers/ Local Authorities/ Growth Hub	Employers/VCSE	Year 1 onwards	Growing network of employers committed to inclusive recruitment. More residents from underrepresented groups accessing employment in priority sectors.	Number of employers sign up annually. Number of individuals from target groups supported into employment. Employer-reported investment in inclusive recruitment practices.

Priority 4: Expanding Leadership, Management and Workforce Capability Across All Sectors

Activity	Lead Organisation(s)	Supporting Partners	Timescale	Expected Outcomes	Monitoring and Measurement
Create a flexible, modular Leadership and Management programme accessible to SMEs in sectors where management qualification rates are historically lowest.	FE Colleges/ Universities/ ITPs	Employers/ Sector bodies	Year 1 design; Year 2 launch	Increased access to affordable, flexible management development for SMEs across priority sectors. Improved management capability and staff retention.	Number of SME managers enrolled by sector and business size. Employer survey: proportion reporting improved management capability. Increased workforce attainment at Level 3+ leadership and management. Upskilling of employees into higher management levels (Level 4+).
Expand management development pathways in the care sector, addressing the chronic gap between supervisory need and affordable provision.	Staffordshire Chambers/ Skills Hub/ Growth Hub	Skills for Care/ FE Colleges/ Universities/ ICB/ITPs	Year 1 ongoing	Measurable reduction in management vacancy ratio in health and social care. Improved governance and quality of care provision.	Management vacancy rates tracked annually through Skills for Care report. Progression rates from supervisory into management roles. Growth in Level 4/5 management apprenticeship starts in the care sector.
Embed project and programme management skills into Level 4+ technical qualifications across construction, clean energy and digital.	FE Colleges/ Universities	Sector Bodies/ Employers	Year 2	Project management skills embedded across technical qualifications in construction, clean energy and digital. Improved employer confidence in technical graduate readiness.	Number of qualifications updated to include project management components. Learner starts in PM-inclusive provision. Employer satisfaction with graduate readiness. Increased enrolment in Level 4+ technical education with embedded project management.
Develop an Entrepreneurship and Business Leadership pathway.	Staffordshire Chambers/ Growth Hub/ Local Authorities/ Universities	FE Colleges	Year 1	Growing entrepreneurial pipeline among young people and adults. Increased business creation and growth supported through skills provision.	Number of new businesses formed or supported through enterprise activity tracked annually from Year 2. Number of individuals accessing entrepreneurship and business leadership development. Employer-reported improvement in commercial and leadership skills. Year-on-year growth targeted by 2029.

Priority 5: Stimulating Employer Demand for Skills — The Other Half of the Equation

Activity	Lead Organisation(s)	Supporting Partners	Timescale	Expected Outcomes	Monitoring and Measurement
Develop and deliver a sector-specific employer demand campaign making the business case for skills investment at every level from L2 to L8.	Staffordshire Chambers/ Skills Hub	Local Authorities/ ITPs	Year 1 — first boards by Q2 2026	Increased employer awareness of the business case for skills investment. Growth in the proportion of businesses actively investing in training across all levels.	Annual employer survey: proportion reporting increased investment in staff training — Year 1 baseline, improvement targeted by Year 3. Number of businesses newly engaging with formal training each year. Increase in share of establishments providing training in the last six months.
Develop a free Workforce Planning Toolkit, backed up with a Training Needs Analysis, giving every SME a clear route from latent interest to training starts.	Staffordshire Chambers/ Skills Hub	FE Colleges / Employers	Year 1 — published by end of Year 1	Every SME with a clear route from latent interest to training starts. Reduced perceived barriers to apprenticeship take-up.	Toolkit published by end of Year 1. Uptake tracked through Skills Hub and Annual Employer Survey. Number of SMEs converting from TNA engagement to confirmed training starts. Decrease in incidence of skills gaps across priority occupations.
Strengthen local employer engagement with graduate talent to improve retention and career progression opportunities.	Staffordshire Chambers/ Universities		Year 1	Improved graduate retention in priority sectors. Stronger employer-university relationships supporting local talent pipelines.	Graduate retention rate tracked annually — baseline established Year 1 through HEI destinations data. Increase in graduates entering employment in local priority sectors. Growth in Level 6+ employment within Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire.
Maximise uptake of the Government's apprenticeship incentive package among non-levy SMEs.	Staffordshire Chambers/ Skills Hub			Growth in apprenticeship starts among non-levy SMEs in shortage occupations. Increased employer confidence in apprenticeship routes.	Annual apprenticeship starts by SME size and sector against Year 1 baseline. Increase in apprenticeships across priority sectors. Growth in Level 3+ apprenticeship starts among SMEs. Increased uptake of higher apprenticeships (Level 4+) by smaller employers.

Priority 6: Strengthening Our Skills System — Building on Strong Foundations

Activity	Lead Organisation(s)	Supporting Partners	Timescale	Expected Outcomes	Monitoring and Measurement
Establish a permanent sector employer engagement mechanism to hold provision accountable to real-time intelligence.	Staffordshire Chambers/ LSIP Data Group	Local Authorities/ITPs	Year 1 — first boards by Q2 2026	Employer-led governance for LSIP delivery across all eight priority sectors. Provision held accountable to real-time intelligence.	Quarterly meetings with published outputs. Employer participation rates and satisfaction. Decreased incidence of skills gaps across priority sectors over time.
Develop the Skills Hub into the single point of access for all training and funding navigation across the area.	Skills Hub/ Growth Hub	FE Colleges/ Universities/ ITPs/Local Authorities	Year 1	Single, accessible point of contact for all training and funding navigation across the area. Increased SME engagement with formal skills provision.	Skills Hub usage data tracked year-on-year. Employer satisfaction survey — baseline Year 1. Number of referrals and businesses supported. Number of businesses converting from enquiry to training start.
Create a Skills Intelligence Group to generate shared, real-time labour market insight across employers, providers and local authorities.	Staffordshire Chambers/ Local Authorities/ FE Colleges/ Universities	ITPs/Job Centre/ Employers	Year 1; Dashboard live by end of Year 2	Near real-time intelligence on skills demand and supply informing provision decisions. System responding to emerging needs rather than lagging behind them.	Skills Intelligence Group operational by end of Year 1. Local Skills Dashboard live and publicly accessible by end of Year 2. Usage data and frequency of provision adjustments made in response to intelligence.

Abbreviations: CEC = Careers and Enterprise Company; ICB = Integrated Care Board; VCSE = Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise; APM = Association for Project Management; HTQ = Higher Technical Qualification; AMRICC = Advanced Manufacturing Research and Innovation Centre for Ceramics and Composites; CMC = Ceramic Matrix Composite; ASF = Adult Skills Fund; LLE = Lifelong Learning Entitlement; JET = Jobs and Employment Team; TEC = Technical Excellence College, ITP = Independent Training Provider

ANNEX C: BACKGROUND AND METHOD

This annex explains the approach used to develop the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire LSIP and how that approach aligns with the process set out in national LSIP guidance. It covers the evidence base, employer and stakeholder engagement, alignment with national policy and guidance, Net Zero and environmental goals, equality of opportunity, and the governance structure for LSIP development and delivery.

C1. The Evidence Base

The LSIP has been developed on an unusually broad and deep evidence base, designed to go substantially beyond the minimum requirements of the guidance and to give the priorities and actions in the plan the strongest possible empirical foundation. In total, quantitative and qualitative evidence was gathered from over 365 individual employer engagements, comprising 199 online survey responses, 81 Skills Breakfast event attendees and 185 Training Needs Analyses, supplemented by sector-specific focus groups, Rebus Training employer engagement events, provider network workshops and governance board consultation. Evidence was gathered and analysed across six stages.

Quantitative Labour Market Intelligence

The LSIP draws on quantitative analysis across multiple data sources. Job posting analytics (provided by Lightcast) were used to track vacancy volumes, skill requirements, salary trends and occupational demand across all priority sectors, providing near real-time intelligence about where employer demand is concentrated and where it is growing. The Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES) provided data on employment concentration and trends by sector and sub-sector. Census 2021 resident occupation data was used to understand the composition of the local workforce. Annual Population Survey data was used for qualification level analysis and economic inactivity statistics. ONS economic output data underpinned the GVA analysis in the Strategic Context section.

