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BERKSHIRE PRIORITIES

LOCAL SKILLS IMPROVEMENT PLAN



LSIP BERKSHIRE
SHAPING THE FUTURE WORKFORCE

June 2026



'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'



FOREWORD

Berkshire and the Thames Valley are home to one of the UK's most productive local economies. The county benefits from globally recognised strengths in digital technology, life sciences, professional and scientific services, advanced manufacturing and the visitor economy. With no less than five of the eight growth sectors identified in the Industrial Strategy, evidentially world leading in the county, businesses across Berkshire contribute significantly to national growth, innovation and exports, supported by a highly skilled workforce and strong links to research institutions across the wider Thames Valley.

However, employers across the county consistently tell us that the availability of skilled people is one of the most significant factors shaping their future growth. Businesses are operating in a more uncertain global economic environment, facing cost pressures, rapid technological change and increasing competition for talent. At the same time, Berkshire's labour market faces structural pressures, including an ageing workforce, rising replacement demand and persistent shortages in specialist and technical roles.

This Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) for Berkshire has been developed through extensive engagement with employers across the county and the wider Thames Valley. Businesses of all sizes have contributed their insight through interviews, workshops, surveys and sector discussions, supported by labour market analysis and collaboration with education providers, local authorities and wider partners.

The Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce (TVCC) is proud to lead this plan as the designated Employer Representative Body (ERB) for Berkshire. Through our Workforce Development Partnerships (WDPs), Thames Valley Skills Champions and wider engagement networks, we are committed to ensuring that the voice of employers remains central to the way the local skills system develops over the coming years.

This LSIP is intended to support shared responsibility across the local skills system. By bringing together employers, training providers, universities and local partners, the plan provides a collaborative framework for addressing workforce challenges and strengthening the pipeline of skills that Berkshire's economy depends upon.

Above all, this plan reflects a simple principle: that the skills system works best when employers and education providers work together. By continuing to build these partnerships, Berkshire can ensure that its workforce remains adaptable, productive and equipped for the opportunities and challenges of the years ahead.

Paul Britton
Chief Executive
Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce

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INTRODUCTION

This Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) sets out the skills priorities identified by employers across Berkshire.

This LSIP covers the whole of the ceremonial county of Berkshire and includes the unitary authorities of Bracknell Forest, Reading, Slough, West Berkshire, Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead, Wokingham.

It draws on engagement with businesses of different sizes and sectors to highlight areas where employers experience recruitment challenges, where skills gaps exist within the current workforce, and where new capabilities will be required over the next three years as technologies, business models and labour markets evolve.

The LSIP has been developed through employer engagement, supported by labour market intelligence and partner insight. It brings together evidence from businesses to identify:

- areas where employers face persistent recruitment difficulties
- skills gaps affecting the productivity and progression of the existing workforce
- emerging skills that will become increasingly important as industries and job roles change over the life of the plan

The Berkshire LSIP is led by the Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce (TVCC) as the designated Employer Representative Body (ERB). It has been developed in partnership with employers, education and training providers, local authorities and other regional stakeholders.

At a national level, the LSIP aligns with the work of Skills England, which looks at future workforce needs across the country. The LSIP adds value by providing local, employer-led detail about jobs, skills and pressures in the county. This helps make sure national priorities reflect what businesses actually need on the ground.

In addition, TVCC operates across the wider Thames Valley, providing a cross-border footprint that enables collaboration between Berkshire and neighbouring economies, such as Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Swindon. This broader regional perspective allows the LSIP to benefit from shared labour market insight, partnership working and aligned workforce development activity across the Thames Valley.

Employer involvement in course design, delivery and work-based learning will be strengthened through the Workforce Development Partnerships (WDPs) that were established by TVCC in 2022, led by employers volunteering as Thames Valley Skills Champions. The new plan set out in this report is intended to continue to support the education and training system in responding more effectively to employer demand, helping to ensure that local people develop the skills needed for current and future



“The future of work is changing fast, and Skills England is leading the charge in making better skills for better jobs.

Our vision is to create better skills for better jobs building the nation's world-class skills and enable growth and opportunity. Recognising that every area has unique strengths, challenges, and opportunities to unlock, delivering this vision in regions, like the Thames Valley, is particularly important to the UK.

Building on the foundation of some tremendous strengths, TVCC is leading the way with two LSIPs, and through partnership, successfully co-creating solutions to regional skills challenges. The presence and depth of the eight growth sectors of the UK's modern industrial strategy, found in the Thames Valley, means we should expect 'super-things' from a region with the capability of turning local success into national impact and 'super-growth.'

TVCC is helping more people into good jobs and building the skills the Thames Valley community and UK needs. I commend their work to all stakeholders.”



Phil Smith Chair of Skills England, and Honorary Life Member, TVCC

jobs while supporting productivity and economic growth across Berkshire.

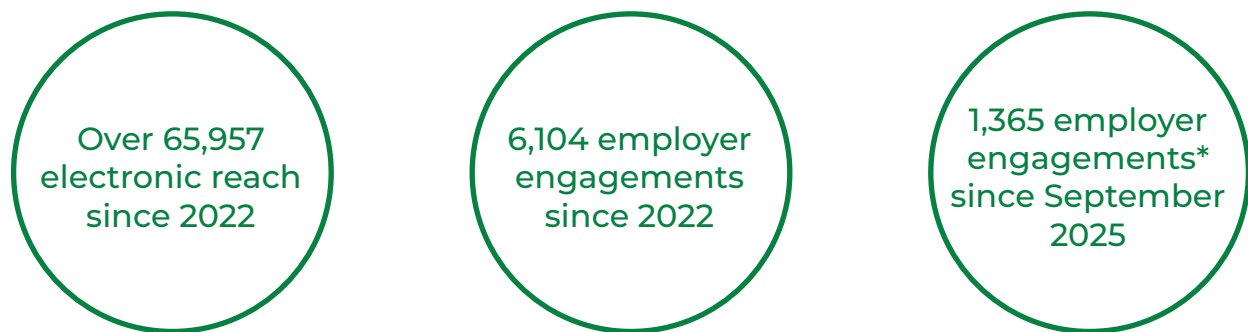
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The LSIP is intended for organisations involved in skills, training and economic development. This includes businesses and employer groups, relevant providers with statutory duties (further education colleges, independent training providers and organisations delivering technical education) and universities.

It focuses on post-16 education and training, covering the full range of provision from entry level through to Level 8. It is designed to support young people and adults to enter the labour market, progress in work and develop higher-level skills over time. Further Education (FE), adult education providers and Independent Training Providers (ITPs) play a central role at entry level to Level 4/5, delivering technical education, apprenticeships and programmes such as ESOL that support access to employment. Higher Education (HE) providers focus mainly on Levels 4 to 8, providing higher technical, degree-level and professional training. The LSIP brings these parts of the system together, with an emphasis on clear progression routes, flexible learning and alignment to employer needs, so that individuals can move through the system and respond to changing job opportunities.

The LSIP is also used by local authorities and other regional partners working on employment, growth and workforce development. By bringing together employer insight and labour market information, the LSIP supports better discussions and clearer decisions about skills priorities across Berkshire and the wider Thames Valley.

The LSIP Represents:



*Of which 77% were SMEs and 65% non-Chamber members
More detail on methodology and data collection in in Annex C.

The plan prioritises improving how the skills system functions as a whole, with the objective of aligning training more closely to employer needs across Berkshire and the wider Thames Valley. Rather than focusing on specific courses or qualifications, it emphasises structural changes that make skills provision more responsive, flexible and relevant to the labour market.

A joined-up Thames Valley wide offer of flexible, modular training is recommended to help employers, particularly SMEs, overcome practical barriers to staff development and enable people to build skills while staying in work. The LSIP places strong emphasis on shared responsibility, with employers, providers and public partners working together, supported by employer led Skills Champions, to create and invest in skills solutions that meet future workforce needs.

Alongside this, there is a stronger focus on practical, workplace-based skills, ensuring that training delivers competence as well as formal qualifications. This includes improving work-readiness of new entrants and strengthening leadership and management capability, particularly at supervisor and first-line manager level. The plan also focuses on work readiness and workplace exposure through, for example, an innovative pilot in T Level placements.