Skills England and National Sector Reports

The 2025 Skills England sector reports for Advanced Manufacturing, Construction, Digital and Technologies, Health and Social Care, and Clean Energy were used systematically in each of the eight sector evidence reviews. These reports provided nationally validated intelligence about the workforce development trends, occupational demand shifts and skills gaps affecting each sector, which was then tested against local qualitative evidence to identify where national patterns were replicated, amplified or diverged locally. The Migration Advisory Committee's longlist of Level 3–5 occupations for potential inclusion in the Temporary Skilled Worker Visa route was also used to cross-check occupation prioritisation, as it represents an independent, data-driven assessment of national shortages.

Employer Skills Survey

The DfE Employer Skills Survey 2024 was used to supplement sector evidence, providing data on skills gaps and skills shortages in the existing workforce by sector, the types of skills most commonly cited as gaps, and employer training behaviour. This national survey data was used as a cross-check against local employer engagement findings and was incorporated directly into the sector evidence tables in Annex A.

Local Economic Strategies and Plans

The LSIP was developed in close alignment with local economic strategies and plans, including: the Stoke-on-Trent Economic Strategy; the Staffordshire Economic Strategy 2023–2030; the Staffordshire Employment and Skills Strategy 2023–2030; the Stoke-on-Trent Young People’s Learning and Skills Strategy; the Get Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Working Plan; the Staffordshire County Council Strategic Direction 2026–2028; the Stoke-on-Trent Future 100 Prospectus; the emerging Innovation Framework for Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire; and the Skills for Growth FE capital investment proposal. Where priorities and evidence in these strategies aligned with LSIP sector findings, this alignment is explicitly noted in the main body of the plan.

Sector Evidence Reviews and Employer Engagement

Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce commissioned and led detailed sector evidence reviews for eight priority sectors: Advanced Manufacturing (including Engineering and Advanced Materials), Construction, Digital and Technology, Health and Social Care, Logistics and Distribution, Clean Energy, Creative Industries and Crea-Tech, and Agriculture and Agri-Tech. Each review combined the quantitative and national evidence sources described above with qualitative engagement through employer focus groups, employer surveys distributed across sector networks, and structured Training Needs Analyses (TNAs) carried out directly with businesses. The TNA process involved detailed conversations with employers about their current and anticipated skills needs, their training behaviour, and their experience of the local skills system. Provisional findings from each sector review were shared with employer groups in draft form and refined in response to feedback before being incorporated into the plan.



C2. Alignment with LSIP Guidance

Breadth and Depth of Employer Engagement

Employer engagement for this LSIP extended well beyond the membership of Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce as the Employer Representative Body. Engagement was designed to be sector-representative, geographically diverse and inclusive of businesses of all sizes. In total, the evidence base for this plan draws on engagement with over 365 individual employers across four primary mechanisms.

The LSIP Employer Survey (March 2025) received 199 responses from employers across the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire area, representing 19 sector categories. The largest groups were Creative, Media, Marketing and Advertising (22 responses), Manufacturing and Engineering (20), Professional, Scientific and Technical Services (20), Health and Social Care (19), Digital and Technology (19) and Construction (18). Respondents spanned all local authority areas, with 60 based in Stoke-on-Trent, 38 in Staffordshire Moorlands, and 28 in Newcastle-under-Lyme. Of the 199 respondents, 73% reported at least partial skills gaps or recruitment challenges, and only 38 described their skills needs as fully met. 62% said they were aware of the LSIP prior to completing the survey. Independent training providers showed the highest engagement trend of any provider type, 80 businesses reported increased engagement with ITPs, while engagement with FE colleges had stayed the same or decreased for most respondents. The most common services requested from training providers were bespoke business skills development courses (cited by 142 respondents), support with work placements (64), and support with apprenticeship recruitment (61). The top future skills priorities identified by employers were: IT and digital skills (119 responses), sector-specific technical skills (81), employment and employability skills (76), green and low-carbon technologies (64) and automation and robotics (35).

A Skills Breakfast event (separate to the online survey) gathered responses from 81 employers. Participants rated the difficulty of filling vacancies on a scale of 1–5, with an average score of 3.7, indicating that hiring is meaningfully harder than it was three years ago. More than half of respondents (57%) rated difficulty at 4 or 5. Confidence in finding relevant training was rated

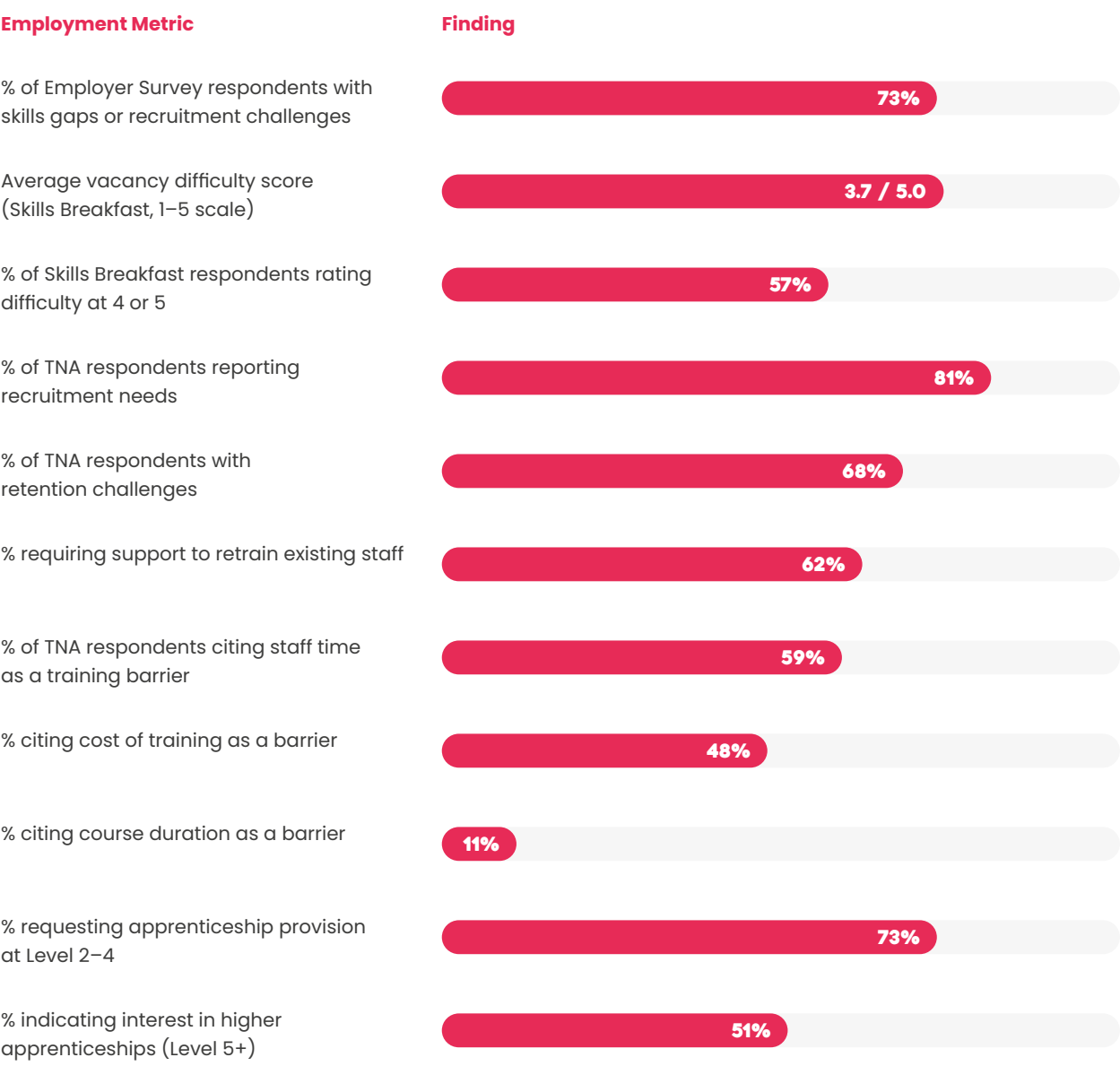
at an average of 3.1, with 31% rating themselves at 4 or 5 on the 'not confident' scale. The hardest roles to fill identified at Skills Breakfast events included: qualified electricians and electrical engineers, software developers and digital analysts, project managers, ceramic scientists and advanced materials engineers, teachers and specialist tutors, and social care workers. Key skills needs identified by existing staff included communication and employability skills, AI and digital literacy, leadership, and specialist technical proficiency.

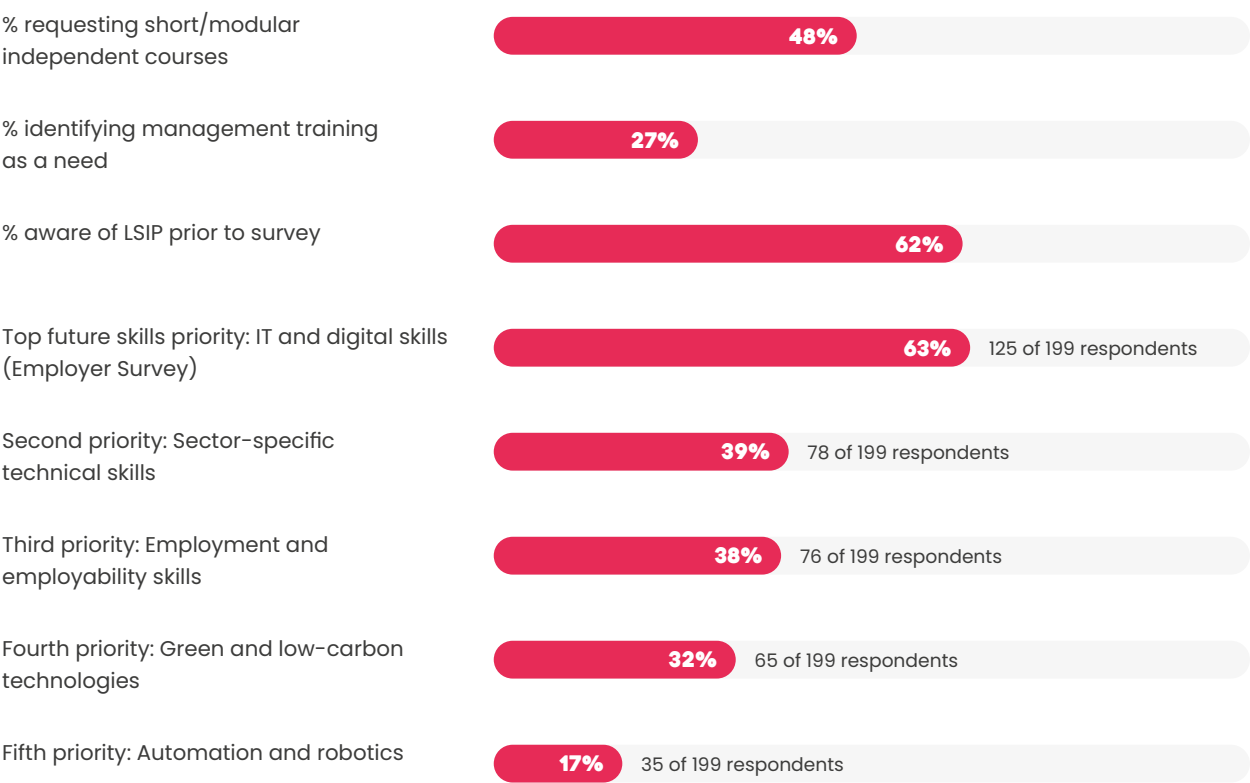
185 Training Needs Analyses (TNAs) were completed with businesses across the area, representing by far the largest and most detailed data set in the LSIP evidence base. The TNA sample was dominated by manufacturing and engineering (34 businesses), construction including electrical and plumbing (28), and health and social care (14). Over half (51%) were micro-businesses with fewer than 3 employees, reflecting the dominance of very small businesses in the local economy. The most commonly cited skills barrier was staff time (59% of respondents), followed by cost of training (48%) and course duration (11%). 81% of TNA respondents reported recruitment needs, 68% reported retention challenges, and 62% required support with retraining existing staff. Demand for apprenticeships at Level 2–4 was identified by 73% of respondents, with 51% also indicating interest in higher apprenticeships at Level 5 and above. Short independent courses were identified as a need by 48%, a direct signal of the demand for modular, flexible upskilling provision. Management training was identified by 27% of respondents.



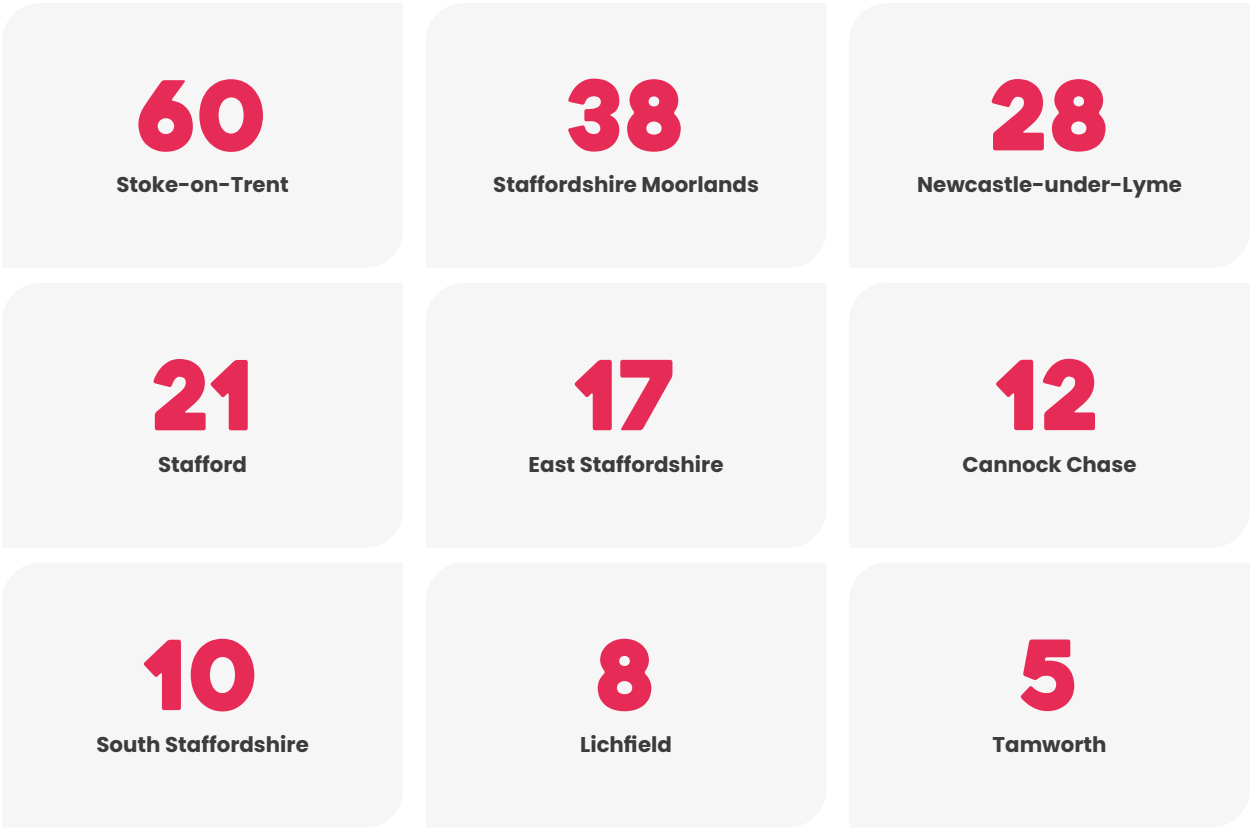
Engagement Summary Data

The tables and charts below summarise the quantitative evidence from employer engagement, providing a statistical foundation for the LSIP’s priorities and sector judgements.