There are also plans for specific partnerships and collaborations, such as the expansion of the successful Career Festival model, including a Defence Careers Festival across the Thames Valley (with neighbouring areas), a pilot of a Hospitality Skills Passport, promotion of a new Electrotechnical Training Alliance for the Thames Valley, and a Gatsby-supported Industry Associates network to bring industry expertise



into training providers, strengthening delivery of specialist skills in defence, manufacturing, engineering and construction.

The plan also reflects the increasing importance of digital capability through a recommendation of a Thames Valley wide AI framework to embed skills and knowledge for effective, ethical and responsible use.

Over the lifetime of this plan, there are significant changes and shifts in funding models and available qualifications. Accordingly, the LSIP reflects how employers and providers can work together to implement and benefit from new reforms such as the Growth and Skills Levy (GSL)¹, apprenticeship units², the Lifelong Learning Entitlement³ and modularisation. This also includes supporting FE providers and employers in the implementation of the three major changes to post-16 pathways: the introduction of V Levels⁴, the expansion of T Levels⁵, and clearer Level 2 routes⁶ through new Occupational and Further Study pathways.⁷

Delivery of the plan will be coordinated through WDPs, led by our volunteer Thames Valley Skills Champions, which bring together employers, colleges and training providers around key sectors. In Berkshire, some of these partnerships are aligned with wider Thames Valley sector groups, enabling collaboration across functional economic areas where labour markets and industries overlap.

The WDPs are a central part of how the LSIP is delivered and the key delivery vehicle for the model of shared responsibility for skills. They were created in 2022 to respond to a key issue raised by employers: that training and education often do not reflect the real needs of local businesses. WDPs provide a space where employers, training providers, and partners can work together to understand sector-specific challenges, share insight, and co-design practical solutions. The proposed WDPs are below.

1 [Find training and employment schemes for your business - The Growth and Skills Levy](#)

2 [Apprenticeship units – Apprenticeship Service Support](#)

3 [Lifelong learning entitlement \(LLE\): overview - GOV.UK](#)

4 V Level- The new flagship vocational qualification will sit alongside A Levels (academic) and T Levels (technical). V Levels will be the same size as an A Level and can be taken alongside them to create a broad study programme appropriate for a young person who wishes to progress to higher level study without specialising in one particular area.

5 The consultation response confirms the expansion of T Level subjects - including the introduction of new T Levels in areas such as Care Services and Sports, Fitness and Exercise Science from 2028.

6 Level 2- two new pathways for young people who need to continue learning at level 2 at age 16. They will have a choice of the Further Study pathway, which will help them to progress into a study programme of A Levels and/or V Levels, or a T Level - or the Occupational pathway, which is a two-year programme that supports progression to a good skilled job.

7 [Post-16 level 3 and below pathways - GOV.UK](#)

Workforce Development Partnerships:



Thames Valley Digital WDP

To lead on cross-sector skills priorities on AI and digital transformation



Thames Valley Health and Life Science WDP

Embedded within the [Health and Life Science Working Group](#)



Thames Valley Creative WDP

Aligned with [Screen Berkshire](#)



Thames Valley Defence and Security WDP

Embedded within the [Defence and Security Working Group](#)



Thames Valley Construction WDP

Aligned with the Thames Valley Electrotechnical Training and Careers Alliance



Thames Valley Visitor Economy WDP

Continuing work with UK Hospitality on Skills Passport and other initiatives to improve pipeline of talent



Thames Valley Care WDP

Continuing work with partners on initiatives to improve pipeline of talent



Thames Valley Logistics WDP

Continuing work with partners on initiatives to improve pipeline of talent

Priority Areas

The LSIP evidence base (employer feedback triangulated with other data and priorities identified- see Annex C) identified a number of priority sector clusters where skills development and workforce planning are particularly important for the Berkshire economy. These are:

Priority 1: [Digital Technology](#) (including Data and Technology-Enabled Services, Datacentres)

Priority 2: [Creative Industries](#) (including Screen/[Film and High-End TV](#), Gaming, Digital Production and Content)

Priority 3: [Health and Life Sciences](#) (including, Pharmaceuticals, Agrifood Technology and Health Technology)

Priority 4: Defence, Security and [Advanced Manufacturing](#) (including Supply Chains)

Priority 5: Critical Services (Health, Care, Visitor Economy, Food and Farming, Logistics)

Priority 6: Construction, Retrofit, Electrification and Green Infrastructure

The detailed industry classifications and occupational priorities for each of these sector clusters are set out in Annex A.

Across these sector clusters, the LSIP Plan in Annex B sets out system-level changes.

Change 1: [Sharing Responsibility for Skills Across the Thames Valley- Industry and Education](#)

Change 2: [Responding to AI and Digital Transformation](#)

Change 3: [Reducing Recruitment Pressure in Specialist Roles](#)

Change 4: [Upskilling to Improve Productivity](#)

Change 5: [Building Management Strength in SMEs](#)

Change 6: [Preparing for Net Zero and Emerging Technologies](#)

Change 7: [Improving Work-Readiness and Real-World Skills](#)

Summary of Main Content

Priority	Policy Alignment	Berkshire Strengths, Growth & Investment Context	Road Map Summary
AI	IS 8 Digital & technologies	Berkshire has a well-established and rapidly growing artificial intelligence capability, anchored in the wider Thames Valley technology cluster centred on Reading. The area is recognised as one of the UK's leading AI hotspots, with around 170 AI companies employing over 27,000 people locally, spanning applications such as machine learning, data processing and automation	Establish a Thames Valley Digital WDP to provide clear employer-led direction on digital and AI skills, underpinned by a common Digital Skills Framework, aligning training provision across all sectors, alongside expanding flexible, modular training to support SME adoption of new technologies.
Digital Technology (including Data and Technology-Enabled Services, Datacentres)	IS 8 Digital & Technologies	Berkshire is part of one of the UK's strongest digital corridors within the Thames Valley and wider UK, with major global technology firms, the world's 2nd largest cluster of data centres and software companies located across the County. The area has a strong, and long-established, concentration of ICT, data and technology-enabled services, supported by high levels of business R&D and strong links to universities and innovation centres across the wider Thames Valley. The digital sector, centred in Berkshire, plays a critical role in supporting UK government ambitions for economic and productivity growth, as outlined in the Industrial Strategy.	Strengthen the pipeline of digital talent by expanding Level 3–6 provision, including higher technical and modular routes, embedding AI and data skills to reduce shortages in software, cyber and data roles.
Creative Industries (including Screen/Film and High-End TV, Gaming, Digital Production and Content)	IS 8 Creative Industries	Berkshire has a growing creative and digital content sector, supported by proximity to the wider regional creative economy and the presence of major film and television production assets such as Shinfield Studios, Amazon at Bray Studios and the nearby Pinewood/Shepperton Studios. The region also has strengths in high-end TV and film, gaming, digital design, publishing and creative technology. Creative businesses intersect with digital and technology sectors, particularly in areas such as virtual production, immersive media and digital content development.	Expand the Creative WDP to reflect the full sector, improve entry routes through supported T Level placements, embed AI and digital skills, and strengthen business and freelance capability to support sustainable careers.
Health and Life Sciences (including, Pharmaceuticals, Agrifood Technology and Health Technology)	IS 8 Life Sciences Skills England priority- Health & Social Care	Berkshire forms part of the wider Thames Valley and golden triangle life sciences cluster, with major pharmaceutical, biotechnology and health technology companies located across the county. Berkshire has seen significant foreign direct investment (FDI) in the past decade. Global firms, research partnerships and links to nearby research institutions support activity in pharmaceutical manufacturing, clinical research, health technology and diagnostics. The sector benefits from proximity to Oxfordshire's science and research assets and plays a key role in the region's innovation economy. TVCC hosts the region's only industry-led, curated, sector working group which incorporates the LSIP WDP for Life Sciences (see Phil Smith, Chair Skills England).	Strengthen employer leadership through the Health and Life Sciences WDP, build the evidence base on sustainability, and expand technical pathways while embedding digital and AI skills to address shortages in laboratory, R&D and production roles.