Employer Survey Respondents by Local Authority Area



TNA Respondents by Sector



EMPLOYER SURVEY 2025: KEY SKILLS PRIORITIES

% of 199 surveyed employers identifying each as a priority

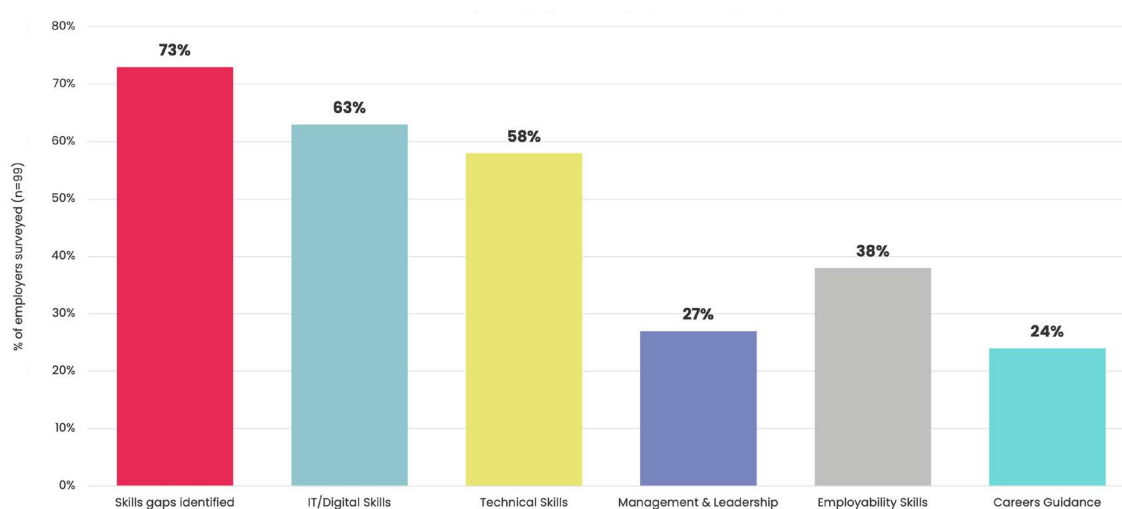


Figure C1: Employer Survey 2025 — key future skills priorities (% of 199 respondents)

TRAINING NEEDS ANALYSIS: BUSINESSES BY SECTOR

185 TNAs completed; top 6 LSIP priority sectors shown individually

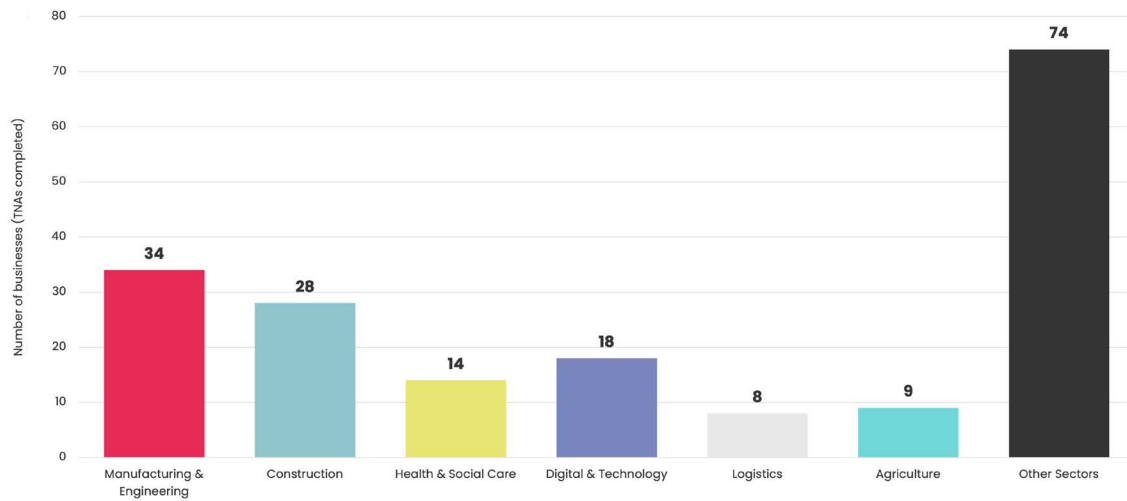


Figure C2: Training Needs Analysis – businesses engaged by sector (185 TNAs)

BARRIERS TO TRAINING ENGAGEMENT

Training Needs Analysis, 185 businesses

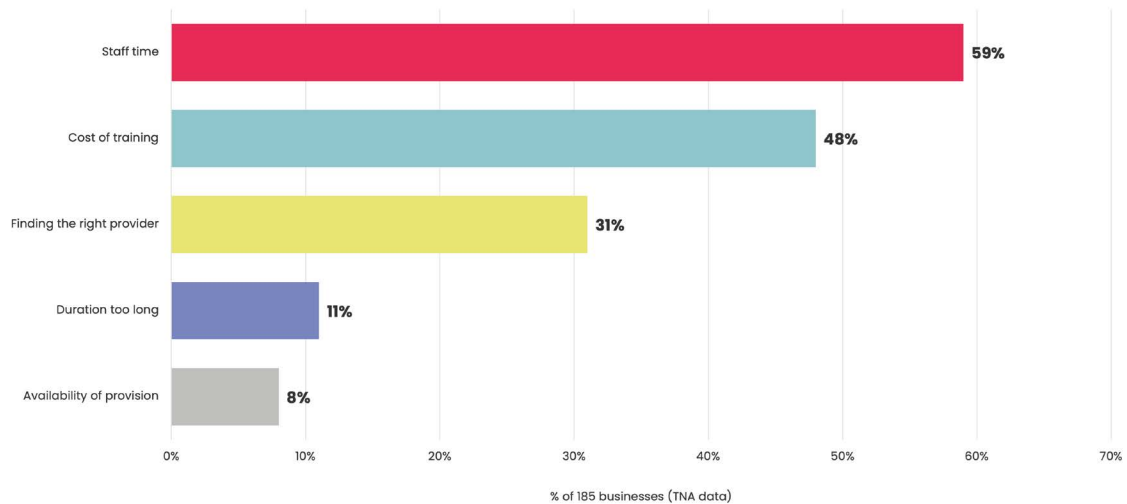


Figure C3: Barriers to training engagement – TNA data (185 businesses)



In addition, sector-specific employer focus groups and TNA workshops were carried out with logistics and distribution businesses (including Alports Group, Palletways and AJB Transport), construction and electrical contractors (including through the Staffordshire Providers Network and Rebus Training employer engagement events attended by electrical contractors across the area), and professional and business services firms. The Rebus Training Employer Apprenticeship and Skills Survey, completed by electrical contractors including H&B Electrical, Smart Electrical, BSW Electrical Ltd and Bourne Electrical Contractors, provided sector-specific intelligence about apprenticeship demand, the challenge of knowledge transfer as experienced

electricians retire, and the EV charging and NIC EIC upskilling requirements of the sector. Engagement through sector bodies including CITB, Skills for Care, AMRICC and the Staffordshire Providers Network supplemented these primary engagement activities. Consultation through the LSIP Governance Board, which includes representatives from major employers including Capula, Sterling Transport Consultancy and University Hospital North Midlands, provided a further mechanism for employer input. Particular efforts were made to engage smaller businesses, which make up 87% of local employers, and over 50 businesses with fewer than 10 employees contributed evidence directly through the TNA process.

Provider Involvement

All categories of education and training providers were engaged in the development of this LSIP, in line with the guidance requirement to involve those with statutory duties under the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022 and those without. Further education colleges, Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group, South Staffordshire College, Stoke-on-Trent College, Stoke-on-Trent Sixth Form College, and Burton and South Derbyshire College, were involved in sector evidence reviews, governance board participation and in the development of priority actions. Higher education institutions, University of Staffordshire and Keele University, contributed to sector evidence and are lead partners on the Advanced Materials talent pipeline development. Their involvement extended the plan's coverage of higher-level technical skills at Levels 6–8, including degree apprenticeships, research-linked skills development and industry knowledge exchange activities relevant to the CMC manufacturing and digital economy clusters. Independent training providers were represented through the Staffordshire Providers Network, whose member organisations deliver a significant proportion of employer-facing technical training, particularly in logistics, construction

trades and digital, and whose intelligence about employer demand in these sectors directly informed the sector evidence reviews. The Institute of Technology was represented on the Governance Board. Schools and the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Careers Hub were engaged in relation to Priority 3 (Entry Pathways and Inclusion). Local authority adult community learning providers were consulted on provision for adults with low or no qualifications. Providers were involved not just as consultees but as active co-designers of the actions in Section 2.

The scope of this LSIP covers technical skills from entry level up to and including Level 8, in line with the statutory guidance. The main body of the plan focuses most heavily on Levels 2–5, where the most acute and evidenced employer shortfalls exist. HE providers have been engaged to ensure Levels 6–8 are considered, and the actions on Level 4/5 technical pathways, degree apprenticeships and the Advanced Materials talent pipeline are designed to create coherent progression routes from Level 3 through to Level 7. The 10% Level 4/5 participation target from the Post-16 White Paper is explicitly referenced in this plan's Priority 1 actions.





Local Stakeholder Involvement

Local authorities, Stoke-on-Trent City Council and Staffordshire County Council, were involved throughout the development process and are represented on the LSIP Governance Board. As the relevant local authorities in this non-devolved area, their economic strategies and sector priorities provided the strategic framework for LSIP development, in line with the guidance for non-devolved areas. The NHS was engaged through University Hospital North Midlands and through the health and social care sector evidence review. The voluntary and community sector contributed through the equality and inclusion workstream. The Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Careers Hub was engaged in the CIAG and employer-in-school dimensions of Priority 3.

DWP and Job Centre Plus were engaged during LSIP development, not only in relation to delivery of Priority 3 but as an evidence source on the characteristics and barriers of economically inactive residents, the scale of health-related worklessness, and the gap between employer vacancy demand

and the current active labour supply. This intelligence directly shaped the inclusion framing of Priority 1 (entry-level occupations suitable for Get Britain Working target groups) and the design of Priority 3's bridging and access provision actions. Prior to the full establishment of the new Jobs and Careers Service, continued engagement with Jobcentre Plus will remain a key priority for ensuring the LSIP's skills actions connect effectively with the local Get Britain Working Plan.

Trade unions were identified as an important stakeholder group in line with the guidance. Initial engagement was conducted through the Staffordshire Chambers' broader business networks, and union representatives from relevant sector bodies were included in focus group activity. The model developed for ongoing sector employee engagement Boards will include arrangements for trade union input into the ongoing review cycle, ensuring worker perspectives on skills investment and workforce development are represented alongside those of employers.

C3. Environmental and Net Zero Goals

The Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire LSIP has been developed with a strong focus on the skills required to meet Net Zero targets, support climate change adaptation and deliver wider environmental ambitions. This reflects both national statutory expectations and the region's emerging green economy strengths, ensuring that skills provision is aligned with long-term sustainability and economic resilience.



Embedding National Net Zero Priorities

National LSIP guidance emphasises the importance of aligning local skills planning with the UK's Net Zero commitments and broader environmental goals, recognising the essential role of technical skills in delivering decarbonisation across infrastructure, energy systems and the wider economy. Evidence from the Climate Change Committee highlights widespread skills gaps in areas such as low-carbon heat, retrofitting, renewable energy generation and green transport, all of which inform demand patterns in the local labour market. The Government's Clean Energy Jobs Plan sets an ambition to double the clean energy workforce by 2030, identifying 31 priority occupations that directly overlap with the area's existing technical workforce in construction, engineering and manufacturing. These national priorities have been incorporated throughout the LSIP's evidence base, employer engagement activity and priority-setting process.

Local Green Economy Strengths and Opportunities

Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire are home to significant low-carbon and environmental innovation assets which shape future workforce requirements and sector growth trajectories. These include: the Keele University Smart Energy Network Demonstrator (SEND) and the Stoke District Heat Network, both of which create ongoing demand for skills in energy systems, engineering and digital decarbonisation technologies; the Staffordshire Green Skills for Growth project, funded by Innovate UK, which is modelling the region's Net Zero skills needs through to 2050 and developing a skills investment plan with local education providers; and a well-established Low Carbon Environmental Goods and Services (LCEGS) sector, supported by long-standing regional networks and business support programmes, which is generating demand for new green training pathways in areas such as carbon literacy, clean energy technologies and sustainable business practices. These assets help ensure local provision aligns with emerging green labour market needs and supports the future pipeline of skilled workers.

Net Zero Skills Needs Identified Through Employer Engagement

Consultation with local employers, sector bodies and training providers confirmed growing demand for skills across a range of Net Zero-related roles. Consistent with national evidence, employers highlighted needs in: low-carbon construction and retrofit; environmental monitoring and resource management; green manufacturing and sustainable materials; electric vehicle maintenance and supporting technologies; and energy system management, carbon accounting and corporate sustainability practices. This aligns closely with Staffordshire's Employment and Skills Strategy, which emphasises green skills as central to meeting Net Zero by 2050. These needs are directly reflected in the LSIP's sector priorities, particularly in the construction clean energy reskilling pathway and the advanced manufacturing sustainability and net zero workforce development actions in Section 2.

Climate Adaptation and Environmental Resilience Skills

In addition to decarbonisation, the LSIP considers skills needed to support climate adaptation and environmental resilience. Evidence from sector studies and employer dialogue highlights requirements in: sustainable land and resource management; agri-tech innovation, anaerobic digestion and BioChar technologies, particularly relevant to the region's significant agricultural base; infrastructure resilience and flood-risk management; and data and digital capabilities that support environmental forecasting and monitoring. These needs have informed local curriculum planning discussions and sector-specific recommendations, particularly in the agriculture and construction sectors.



C4. Equality of Opportunity

The Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire LSIP has embedded equality, diversity and inclusion throughout its development and priority-setting to ensure that all residents can access high-quality skills provision and opportunities in priority sectors. This approach recognises that widening access and removing structural barriers are essential both to reducing skills shortages and to supporting genuinely inclusive economic growth.



Widening and Diversifying Talent Pools

A more inclusive skills system helps address employer recruitment difficulties by enabling a wider range of people to access training and progress into work. To ensure the LSIP reflects the perspectives and barriers of under-represented groups, engagement activity deliberately reached beyond traditional employer networks and incorporated insights from: community outreach programmes and local voluntary organisations; under-represented groups including women, ethnic minority communities, older workers and those with disabilities; and organisations working with refugees, care-experienced young people, those with long-term health conditions and those furthest from the labour market.

Language is one of the most significant structural barriers to labour market participation for a substantial number of area residents, and the LSIP is explicit that ESOL provision is not a peripheral service but a core component of the skills system. Residents with limited English face compounded disadvantage: they are unable to access most accredited training, are concentrated in insecure,

low-paid employment where progression routes are weak, and are significantly underrepresented in the employer engagement and careers guidance activity that this plan depends on. Increasing ESOL provision, in volume, in geographic reach, and in the diversity of delivery models including community-based and workplace settings, is therefore both an equality objective and an economic imperative. The LSIP will ensure that ESOL provision development sits alongside, and is integrated with, the broader entry pathway and inclusion actions in Priority 3, rather than being treated as a separate stream delivered in isolation from sector employment pathways.

Several priority sectors, most notably construction, advanced manufacturing and digital, have significant workforce diversity gaps. The LSIP explicitly supports employer outreach, role model campaigns and accessible careers guidance as mechanisms for widening the talent pool in these sectors, alongside targeted provision for groups facing particular barriers, including NEET young people, adults with no qualifications, and those returning to work after long-term sickness.