Summary of Main Content

Priority	Policy Alignment	Berkshire Strengths, Growth & Investment Context	Road Map Summary
Defence, Security and Advanced Manufacturing (including Supply Chains)	IS 8 Advanced Manufacturing; IS 8 Defence	Berkshire has a strong presence in defence, engineering and advanced manufacturing, including supply chains linked to major national defence programmes and high-value engineering industries. The county also benefits from proximity to major defence establishments and advanced engineering clusters across the wider Thames Valley, which includes significant recent FDI (see: GCAP). These sectors support high-productivity employment and require a pipeline of skilled engineers, technicians and specialists in advanced technologies. TVCC hosts the region's only industry-led, curated, sector working group which incorporates the LSIP WDP for defence	Establish a coordinated Defence WDP to align employer priorities across the region, while strengthening the skills pipeline through improved training capacity, Industry Associates, enhanced careers awareness, and building compliance capability alongside embedding digital and automation skills.
Critical Services (Health, Care, Visitor Economy, Food and Farming, Logistics)	Skills England Health & Social Care;	Berkshire's foundational economy includes large health and care employers, a significant logistics and distribution sector linked to the M4 corridor and Heathrow, and a strong visitor economy. These sectors provide substantial employment across the county and play a critical role in supporting local communities and economic resilience. Employers in these sectors face ongoing recruitment pressures and require a workforce with strong technical, operational and customer service capabilities.	Strengthen the frontline workforce across health, care, logistics and the visitor economy by improving entry-level pathways, embedding supervisory skills and expanding flexible training, alongside improving access, progression and careers awareness.
Construction, Retrofit and Green Infrastructure	Is 8 Clean Energy Skills England Construction	Berkshire faces significant demand for construction and infrastructure skills driven by housing growth, commercial development and investment in transport and energy infrastructure. The transition to net zero is increasing demand for retrofit low-carbon heating, energy efficiency and green infrastructure skills. The construction sector also includes a large SME contractor base and requires stronger pipelines into technical and supervisory roles.	Strengthen employer leadership through the Construction WDP and align skills provision with housing, infrastructure and Net Zero priorities, while addressing shortages in key roles, expanding green skills, embedding digital capability and improving careers awareness.

STRATEGIC AND ECONOMIC CONTEXT

This section sets out the economic and strategic context within which the Berkshire LSIP operates. It explains the structure of the local economy, key labour market trends, and the policy environment shaping workforce demand. It also identifies the sectors and occupational areas where skills are most critical to supporting economic growth.

Berkshire is not currently part of a devolved Strategic Authority. In line with statutory guidance, this LSIP draws on the Berkshire Economic Strategy, local authority growth plans, national Industrial Strategy priorities, Skills England analysis, and direct employer engagement to identify current and future skills needs. It has been developed in consultation with local authorities, employers, education and training providers, and wider stakeholders to ensure alignment with local economic priorities and labour market demand.

Economic Structure and Priority Sectors

Berkshire is one of the most productive local economies outside London, with a strong concentration of knowledge-intensive and high-value sectors. The local economy aligns closely with priority areas identified in the UK Industrial Strategy, particularly Digital and Technologies, Life Sciences, Advanced Manufacturing and Defence, Creative Industries, and Clean Energy and Construction linked to the Net Zero transition.

Employment and output are heavily concentrated in Information and Communication, Professional, Scientific and Technical Activities, Wholesale and Retail, Health and Social Work, Manufacturing, and Transportation and Storage. These sectors generate a significant proportion of local Gross Value Added and underpin Berkshire's economic performance.

Strategic Alignment

At the local level, the LSIP supports the Berkshire Economic Strategy and related local authority plans, which focus on strengthening innovation, supporting high-productivity sectors, and improving workforce participation.

The LSIP also complements the Local Get Britain Working Plan. While Get Britain Working focuses on supporting access to employment, the LSIP focuses on ensuring that training provision equips individuals with the skills required for sustainable employment and progression. Together, these approaches support both entry into work and long-term workforce development.

The [Berkshire Economic Strategy](#) sets the economic direction and long-term mission

The LSIP sets out occupational priorities and creates opportunities for collaboration

The [Get Berkshire Working Plan](#) focuses on workforce participation and progression

This alignment ensures that skills planning is closely linked to economic growth, labour market participation, and employer demand.

Functional links with the Economic Strategy and the Get Berkshire Working Plan are in place as the ERB is represented on the Berkshire Prosperity Board, the Berkshire Skills & Employment Workstream Group and the Get Berkshire Working Strategic Oversight Committee.

Synergies Between Neighbouring Areas

Berkshire sits within a wider Thames Valley economy with strong interdependencies across neighbouring areas, particularly Oxfordshire. Both areas share strengths in digital, life sciences, advanced manufacturing, and clean energy, alongside common skills shortages in technical and professional roles.

These cross-boundary linkages reinforce the importance of coordinated skills planning and collaboration between employers, providers, and stakeholders across the wider region.

The wider Thames Valley context is also important. Swindon has a growing defence and advanced manufacturing presence, including activity linked to autonomous systems and drone technologies.

This strengthens the regional defence and space ecosystem and creates shared demand for systems engineers, robotics specialists, precision manufacturing and export compliance expertise. These cross-boundary clusters reinforce the case for coordinated skills planning across Berkshire and Oxfordshire, particularly through the Defence and Advanced Manufacturing working structures already operating at a Thames Valley scale.

However, there are differences in economic structure. Berkshire has a stronger corporate, digital services and logistics base, while Oxfordshire has a more research-intensive, science-led economy. These differences shape the nature of skills demand, particularly in higher technical and research roles.

In the context of potential future devolution, these similarities and interdependencies are important. The existing cross-county WDPs and sector working groups provide a foundation for more integrated skills governance as devolution progresses.

Demographic and Labour Market Context

Berkshire's population is approximately 961,000 (ONS⁸ mid-2023 estimate), with growth largely driven by international migration. A key structural challenge is demographic change. Around one third of residents are aged 50 and over, and this proportion is projected to increase. At the same time, the core working-age population is expected to decline.

This creates sustained labour supply pressure. Employers are likely to face increasing replacement demand, intensified competition for experienced workers, and greater reliance on workforce development and progression.

The labour market remains strong, with employment rates above the national average and economic inactivity below it. Employment growth has recovered strongly following the pandemic and is projected to continue over the long term. Forecasts indicate both significant job creation and substantial replacement demand through to 2035.

These conditions indicate that recruitment challenges are structural rather than cyclical. Even in a strong labour market, employers face ongoing difficulty securing skilled labour, particularly in technical and professional roles.

Productivity and Skills Dependency

Berkshire's productivity is significantly above national averages, with output per job and per hour well above the England baseline⁹. Thames Valley is forecast to be the highest-growing region in the UK, with a Gross Value Added (GVA) growth of 1.7% predicted for 2025-28, with Reading 'topping' the overall UK growth chart at 2.2%.¹⁰ This reflects the concentration of high-value sectors and skilled occupations.

However, this productivity advantage is highly dependent on the availability of skilled labour. Many key sectors rely on advanced technical, professional and managerial capabilities. Where skills shortages emerge, the economic impact is immediate, affecting business performance, investment decisions, and growth.

Sustaining economic performance therefore depends on strengthening the local skills system, including higher technical pathways, workforce upskilling, and improved work readiness.

Business Base and Employer Demand

Berkshire has over 40,000 businesses, with around 99% classified as SMEs¹¹. This has important implications for skills demand. Smaller employers often require flexible, modular and work-integrated training solutions, rather than long full-time programmes.

Employer demand is therefore characterised by:

- The need for short, targeted upskilling
- A focus on progression within employment
- Demand for specialist technical training

8 [Population estimates - Office for National Statistics](#)

9 [Berkshire Economic Strategy; ey-uk-regional-economic-forecast-03-2025.pdf](#)

10 <https://www.thamesvalleychamber.co.uk/inward-investment/why-the-thames-valley/>

11 [Berkshire Economic Strategy; Business Register and Employment Survey \(BRES\): provisional results 2024, revised results 2023 - Office for National Statistics](#)

- Limited capacity to release staff for extended training

This reinforces the importance of flexible provision, modular learning, and strong employer-provider collaboration.

Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES) data shows that Berkshire has a strong concentration of employment in high-value, knowledge-intensive sectors. Employment is particularly concentrated in:

- Information and Communication
- Professional, Scientific and Technical Activities
- Wholesale and Retail
- Health and Social Work
- Manufacturing
- Transportation and Storage

Berkshire ranks among the leading areas outside London for employment intensity in Information and Communication and Professional, Scientific and Technical Activities. These sectors account for a higher share of total employment locally than in many other parts of England. This reflects the strength of the Thames Valley technology corridor, global corporate presence, data infrastructure, and advanced service industries.

Forecast evidence¹² indicates that Information and Communication is expected to experience the strongest employment growth over the medium to long term, reinforcing Berkshire's position as a digital and technology-led economy.

The occupational profile of these sectors is weighted heavily towards:

- SOC Major Group 2 Professional occupations
- SOC Major Group 3 Associate professional and technical occupations
- SOC Major Group 5 Skilled trades
- SOC Major Group 8 Process, plant and machine operatives (particularly within manufacturing and logistics)

In practical terms, Berkshire's economic strengths are also its workforce risks. A high concentration of technical and professional employment means that recruitment delays, capability gaps and shortages in specialist roles can have a disproportionate economic impact. The LSIP focus on sustaining growth in these key sectors depends on maintaining a strong local pipeline of skilled labour, improving progression into higher technical roles, and ensuring that SMEs can access flexible workforce development solutions.

Foundational Economy

The foundational economy in Berkshire includes essential sectors such as health and social care, the visitor economy, logistics and related local services that support communities and enable wider economic growth. This is becoming increasingly important as Berkshire's Economic Strategy aims to grow the economy from £52.5 billion to £70.5 billion and create around 36,000 additional jobs by 2035, while also facing a projected 20.5% decline in the working age population and an increase in residents aged over 50 from 34.3% to 39.8% by 2034. These demographic changes increase pressure on essential workforce sectors and reinforce the need for inclusive growth and access to employment opportunities.

Latest Business Sentiment

The Quarterly Economic Survey for Q4 2025¹³ shows that business confidence across the UK, including the Thames Valley region, weakened noticeably towards the end of 2025. Overall sentiment was at its lowest level for several years, with many firms reporting caution in their outlook for growth and investment and continuing to report recruitment difficulties, especially for skilled roles.

Our engagement work with employers highlights similar themes. Firms in Berkshire have indicated that sales and orders were flat or weaker for many businesses, while recruitment challenges continue to constrain growth ambitions, particularly in specialist technical, digital and management roles.

This suggests that although businesses remain resilient, confidence is subdued and growth

¹² [The Skills Imperative 2035 - NFER](#)

¹³ [Quarterly Economic Survey - Q4 Report - 2025](#)

expectations cautious. Labour demand remains active, but employers are adjusting hiring and investment plans in response to persistent recruitment challenges and broader economic uncertainty. This reinforces the LSIP's focus on skills development, as employers seek to secure the workforce capability needed to support growth even in less certain conditions.

Inward Investment and Infrastructure - Developments Since the Previous LSIP

Since the publication of the previous LSIP, Berkshire has continued to strengthen its position as a nationally significant location for attracting inward investment¹⁴ and delivering UK ambitions for growth outlined in the Industrial Strategy. The attraction of the region is supported by its global connectivity, access to world class talent and academic institutions, as well as wider transport links, digital and energy infrastructure projects, high-standards of available commercial property space and curated industry working groups (e.g., health and life sciences, defence & security) bringing companies together in a triple-helix model of engagement.

Heathrow Airport remains a major economic driver, supporting international trade, logistics, and global business activity. Improvements in rail connectivity, including the Elizabeth Line, have expanded labour market access and strengthened the area's attractiveness to employers and workers.

Investment in digital infrastructure, including data centres and high-performance computing, has reinforced Berkshire's position as a major technology hub. At the same time, growth in these sectors is increasing pressure on energy and infrastructure systems, making skills in energy, sustainability, and infrastructure development increasingly important. For example, Slough is home to the 2nd largest concentration of Datacentres in the world and is critical to the UK's growth ambitions. Continued investment in digital infrastructure has supported growth in cloud services, artificial intelligence, cyber security and high-performance computing sectors.

The expansion of film and television production facilities and continued development along the M4 corridor further strengthens the region's creative and professional services base. These investments have attracted national and international production activity, generating wider demand for technical production skills, digital media roles and creative occupations, making [Berkshire 'the Hollywood of Britain'](#) (Clive Jones, MP (7th May 2025 House of Commons debate)).

Clean energy and sustainability investment is also increasing demand for green construction skills, retrofit capability, and low-carbon technical expertise, reflecting wider Net Zero commitments.

Implications for Employers and the LSIP

The evidence shows:

- Strong economic growth ambitions.
- High productivity dependent on skilled labour.
- An ageing population and rising replacement demand.
- Sector concentration in digital, technical and professional fields.
- SME-dominated business structure.



Strategic Implications for the LSIP

The evidence presented in this section highlights several structural characteristics of Berkshire's economy that shape the priorities within this LSIP.

The county combines strong economic productivity with a high concentration of knowledge-intensive industries. These sectors depend heavily on professional, technical and skilled trade occupations. At the same time, demographic change and continued economic growth mean that employers face rising replacement demand and increasing competition for skilled labour.

Berkshire's SME-dominated business base also shapes how skills demand is expressed. Many employers require flexible, work-integrated training solutions that allow employees to develop skills while remaining in employment.

These factors reinforce the importance of strengthening technical pathways, supporting workforce upskilling, improving work readiness and expanding flexible training routes. The priorities identified in this LSIP therefore reflect both Berkshire's economic strengths and the workforce challenges associated with sustaining a high-productivity, innovation-led economy.

LOCAL SKILLS NEEDS

This section sets out the key skills needs identified by employers across Berkshire for the current period and the next three years. The analysis is based on evidence gathered through the LSIP process, including employer interviews, WDP discussions, sector roundtables, written submissions and engagement events. These insights have been triangulated with labour market data, sector intelligence and regional economic strategies.

The analysis focuses on the real job roles and operational pressures businesses face rather than qualifications alone. Employers consistently emphasised that the key issue is not simply the number of applicants entering the labour market, but the shortage of candidates who can apply technical knowledge effectively in real working environments. Many roles increasingly require a combination of technical expertise, digital capability, regulatory understanding and operational responsibility. In addition, this LSIP also pays due regard to equality of opportunity and net zero objectives.

Equality of opportunity

Employers and partners highlighted that some groups face greater barriers in accessing training and progressing into skilled work. In Berkshire this includes young people who are not yet connected to employers, adults needing to retrain or change career, people returning to work, and those who may face practical barriers such as cost, time or limited access to flexible learning.

The LSIP aims to address these barriers by improving access to training and progression routes into priority sectors. This includes promoting flexible and modular training that works alongside employment, strengthening work placements and employer engagement to improve work readiness, supporting recruitment in critical sectors through ESOL, and supporting clearer pathways from entry level roles into higher skilled occupations. Partners across the skills and employment system, including providers, Jobcentre Plus and careers services, will help connect people to these opportunities and ensure that training routes are accessible to a wider range of residents.

Environmental and Net Zero goals

Employers across Berkshire highlighted that the transition to a low carbon economy and the adoption of new technologies are changing skills needs across many sectors. This was also confirmed in primary research TVCC undertook, as part of its [State of the Region report](#), which considers a region-wide perspective on the Thames Valley's pathway to net zero and how we are considering climate change and sustainability. This includes growing demand for skills linked to energy efficiency, low carbon construction, sustainable production and the use of digital technologies that support more efficient and environmentally responsible business practices.

The LSIP supports these environmental and Net Zero goals by promoting skills development in areas such as retrofit, green construction, alongside broader digital and technical skills that help businesses reduce emissions and improve productivity. Providers, employers and partners will work together to ensure that relevant environmental knowledge and sustainable practices are embedded within training programmes, helping prepare the workforce for the changes associated with Net Zero and wider environmental challenges.

Six priority sector clusters have emerged from the Berkshire LSIP evidence base.

The six priority areas are:

Priority 1: [Digital Technology](#) (including Data and Technology-Enabled Services, Datacentres)

Priority 2: Creative Industries (including Screen/[Film and High-End TV](#), Gaming, Digital Production and Content)

Priority 3: [Health and Life Sciences](#) (including, Pharmaceuticals, Agrifood Technology and Health Technology)

Priority 4: Defence, Security and [Advanced Manufacturing](#) (including Supply Chains)

Priority 5: Critical Services (Health, Care, Visitor Economy, Food and Farming, Logistics)

Priority 6: Construction, Retrofit, Electrification and Green Infrastructure

AI is also presented as a cross-cutting theme.

Seven system-level changes are also identified:

Change 1: Sharing Responsibility for Skills Across the Thames Valley- Industry and Education

Change 2: Responding to AI and Digital Transformation

Change 3: Reducing Recruitment Pressure in Specialist Roles

Change 4: Upskilling to Improve Productivity

Change 5: Building Management Strength in SMEs

Change 6: Preparing for Net Zero and Emerging Technologies

Change 7: Improving Work-Readiness and Real-World Skills

This section (Local Needs) focuses on articulating the specific needs, pressures and priorities within each sector, ensuring that the evidence and employer voice are clearly grounded in sector context. Section 2 (Changes Required) then shifts from diagnosis to delivery, organising the response around the cross-cutting system changes required to address those needs collectively, recognising that many challenges such as skills pipelines, workforce participation, employer engagement and provision flexibility are shared across sectors and require coordinated system-level action.

Priority 1 **Digital Technology** (including Data and Technology-Enabled Services, Datacentres)

Digital capability is a critical skills priority for Berkshire over the next three years. The county has a strong, long-established, concentration of digital and technology-enabled businesses, including software development, telecommunications, data services and digital consultancy. There is also a significant and growing data centre cluster in Slough. Digital capability is also embedded across many other sectors in the local economy, including healthcare, life sciences, professional services, logistics and creative industries. As a result, demand for digital skills extends well beyond specialist technology firms and increasingly affects a wide range of occupations across the workforce.

Employers reported consistent recruitment pressure in specialist digital roles. These include software developers and engineers, data analysts and data engineers, cyber security specialists and cloud infrastructure engineers.

These occupations require advanced technical capability and practical experience in

areas such as secure coding, cloud architecture, predictive analytics, automation tools and cyber risk management. Employers highlighted that many candidates may hold qualifications but lack the applied technical competence needed to operate effectively in real workplace environments.

Alongside specialist roles, employers reported increasing demand for professionals who can lead digital transformation within organisations. Roles such as digital product managers, systems architects and AI implementation leads require a combination of technical knowledge, project management capability and commercial understanding. These roles are becoming increasingly important as organisations adopt artificial intelligence tools, cloud systems and data-driven decision-making processes.

“Almost every role is now affected. The distinction between ‘technical’ and ‘non-technical’ jobs is fading, because most positions require at least a basic level of digital and data understanding, alongside strong interpersonal skills.”

Medium Software Company (Interview)

awareness, digital collaboration, data literacy and effective use of digital systems are therefore becoming essential across the workforce.

Across the sector, employers highlighted a particular need to strengthen progression pathways into mid-level technical roles. While entry-level digital training exists, businesses often struggle to recruit candidates with the applied experience required for roles such as data analysts, infrastructure engineers and cyber security specialists. Strengthening progression routes from technical education into these roles will therefore be essential to support business growth and the wider adoption of digital technologies across Berkshire's economy.

There is therefore a clear need to provide improved baseline digital skills, including the use of AI, as well as improving the pipeline of skilled roles through higher level courses and upskilling opportunities.

“There is a significant digital skills gap. Many applicants lack even basic digital literacy, such as using the Microsoft suite or understanding how emerging technologies like AI are applied in healthcare. We see this gap at all career levels, and it makes recruitment more challenging.”

Large NHS Employer (Interview)

“The most urgent retraining needs sit at the intersection of infrastructure, data and cyber security. Platform and operations teams need stronger capability in cloud-native operations and DevOps practices, data teams must develop skills in production data engineering and governed analytics, and security teams require modern cyber defence skills as threats become more sophisticated.”

Large Technology Company (Interview)

Employers also emphasised that digital capability is becoming a baseline requirement across many occupations. Administrative staff, supervisors and operational teams are increasingly expected to work confidently with digital platforms, data systems and AI-assisted tools. Core competencies such as cyber

Priority 2 Creative Industries (including Screen/Film and High-End TV, Gaming, Digital Production and Content)

Employer engagement highlighted continued growth in screen production and digital content, supported by investment in studio facilities and the increasing use of technology-driven production methods. The sector is characterised by a mix of large studio environments and a significant number of freelancers and small creative businesses, which means workforce demand is often project-based and requires flexible skills development pathways.

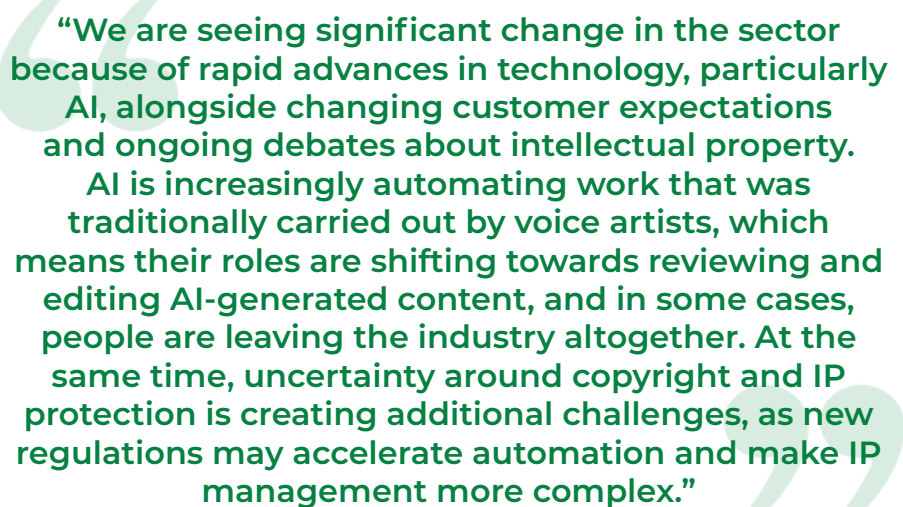
Employers reported recruitment pressure across a number of technical and production roles. In the screen sector, production technicians, studio technical staff and post-production specialists are in increasing demand. These roles require practical knowledge of production workflows, lighting and sound systems, editing software and studio safety protocols. Employers emphasised that real workplace experience is essential because production environments operate at pace and require staff who can contribute effectively from the outset.

As a result, employers highlighted the importance of strengthening opportunities for learners to gain real industry exposure before entering the workforce. This includes expanding supported industry placements, such as those delivered through T Level programmes, and developing closer partnerships between production companies, studios and education providers. Employers indicated that structured placements help learners understand the demands of production environments while giving businesses greater confidence in the work-readiness of new entrants.

Growth in digital production and immersive media is also creating demand for specialist roles such as virtual production technicians, game developers and digital artists. These occupations require capability in areas such as game engines, real-time rendering, interactive design and AI-assisted content

production. Employers noted that rapid advances in artificial intelligence are beginning to reshape creative production workflows, with some tasks increasingly automated and creative professionals shifting towards reviewing, editing and directing AI-generated outputs. At the same time, evolving debates around copyright and intellectual property mean that understanding IP management and the legal implications of AI-generated content is becoming increasingly important within creative roles.

Alongside technical production roles, employers highlighted the need for stronger project management and commercial capability within the sector. Creative producers and project managers must be able to coordinate teams, manage budgets and understand intellectual property, contracts and international collaboration. In an industry dominated by freelancers and project-based work, employers also stressed the importance of business skills such as contract management, financial planning and professional networking.