Removing Physical and Digital Barriers to Training

The LSIP's actions under Priority 3 include a specific focus on removing physical and digital access barriers to training. Bridging and access provision is designed to be available in community settings, not just on college campuses, to reduce transport and childcare barriers. Digital skills provision for economically inactive adults includes confidence-building and foundational literacy components, recognising that digital exclusion can compound employment exclusion. The LSIP also supports the development of flexible, online and blended delivery models that can reach workers who cannot attend full-time provision.

Equality in Priority Sector Actions

Equality considerations are embedded throughout the LSIP's priority sector actions. The Care Leaver Guaranteed Interview Scheme and mentoring and coaching pilot under Priority 3 specifically address the transition needs of young people who are disproportionately represented in NEET statistics. The Get Britain Working alignment under Priority 3 specifically addresses the needs of those with long-term health conditions, the largest driver of economic inactivity locally. The Future Ready Pledge and employer engagement strand under Priority 3 provides a mechanism for recognising and incentivising employers who take active steps to recruit from underrepresented groups.



Ongoing Monitoring

Equality considerations will remain central to LSIP delivery throughout the plan period. The LSIP Governance Board and project team will monitor progress through: regular review of participation data by demographic group; feedback from learners and community partners; assessment of how well new provision reaches under-represented groups; and continuous refinement of outreach, marketing and delivery models. This ensures that the LSIP remains responsive to emerging needs and continues to contribute to a fairer and more inclusive local economy.

C5. Governance Structure

It is important to be clear about what this LSIP is and is not. The LSIP's role is to lead, influence, convene and hold to account. It sets the direction, builds the evidence base, maintains the employer voice at the centre of the system, and creates the governance and accountability structures through which providers, local authorities, employers and government can act together more effectively than any of them could act alone.

This means that progress against the plan's priorities depends on the commitment and capability of a wide range of partners, FE colleges, universities, the Growth Hub, local authorities, DWP, employers and training providers. The LSIP cannot compel any of them to act; it can only make the case, build the relationships and create the conditions in which acting together is easier and more rewarding than acting alone.

The convening and influencing role is precisely where the LSIP adds its greatest value, and the track record of the first plan demonstrates that when that role is played well, the system responds.

The Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire LSIP operates within a clear and robust governance framework.

LSIP Governance Board

The Governance Board brings together key stakeholders from across the local skills system, ensuring broad representation and strong employer voice. It provides strategic direction, scrutiny and sector insight to support effective LSIP delivery. Board membership includes:

Local Authorities and Higher Education

Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Staffordshire County Council
University of Staffordshire
Keele University

Further Education and Training Providers

Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group
South Staffordshire College
Institute of Technology
Staffordshire Providers Network
(independent training providers)

Employers and Sector Representatives

Capula
CITB
Sterling Transport Consultancy
University Hospital North Midlands

Sector and Workforce Bodies

Skills for Care
AMRICC (Advanced Manufacturing Research and Innovation Centre for Ceramics and Composites)

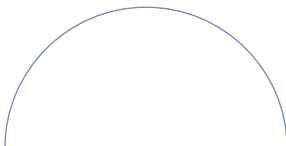
Roles and Responsibilities of the Governance Board

The Board's core responsibilities include: providing oversight, guidance and challenge to ensure high-quality delivery; reviewing and commenting on implementation plans, delivery progress and emerging findings; ensuring all activities remain aligned with LSIP statutory guidance and local priorities; representing the interests of their respective sectors and organisations, and acting as a conduit to feed intelligence back to those groups; supporting the LSIP Project Team to identify, manage and mitigate key delivery risks; and shaping and refining actionable recommendations for stakeholders, ensuring they are measurable and demonstrate clear impact.

Annual Review

The governance structure and Board membership will be reviewed annually to ensure it remains effective, representative and aligned with the evolving needs of the plan and the local skills landscape. A formal mid-term review of the LSIP will be conducted in 2027, with findings published and used to inform any necessary revisions to the action programme for Year 3. A full plan refresh will be undertaken in 2029, informed by all three years of progress data, updated labour market intelligence and renewed employer engagement.

Each review cycle is an opportunity not only to assess progress but to extend the plan's horizon — ensuring that as intelligence deepens and the strategic landscape develops, the LSIP looks progressively further into the future rather than simply accounting for the period already under way.



ANNEX D: SUMMARY OF KEY LOCAL AND NATIONAL STRATEGIES

This section provides brief summaries of the principal strategies that have informed the development of this LSIP. Fuller descriptions of how each strategy connects to LSIP priorities are provided in the Strategic and Economic Context section of the main body of the plan.

Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire are non-devolved areas with no Mayoral Strategic Authority and no Local Growth Plans currently in place. This LSIP has been developed in active alignment with the full suite of local strategies from both councils, who are represented on the Governance Board.

D1. National Strategies

Framework	Key Relevance to this LSIP
Industrial Strategy (2024)	Identifies advanced manufacturing, digital, clean energy, creative industries and defence as frontier sectors. All are present locally. Sector Plans for Advanced Manufacturing, Digital and Clean Energy set specific workforce development priorities that directly shape LSIP actions.
Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper (2025)	Sets out the Government's long-term vision for the post-16 skills landscape. Includes the Prime Minister's target for two-thirds of young people to be in higher-level learning by age 25, and a sub-target of at least 10% in Level 4/5 study (including apprenticeships) by 2040. Also introduces the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) from January 2027, which will fund modular provision at Levels 4–6. Both targets directly shape this LSIP's Priority 1 (Level 4/5 technical pathways) and Priority 6 (modular short-course provision and system strengthening aligned to LLE).
Clean Energy Jobs Plan (2024)	Target to double clean energy workforce to 860,000 by 2030. 31 priority occupations identified. Directly informs the LSIP's clean energy reskilling pathway and the green skills content of Priority 1.
Get Britain Working Plan	80% employment rate target. Establishes local Get Britain Working Plans as the delivery mechanism. The LSIP's Priority 3 is designed as the skills delivery arm of this Plan locally, connecting inactivity reduction to sector-specific entry pathways.
Skills England	National body responsible for skills planning aligned with employer demand. LSIPs are a primary intelligence input. Skills England's 2025 sector reports for Advanced Manufacturing, Construction, Digital, Health and Social Care, and Clean Energy have directly shaped this LSIP's evidence base.
Advanced Manufacturing Sector Plan	Identifies STEM shortage, materials science skills gaps, need for flexible apprenticeships and school outreach as the key talent pipeline challenges. Directly informs the LSIP's Advanced Materials pipeline development and Priority 1 actions.

Framework	Key Relevance to this LSIP
National Materials Innovation Strategy	Sets out a 'no wrong path' approach to materials education. Calls for review of apprenticeships and T-level provision for materials-related programmes. Underpins the LSIP's CMC manufacturing talent pipeline development.
Technical Excellence Colleges (TECs) – Wave 2 (DfE, 2025)	Wave 2 TECs are being established in Advanced Manufacturing (4), Digital and Technologies (5), Clean Energy (5) and Defence (5) – all sectors covered by this LSIP. TECs act as hub-and-spoke centres of excellence, sharing curricula, CPD and facilities across provider networks. A Technical Excellence College in Advanced Manufacturing has been secure for Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire. Wave 3 of TECs anticipated from May 2026.
Employer Skills Survey (DfE, 2024)	The most recent national survey of employer skills needs. Findings by sector are cited throughout the LSIP evidence base and directly inform the workforce development skills needs in each sector table.
Youth Employment and Apprenticeship Reform Package (March 2026)	Offering £2,000 SME Apprenticeship Incentive for each new employee aged 16–24; a £3,000 Youth Jobs Grant for businesses hiring 18–24 year olds who have been on Universal Credit for six months; full funding of apprenticeship training costs for under-25s at non-levy SMEs; apprenticeship units (short, flexible levy-funded courses) launching from April 2026 in digital, AI and engineering; and expansion of foundation apprenticeships into hospitality and retail from April 2026.
10 Year Health Plan for England: Fit for the Future (DHSC, 2025)	Sets out the transformation agenda for health and care, including the shift from hospital to community-based provision, the prevention agenda and workforce development priorities. Directly relevant to the skills mix changes identified in the LSIP's Health and Social Care priority, including digital skills, community care competencies and the role of the workforce in reducing worklessness and supporting workforce wellbeing.
Workforce Strategy for Adult Social Care in England (Skills for Care)	The sector's overarching workforce strategy, embraced by both independent employers and local authorities. Identifies key drivers of change including digital and technological skills development and best practice in recruiting and retaining staff. Cross-cuts multiple LSIP priorities including digital skills (Priority 2), leadership and management (Priority 4) and system strengthening (Priority 6).
Care Workforce Pathway for Adult Social Care (DHSC)	The first universal career structure for the adult social care workforce, setting out the knowledge, skills, values and behaviours required at each stage of a care career. Being actively adopted by the sector to support recruitment, retention and skills development. Directly informs the LSIP's approach to career pathway communication and apprenticeship progression in Health and Social Care under Priorities 1 and 4.