“We are seeing significant change in the sector because of rapid advances in technology, particularly AI, alongside changing customer expectations and ongoing debates about intellectual property. AI is increasingly automating work that was traditionally carried out by voice artists, which means their roles are shifting towards reviewing and editing AI-generated content, and in some cases, people are leaving the industry altogether. At the same time, uncertainty around copyright and IP protection is creating additional challenges, as new regulations may accelerate automation and make IP management more complex.”

Small Production Company (Interview)

Priority 3 Health and Life Sciences (including, Pharmaceuticals, Agrifood Technology and Health Technology)

Berkshire forms part of the Thames Valley life sciences cluster and wider UK's golden triangle of life sciences, which includes pharmaceutical manufacturing, biotechnology research, health technology development and agrifood innovation. Employers in the sector range from large multinational pharmaceutical companies to specialist research and technology firms. Across this ecosystem, organisations operate in highly regulated environments and rely on a workforce that combines scientific knowledge with practical production, engineering and regulatory capability.

Employer engagement highlighted ongoing recruitment pressure across several technical roles, particularly laboratory technicians, pharmaceutical process engineers, quality assurance specialists and applied research staff. However, employers emphasised that the challenge is often not a shortage of qualified candidates but a shortage of individuals with the practical, industry-specific skills needed to operate effectively in regulated production environments.

“We recently struggled to recruit a process engineer. There are many qualified candidates, but very few had experience with the specific scale-up processes and production systems we use, so we have had to rethink how we onboard and train new hires.”

Large Life Science Company (Interview)

In manufacturing and production environments, employers highlighted the importance of hands-on technical capability. Roles in regulated production require staff who can operate equipment, follow strict procedures, maintain detailed documentation and work confidently within Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) frameworks. Employers reported that these roles often require technician-level practical skills rather than advanced scientific qualifications, particularly in shift-based production settings where reliability and operational competence are essential.

Digital transformation is also reshaping skills demand across the sector. Employers reported a growing need for staff who can work with automation systems, data platforms and artificial intelligence tools used in research and production environments. The emergence of new roles focused on managing and integrating digital systems was identified as a likely development as life sciences organisations adopt more advanced digital technologies.

“The parts of the workforce that most urgently need retraining are those involved in automation and AI at site operations level. There is a clear gap in the ability to maintain and integrate AI systems into business processes, and roles focused on managing these tools, what you might call an ‘AI technologist’, are becoming increasingly important.”

Large Life Science Company (Interview)

Alongside digital capability, employers highlighted the importance of sustainability and regulatory expertise. Life sciences companies are under increasing pressure to improve environmental performance and reduce resource use, particularly in areas such as water and energy consumption within manufacturing processes. This is creating

demand for engineers and scientists who can combine traditional technical knowledge with sustainable engineering and bioprocessing skills. At the same time, regulatory requirements continue to expand, meaning staff must be able to integrate compliance considerations, sustainability requirements and customer expectations within research, development and production activities.

Employers also emphasised the importance of broader professional capabilities across the workforce. Scientific and technical staff increasingly need skills in communication, stakeholder engagement, project management and commercial awareness in order to operate effectively within complex research and production environments. Several employers highlighted the need to support scientists and technical specialists as they progress into leadership and management roles, particularly in SMEs and growing research-led companies.

Finally, employers stressed the importance of strengthening the connection between education and

real workplace practice. Greater use of modular provision and closer collaboration between employers and local education providers were identified as key ways to ensure that new entrants develop the practical skills required in regulated life sciences environments.

“Many of our clinical support staff and technicians need stronger training in compliance, documentation and digital reporting systems. We have introduced electronic systems for patient records, sterilisation logs and quality checks, but some staff still record information manually or inconsistently. That means we need retraining to ensure we meet regulatory requirements.”

Feedback at a Life Science Event



Priority 4 Defence, Security and [Advanced Manufacturing](#) (including Supply Chains)

Berkshire has a strong defence and advanced manufacturing sector, supported by a mix of large employers and specialist firms that are part of national and international supply chains. Key organisations based in or around the area include Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE), BAE Systems, Chelton, Collins Aerospace, Explosive Learning Solutions (ELS), Ministry of Defence (MOD), Thales and QinetiQ. The area also has a growing cluster of cyber and digital security companies, including CrowdStrike, Cybercrowd, Rapid7, Splunk and Ultra Cyber, showing how closely defence and digital technology are now linked. Priority 4 therefore has some crossover with Priority 1.

AWE Aldermaston is a major local employer and supports highly specialised engineering and scientific roles. It supports highly specialised engineering, scientific and defence related skills, and the recently announced [Global Compact Air Programme](#), headquartered in Reading, Berkshire and whose partners include BAE and Leonardo are responding to the skills challenges with initiatives, such as [Tempest](#).

Together, these organisations create strong and ongoing demand for engineers, technicians, scientists and project staff. This demand also affects smaller companies in the supply chain, which often find it harder to recruit and develop the skilled workforce they need.

Berkshire's defence sector is closely connected to a wider regional economy across the Thames Valley and nearby areas. This includes advanced manufacturing activity around Swindon and major defence and aviation operations at RAF Brize Norton. These links mean that skills and workforce need often cross local boundaries, particularly in areas such as engineering, logistics and digital systems.

There are also strong links to Heathrow Airport, which supports a large number of jobs in engineering, logistics, security and digital systems. Many of these roles overlap with defence-related work, particularly in areas like aviation engineering, systems integration and secure supply chains.

Across the sector, employers reported ongoing difficulty recruiting engineers and technicians. Roles such as mechanical and electrical engineers, engineering technicians and systems specialists are particularly hard to fill. While candidates often have the right qualifications, employers said they often lack practical experience of working with complex systems and real-world production environments. This is a particular issue in mid-level roles, where people need both technical skills and the ability to take responsibility for day-to-day operations.

Advanced manufacturing firms also reported demand for skilled machinists and precision manufacturing roles. Jobs such

“We would benefit most from co-designed curricula and work-integrated learning that combine strong STEM foundations with practical experience in high-assurance environments. Clear pathways into apprenticeships and engineering roles, alongside modular micro-credentials in areas such as CAD/CAM, data governance and digital modelling, would help close the gap between academic knowledge and the skills needed in regulated, technology-intensive workplaces.”

Large Weapons Manufacturer (Interview)

“At the expo, employers emphasised that the main areas needing retraining are operational coordination, digital systems capability and regulatory compliance. Heathrow's environment brings together aviation and non-aviation operations, which means staff across many roles must work with integrated systems, from scheduling platforms to digital supply chain interfaces. For example, people working in logistics, inventory management and customer service need stronger skills in data handling, digital dashboards and real-time reporting. Supervisors also need further development in leadership and team coordination so they can manage fast-moving operations where clear communication and rapid decision making are essential.”

Feedback at Heathrow Expo Event

as CNC operators and toolmakers require skills in CAD/CAM, digital manufacturing systems and quality control. As technology becomes more advanced, there is also growing demand for people who can work with automation, robotics and maintenance systems.

Employers also highlighted demand for a wider range of roles linked to defence infrastructure and aviation. These include logistics and supply chain roles, engineering support, digital technicians, compliance specialists and project managers. Many of these jobs offer good entry points into the sector but can be difficult to fill and retain.

The transition to electric vehicles (in defence and across other sectors) is driving demand for skills in EV maintenance, battery systems, charging infrastructure and diagnostics. Institute of the Motor Industry (IMI) data indicates a growing gap between workforce capability and EV uptake, with a shortage of technicians qualified to work on electric and hybrid vehicles. Employers increasingly require a mix of electrical, mechanical and digital skills, alongside knowledge of safety and energy systems, highlighting the need for updated technical pathways and flexible training provision.

Digital skills are becoming more important across all parts of the sector. Engineers and technicians are now expected to work with data, digital systems and automated processes, as well as traditional engineering tools. At the same time, strong cyber security capability is needed to support secure systems and protect sensitive data, particularly given the number of data centres and digital businesses in the area.

Employers also stressed the importance of compliance and regulation. Many defence-related businesses must meet strict standards around safety, quality and export controls. This creates demand for staff who understand these requirements, particularly in quality assurance and production roles. Smaller companies can find this especially challenging, as compliance can be a barrier to entering or growing within defence supply chains.

Employers also raised concerns about careers awareness and the reputation of the sector. Defence and advanced manufacturing careers are not always well understood, particularly by young people, and are sometimes seen as less attractive than other options. Employers reported that many potential recruits are unaware of the range of roles available or the progression opportunities within the sector. This was identified as a barrier to attracting new entrants, particularly into entry-level and technical roles. There is a need to improve how careers in defence and engineering are presented, including through more visible engagement with schools and colleges and initiatives such as sector-based careers events and festivals.



Priority 5 Critical Services (Health, Care, Visitor Economy, Food and Farming, Logistics)

These sectors are grouped together as a cluster because, although they operate in different parts of the economy, they share a number of similar workforce characteristics and occupational priorities.

Critical service sectors form a large and essential part of Berkshire's economy. Health and social care, logistics and transport, hospitality and tourism, food production and agriculture together employ a substantial share of the local workforce and play a central role in supporting both communities and wider economic activity. Berkshire's economic strategy recognises the importance of these sectors within the county's foundational economy, providing essential services, sustaining local supply chains and supporting major economic assets.

These sectors have been prioritised in the LSIP because of the strong recognition of these sectors' importance in the Berkshire Economic Strategy and the Get Berkshire Working Plan. Employer insights into skills can add a valuable dimension to improvements for these sectors.

Berkshire's Economic Strategy highlights the importance of improving productivity across the local economy, including within sectors that employ large numbers of people. Employers emphasised that strengthening workforce capability, improving supervisory and management skills and supporting the adoption of digital technologies are all important to raising productivity and service quality within these sectors.

The Get Berkshire Working Plan highlights the importance of improving equality of opportunity across these sectors by widening access to training and career progression. Many roles within health, care, hospitality, logistics and food production provide important entry points to the labour market for individuals who may face barriers to employment, including young people, career changers and those returning to work.

Employer feedback indicates that workforce demand across these sectors is expected to remain strong over the coming decade. Population growth, demographic change and rising service demand are increasing workforce needs in health, care and community-based services. At the same time, Berkshire's strategic location along the M4 corridor and its proximity to major transport infrastructure (including [Heathrow](#) - the UK's [largest port by value](#)) continue to drive expansion in logistics, distribution and supply chain activity. The visitor economy also remains an important contributor to employment across the county, supported by tourism assets, hospitality businesses and a growing events economy.

Health and social care organisations are among the largest employers in Berkshire and continue to report persistent workforce shortages. Recruitment pressures exist across nursing, care work, allied health professions and operational support roles. Employers also highlighted the growing importance of digital capability across health services, as systems increasingly rely on electronic patient records, digital diagnostics and AI assisted tools.

Employers in the Visitor Economy sector consistently reported difficulties recruiting and retaining staff in entry and operational roles, particularly those involving shift work, irregular hours or physically demanding tasks.

“Front-of-house and bar staff need ongoing development in customer service, cash handling, event service delivery and communication skills.”

Large Hospitality Company (Interview)

At the same time, the nature of many operational roles is changing. Employers reported that even entry-level positions increasingly require digital competence, regulatory awareness and strong interpersonal capability. Logistics and supply chain roles now rely heavily on digital fleet management systems, warehouse technologies and real-time data platforms. Similarly, health and care providers increasingly depend on electronic record

“Recruiting for front-line hospitality roles such as housekeeping has been difficult. Many applicants arrive with very little understanding of customer service or the realities of working in hospitality, so new hires often start ‘very green’ and require significant on-the-job training and coaching.”

Large Visitor Attraction Company (Interview)

progression opportunities, improving access to training and strengthening partnerships between employers and education providers will be important to support workforce retention and long-term career development.

Employers across these foundational sectors report that candidates often need upskilling in essential skills such as communication; many speak English as a second language and may require specific training on occupationally relevant vocabulary or cultural conventions.

A common theme across all of these sectors is the need to improve awareness of career opportunities and progression routes. Employers reported that many potential recruits, particularly younger people, have limited understanding of the range of roles available within these industries or the potential for long-term career development. This lack of visibility contributes to recruitment challenges and reinforces perceptions of these sectors as short-term or entry-level employment rather than viable long-term careers. The successful ERB and employer-led Care Festival in 2025 offers a model for these sectors and others moving forward.

Addressing these challenges will require a strategic focus on improving workforce awareness, strengthening skills development for workforce entry and supporting the adoption of technologies that can improve both service quality and productivity across Berkshire's foundational economy.

Finally, the emerging evidence in food production and farming points to further deep dive research to be done in the area to flesh out potential solutions for this sector.

Employers in food production and agriculture reported challenges recruiting people with the practical skills required for modern land-based work. Employers also noted that awareness of career opportunities in agriculture and food production remains relatively low.

“There is also a wider perception issue. Many people are unfamiliar with agricultural career pathways, which means we are competing with other sectors for a small pool of candidates who are willing to move beyond seasonal work into longer-term roles with opportunities to develop skills.”

Medium Farm Enterprise (Interview)

systems, digital compliance reporting and integrated data platforms to support service delivery.

Employers also highlighted the need to strengthen progression pathways within these sectors. Many roles provide entry points into the labour market but offer limited structured routes into higher-skilled or supervisory positions. Developing clearer

Priority 6 Construction, Retrofit, Electrification and Green Infrastructure

Construction is a critical enabling sector for Berkshire's economy. The sector supports housing delivery, infrastructure development, commercial growth and the transition to a lower carbon-built environment. Berkshire remains a local hub of growth and investment and is estimated to need to build around 6,800 new homes, per annum, over the next ten-years¹⁵. This equates to 68,000+ new dwellings. As a preferred investment location of choice, it will continue to see new commercial development come forward on existing and new, sites both in/out of town. In addition, the delivery of key infrastructure projects, such as Heathrow expansion and potentially the Western Rail Link to London Heathrow (WRLtH), means demand for construction skills is expected to remain strong over the coming decade. This means that medium term actions also need to consider the future pipeline of talent.

Employer engagement highlighted persistent recruitment pressures across core construction trades. Bricklayers, carpenters, electricians, plumbers and groundworkers were frequently identified as difficult-to-fill roles. Employers reported that while there is interest from new entrants, many applicants lack the practical experience and site readiness required to contribute effectively on live construction projects. As a result, companies often need to invest significant time in developing basic site competence before new recruits can operate productively.

The electrotechnical sector, represented by the Electrical Contractors' Association (ECA), faces increasing workforce pressures that are directly affecting the delivery of construction and Net Zero priorities.

Employers report a widening skills gap. Regulatory changes further restrict the role of part-qualified staff, increasing demand for fully competent electricians and placing additional strain on the pipeline.

Recruitment challenges are particularly acute within supply chain and subcontractor roles. Employers noted that outdoor construction roles requiring specific trade skills such as bricklaying, groundwork engineering and surveying are in particular short supply. These roles are essential to maintaining construction timelines and project delivery, meaning shortages in these areas can have knock-on effects across wider building programmes.

“We have recently experienced difficulties recruiting skilled electricians and electrical improvers. While some applicants hold the right qualifications, many lack the practical experience needed to work independently on site, interpret drawings and apply current standards such as BS 7671. There are also gaps in testing and inspection skills, as well as general site readiness, including communication and health and safety awareness.”

Small Electrical Company (Interview)

Another significant challenge identified by employers is the shortage of experienced workers at supervisory and technical levels. Site supervisors, project managers and construction managers require

a combination of technical construction knowledge, health and safety compliance expertise and the ability to coordinate multiple subcontractors and supply chains. Employers noted that progression from trade roles into supervisory positions is often informal and not always supported by structured training pathways.