D2. Local Strategies

Strategy	Summary and Relevance to LSIP
Stoke-on-Trent Economic Strategy	Aims to accelerate the city's transition towards a modern, innovation-driven economy, building on strengths in advanced manufacturing, digital and the creative sector while tackling persistent challenges in skills, health and economic inactivity. Priorities include raising living standards, supporting business growth, and improving infrastructure and liveability. The LSIP's focus on technical pipeline development, inclusive entry pathways and digital skills directly supports these ambitions.
Staffordshire Economic Strategy 2023–2030	Outlines a long-term plan to build a resilient, dynamic and productive economy across the county. Focuses on business growth, new enterprise, future-facing skills, town centre regeneration and major strategic projects. Highlights clean energy and strategic transport corridors as long-term growth opportunities. Its central aim — that all residents benefit from growth through access to good jobs — is the economic rationale for the LSIP's inclusion priorities.
Staffordshire Rural Economic Strategy	Recognises the scale and diversity of Staffordshire's rural economy, setting out plans to boost productivity, digital connectivity and skills across rural businesses and communities. Supports land-based industries alongside advanced manufacturing, construction, tourism and services. Informs the LSIP's coverage of agriculture and agri-tech, and the Rodbaston campus inclusion in the Skills for Growth investment proposal.
District and Borough Economic Growth Strategies	Each district and borough across Staffordshire has its own Economic Growth Strategy setting out local economic and labour market challenges and opportunities. These strategies provide important geographic granularity and have been consulted during LSIP development to ensure local variation in sectoral strengths, deprivation and labour market conditions is reflected in the plan.
Innovation Framework for Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire (2026)	Draft diagnostic framework identifying four high-value innovation cluster groupings — Materials Innovation, Digital Economy, Life Sciences, and Advanced Manufacturing and Energy Systems. Identifies Level 3–5 'missing middle' skills gaps as a structural constraint across all clusters. The LSIP is the designated skills delivery mechanism for this framework, with the Advanced Materials talent pipeline representing the most specific application.
Skills for Growth — FE Capital Investment Proposal (2026)	Joint proposal from Staffordshire's FE colleges and Staffordshire County Council seeking £103.6 million capital investment across 13 shovel-ready projects to create 4,000 new 16–18 training places and 26,760 m ² of new teaching space. Directly aligned with LSIP priority sectors. The LSIP treats this investment as its most critical structural enabler, without which the technical pipeline priorities in Priority 1 cannot be fully delivered.
Emerging Foundation Strategic Authority (FSA) arrangements	The area's transition toward FSA governance will reshape the institutional landscape for economic development, skills planning and investment over the plan period. The LSIP has been developed with the expectation of this transition and is designed to serve as the employer-led skills intelligence function within the evolving governance structure. Annual LSIP reviews will explicitly assess and respond to FSA development.

Local Skills and Employment Strategies

Strategy	Summary and Relevance to LSIP
Staffordshire Employment and Skills Strategy 2023–2030	Sets long-term ambitions to strengthen digital, green, technical and entrepreneurial skills across the county. Focuses on improving careers guidance, expanding technical pathways, supporting priority sectors, and fostering inclusive access to better-paid employment. Identifies green skills as central to meeting Net Zero by 2050. The LSIP's priorities and actions are designed to be the operational delivery mechanism for this strategy's ambitions.
Stoke-on-Trent Young People's Learning and Skills Strategy	City-wide plan to improve education and skills for 14–25 year olds. Emphasises high-quality learning, stronger employer engagement, tackling inequalities, and developing clear pathways into apprenticeships, technical routes and high-value local careers. The LSIP's Priority 3 actions — CIAG audit, employer-in-school programmes, NEET and care leaver support protocols — are directly aligned with this strategy.
Get Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Working Plan	Joint plan for tackling economic inactivity and health-related worklessness through system-wide partnership. Aims to increase employment and widen access to good jobs for people with long-term health conditions, young people, older workers and those in insecure work. Priority 3 of the LSIP is designed as the skills-system contribution to delivering this plan's objectives, connecting inactivity reduction to sector entry pathways.

Long-Term Local Vision Strategies

Strategy	Summary and Relevance to LSIP
Staffordshire County Council Strategic Direction 2026–2028	Sets five strategic priorities — People, Economy, Connectivity, Communities, and Value for Money — framing a commitment to sustainable growth, strong partnerships and a skilled, productive workforce. Provides the policy foundation for county-level investment and service planning and underpins the County Council's role as a key partner in LSIP governance and delivery, including as co-sponsor of the Skills for Growth capital investment proposal.
Stoke-on-Trent Future 100 Prospectus	Long-term framework for inclusive, sustainable growth in the city, focused on ensuring residents benefit more directly from economic success. Identifies missions around clean energy, regeneration, removing barriers to opportunity, and improving health and wellbeing. Skills and workforce development are embedded throughout. The LSIP's inclusive entry pathways, digital adoption and clean energy reskilling actions directly serve the Prospectus's missions.

D3. Major Strategic Developments

Several major strategic developments in the pipeline will significantly shape the area's economy and skills demand over the plan period. These are not background context, they are live investment projects with direct and specific workforce implications that the LSIP must respond to.

Major Assets – Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire

fifty500 / Midlands Growth Corridor

A vision to transform the 90km A50/A500 route through Staffordshire into a clean energy super corridor and primary UK location for sustainable investment and manufacturing. Spanning four counties and linking the East Midlands to Stoke-on-Trent and the North-West, the corridor is a focal point for decarbonisation investment, clean energy infrastructure and advanced manufacturing growth. The skills implications for clean energy, engineering and logistics are significant and directly shape this LSIP's priorities.

West Midlands Interchange (WMI)

One of the largest and most environmentally ambitious logistics developments in the UK, with consent for up to 8 million sq. ft of Class A logistics warehousing plus a strategic rail freight interchange. The scale of construction and ongoing operational demand for logistics and warehousing skills is transformational for the local workforce pipeline.

Chatterley Park

Prime 106-acre commercial development site close to the M6 on the border of Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme, with consent for 1.2 million sq. ft of commercial space and 1,700 projected local jobs. Significant demand for construction, commercial and technical skills.

i54 Advanced Manufacturing Hub

A flagship 300-acre site with over £1 billion in private investment, home to Jaguar Land Rover, MOOG and Atlas Copco. 2.5 million sq. ft of high-quality industrial space, 60 further acres of development land, and 1.7 million skilled workers within 30 minutes. A sustained source of demand for engineering, manufacturing and technical skills at all levels.

South Staffordshire and Wolverhampton Economic Growth Zone (EGZ)

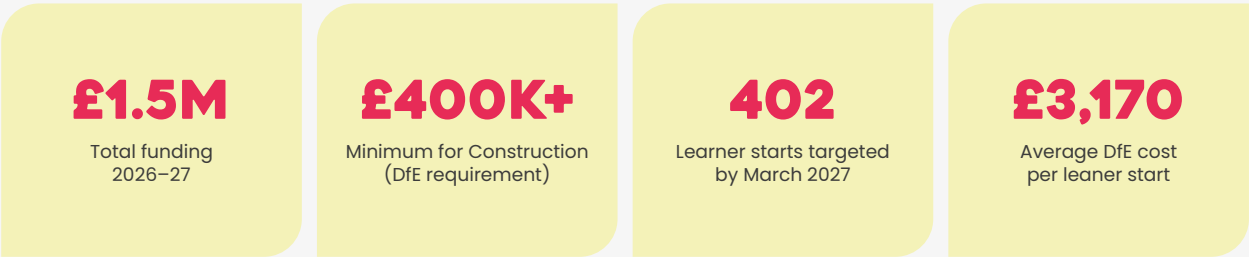
A dynamic model for driving economic expansion, innovation and investment across South Staffordshire, creating opportunities for public and private investors to develop sustainable growth and create highly skilled jobs. The EGZ's focus on advanced manufacturing and innovation creates specific skills demand in engineering, digital manufacturing and technical trades.

Together, these five major projects and other small developments taking place across the County represent a combined pipeline of construction activity, logistics employment, advanced manufacturing capacity and clean energy infrastructure that will reshape the local workforce over the next decade.

D4. Skills Bootcamps: A Key Delivery Vehicle

Skills Bootcamps are government-funded, free and flexible short courses designed for adults aged 19 and over, co-designed with employers to address skills shortages in high-growth sectors. Introduced in 2020 via the National Skills Fund, over 120,000 people have participated nationally, resulting in more than 50,000 positive employment outcomes. Bootcamps are explicitly identified in the Government’s Get Britain Working plan as a key component of its employment and skills strategy.

In January 2026, Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire received a Grant Offer Letter from DfE confirming £1.5 million of Skills Bootcamp funding for 2026–27, the area’s first dedicated allocation as a local delivery area. This is a significant milestone: it means the area now has a directly managed Skills Bootcamp programme for the first time.



Skills Bootcamp Key Facts – Stoke-on-Trent & Staffordshire 2026–27

Free, flexible training for adults aged 19+ – minimum 60 guided learning hours over up to 16 weeks

Employer co-funding required: large employers contribute 30%; SMEs contribute 10% of training costs

100% of unemployed completers guaranteed a job interview for a matched role

75% of completers to achieve a positive outcome within 6 months (new job, new role or new opportunities)

DfE milestone payment structure: 40% on learner start, 30% on completion, 30% on job outcome

Directly managed by Staffordshire County Council – delivered by approved training providers

Funding for future Skills Bootcamps will only be available for construction moving forward

SKILLS BOOTCAMP PRIORITY SECTORS

Stoke-on-Trent & Staffordshire 2026–27

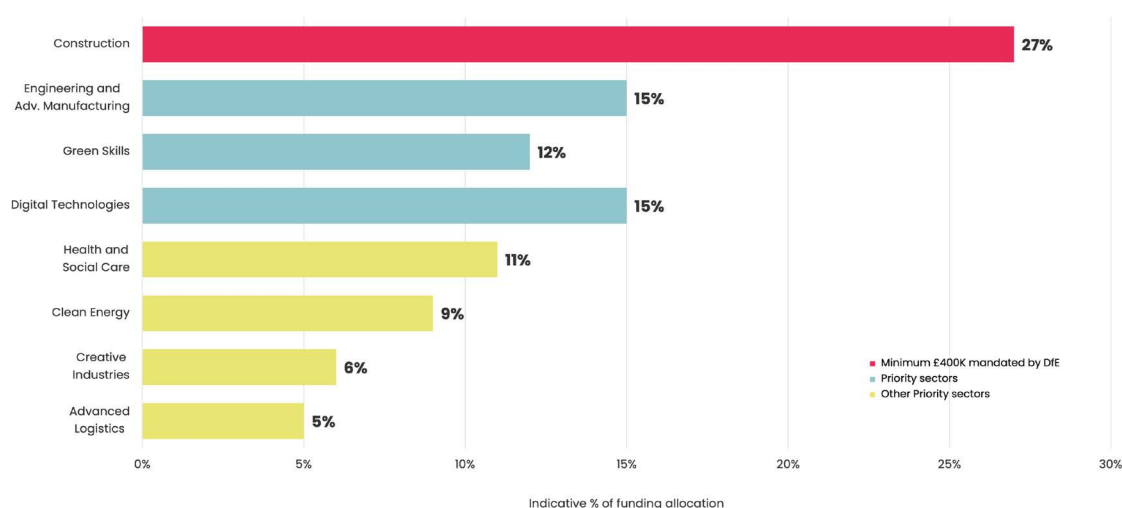


Figure 8: Skills Bootcamp priority sectors – Stoke-on-Trent & Staffordshire 2026–27 (indicative allocation)

The Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire programme covers 13 priority sectors directly aligned with this LSIP's eight priority sectors, including Construction, Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing, Digital Technologies, Green Skills, Health and Social Care, Clean Energy, Creative Industries and Advanced Logistics. Up to 50% of funding can be allocated flexibly to respond to identified local need beyond the nationally mandated sectors. The Skills Bootcamp programme is referenced throughout this LSIP's priorities and actions as a cross-cutting delivery vehicle, most directly in Priorities 1, 2 and 3, and is a key mechanism for reaching the underrepresented groups, SMEs and economically inactive adults that the plan targets.

ANNEX E: GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Adult Skills Fund (ASF) Government funding for free or subsidised training for adults aged 19 and over who do not hold certain qualifications, often used for entry-level and Level 2 courses.

Apprenticeship Levy / Growth and Skills Levy A fund, paid into by larger employers, used to pay for apprenticeships and (under recent reforms) a wider range of shorter, flexible training courses.

CMC (Ceramic Matrix Composite) An advanced, lightweight, heat-resistant material used in sectors such as aerospace and energy; an emerging specialism for the area's ceramics and advanced manufacturing sector.

ESOL – English for Speakers of Other Languages; courses that help non-native English speakers improve their English, often a first step toward employment or further training.

FSA (Foundation Strategic Authority) A new type of regional governance arrangement being introduced for areas, like Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire, that do not currently have a directly elected mayor; expected to take on a greater role in local economic and skills planning over time.

GVA (Gross Value Added) A measure of the economic value generated by an area, sector or business; broadly similar to economic output.

HTQ (Higher Technical Qualification) A government-approved qualification at Level 4 or 5 (between A Level and a full degree), designed to give people the skills employers need for technical and higher-skilled roles.

ITP (Independent Training Provider) A training organisation that is not a college or university, often specialising in a particular sector such as logistics, construction or digital.

Levels (qualification levels) A national framework describing the difficulty of a qualification. As a rough guide: Level 2 is equivalent to GCSEs; Level 3 to A Levels; Level 4/5 to the first and second years of a degree (sometimes called “higher technical” level); Level 6 to a full degree; Levels 7–8 to postgraduate study (Master’s and doctorate).

Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) A new government funding system, from 2027, giving adults a loan entitlement to fund modular study at Levels 4–6 throughout their working life, rather than only as one block at the start of a career.

NEET A young person who is “Not in Education, Employment or Training”.

SIC (Standard Industrial Classification) A national coding system used to classify businesses by the type of industry they operate in.

Skills England The national body responsible for assessing skills needs and shaping training and funding priorities across England.

SOC (Standard Occupational Classification) A national coding system used to classify jobs by occupation, used to compare skills needs and shortages consistently across the country.

Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Growth Hub A local service providing free advice and support to businesses, including on funding, growth and skills.

Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Skills Hub A planned local “front door” service to help businesses navigate the training, funding and support available to them.

T Level A technical qualification for 16–19 year olds, equivalent in size to two A Levels, combining classroom learning with a substantial industry placement.

TEC (Technical Excellence College) A college given special status and funding by the Government to act as a specialist centre of expertise in a particular technical area, sharing facilities and expertise with other local providers.

VCSE (Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise) sector Charities, community groups and social enterprises, often involved in supporting people facing barriers to work or training.



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