“Within the current workforce, electricians and apprentice electrical engineers are the roles most urgently in need of new skills. Electricians increasingly need training in renewable energy technologies such as solar PV and EV charger installation, alongside skills in fire safety systems, emergency lighting and alarm maintenance. Apprentices also need stronger practical on-site training, including safe use of tools, fault diagnosis and compliance with current building and electrical safety regulations.”

Electrical Contractors Association (ECA) (Interview)

The sector is also undergoing significant transformation as the built environment responds to national net zero commitments and evolving environmental standards. Retrofit and energy efficiency improvements to existing

¹⁵ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c7ve76156ndo>

buildings are expected to generate substantial demand for new skills. Employers highlighted the growing need for workers who understand insulation systems, heat pump installation, energy-efficient ventilation, low-carbon heating technologies and building performance monitoring.

These developments mean that construction roles increasingly require a blend of traditional trade expertise and new technical knowledge related to sustainability and building performance. Workers must understand both the installation of new technologies and the regulatory frameworks governing energy efficiency, building safety and environmental compliance.

Digital capability is also becoming more important across the sector. Construction projects increasingly rely on digital tools such as Building Information Modelling (BIM), digital project management systems and electronic compliance documentation. As a result, workers at all levels require a baseline understanding of the digital systems used to plan, coordinate and monitor construction activity.

Employers also emphasised the need to strengthen the pipeline of new entrants into construction careers. Awareness of construction career pathways remains uneven, particularly among younger people who may not fully understand the range of technical and professional roles available within the sector. Employers also reported that many applicants lack site readiness, including the practical confidence to work independently on site, interpret technical drawings, follow current industry standards and demonstrate basic health and safety awareness. Improving awareness of apprenticeship routes, trade careers and progression opportunities, alongside strengthening practical site-based training, was therefore identified as an important priority.

Overall, employer feedback indicates that the construction workforce will need to expand while also adapting to new technologies, sustainability requirements and regulatory frameworks. Strengthening entry pathways, supporting progression into supervisory roles and embedding green and digital skills across the workforce will be essential to ensuring Berkshire has the construction capability needed to deliver housing, infrastructure and the transition to a lower carbon-built environment.



AGREED CHANGES AND ACTIONS NEEDED

This section sets out the changes required within Berkshire's skills system to address the key skills priorities identified in Section 1. The narrative is organised by the system level strategic changes required and acts as the accompanying narrative to the actions plans set out in Annex B.

The detailed delivery activity supporting these changes is set out in the sector action plans in Annex B. AI and Digital Transformation is pulled out in a separate table for ease of reading. The plans identify specific actions, delivery partners and monitoring measures for each priority sector. The tables link occupational pressures identified in Annex A to coordinated responses across education providers, employers and regional stakeholders.

Delivery will be coordinated through WDPs operating across the priority sector clusters identified in this plan. These partnerships bring together employers, training providers and relevant partners to focus on workforce development within specific sectors. Each WDP will be led by one or more employers as Thames Valley Skills Champions, and will be supported by the TVCC, ensuring that employer insight remains central.

The WDP model will also align with wider sector networks and collaboration across the Thames Valley. This approach reflects the reality that labour markets and supply chains often operate across local authority boundaries. Collaboration across neighbouring areas will allow employers and providers to share intelligence and develop coordinated responses while maintaining a clear focus on Berkshire's workforce needs.

Role of Partners

Delivering the LSIP requires close working between employers, education providers and public partners across Berkshire. Colleges, universities and independent training providers respond to the priorities identified by employers by adapting courses, developing new programmes and supporting apprenticeships, higher technical qualifications and short courses. Universities also contribute through higher level technical education and links between research, innovation and local industry.

Local authorities help align skills priorities with wider economic and growth plans and support access to training across the county. Jobcentre Plus helps connect jobseekers and people looking to progress in work with opportunities in priority sectors, while careers services and careers hubs help young people and adults understand local job opportunities and training routes.

Employers remain central to the process through WDPs and other forums, helping shape training provision, offering placements and sharing industry insight. Other partners, including employer representative organisations, sector bodies, local enterprise and growth organisations, and community and voluntary groups, also support the LSIP by sharing labour market insight, promoting opportunities to businesses and residents, and helping ensure that training opportunities are accessible to a wide range of people.

Agreed Changes

The agreed changes are cross-cutting and apply across priority sectors. They respond directly to the



skills needs identified in Section 1 and focus on areas where change is required.

Change 1: Sharing Responsibility for Skills Across the Thames Valley- Industry and Education

Change 2: Responding to AI and Digital Transformation

Change 3: Reducing Recruitment Pressure in Specialist Roles

Change 4: Upskilling to Improve Productivity

Change 5: Building Management Strength in SMEs

Change 6: Preparing for Net Zero and Emerging Technologies

Change 7: Improving Work-Readiness and Real-World Skills

Change 1: Sharing Responsibility for Skills Across the Thames Valley - Industry and Education

Employers across Berkshire reported that one of the barriers to training is practical rather than attitudinal. Many businesses recognise the importance of investing in workforce development but struggle to release staff for extended periods of training while maintaining day-to-day operations. This challenge is particularly acute for SMEs, where small teams mean that the absence of even one employee can have a significant operational impact. Cost, inflexible course structures and limited availability of modular provision were also identified as constraints.

The LSIP action plan therefore focuses on making better use of emerging national reforms designed to support flexible learning pathways, in particular, the introduction of the LLE. This creates an opportunity for providers and employers in Berkshire to develop shorter technical modules that allow employees to build skills progressively while remaining in work. Similarly, the development of apprenticeship units and shorter apprenticeship-based training offers potential for more targeted upskilling, particularly for existing employees who need to update specific technical competencies. The LSIP recommends a coherent Thames Valley wide offer of modular courses in response.

At the same time, employers recognised that flexibility alone will not resolve skills challenges. Businesses themselves must also continue to invest in training and development if they want to remain competitive in a rapidly changing economy. The LSIP therefore emphasises a shared responsibility model, led by WDPs, with volunteer employers acting as Thames Valley Skills Champions, where employers, providers and public partners work together to create skills solutions.

Change 2: Responding To AI and Digital Transformation

The need to respond to AI and other digital transformations is the golden thread through all the six sector priorities. The most consistent cross cutting theme was the growing interaction between technology, artificial intelligence, regulation and compliance. These issues are increasingly intertwined in how organisations operate, particularly in sectors such as life sciences, advanced manufacturing, digital services and energy related industries. Employers reported that new technologies are transforming how work is carried out, but they also introduce new regulatory, ethical and operational responsibilities.

Poorly implemented technology can introduce risks around data governance, security and regulatory compliance. In highly regulated sectors, organisations must ensure that automated processes remain transparent, auditable and aligned with regulatory frameworks.

In response, the LSIP recommends the setup of a Thames Valley Digital WDP that can support a co-ordinated Thames Valley wide training offer, alongside a Digital Skills Framework that will systemise skills for AI (technical as well as governance, safety and ethics) for learners. This WDP will also drive actions for Priority 1- Digital Technology.

In addition, the LSIP recommends co-ordinating a Thames Valley wide modular offer, providing simplified access to short training courses for businesses including SMEs.

Change 3: Strengthening Technician and Higher Technical Pathways

Employers across Berkshire consistently reported recruitment pressure in specialist technical, supervisory and higher technical roles. These roles are central to business operations and include engineering technicians, laboratory technicians, digital specialists, skilled construction trades, production and quality roles, and first-line and mid-level supervisors. Employers emphasised that vacancies are often hard to fill not because of a lack of applicants, but because candidates frequently lack the applied technical competence, workplace experience and occupational confidence to operate effectively in real working environments.

The LSIP therefore identifies a clear need to strengthen technician and higher technical pathways

“We are seeing recruitment bottlenecks in roles that combine advanced engineering with software and digital systems.”

Large Manufacturing Company (Interview)

aligned to priority occupations such as software development, cyber security, cloud infrastructure and data roles, alongside greater integration of AI, automation and data skills within technical pathways. In Life Sciences, it requires expansion and alignment of laboratory, production and quality assurance pathways, including the integration of Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP), digital laboratory systems and data-led processes. In Defence and Advanced Manufacturing, it requires strengthening engineering pathways aligned to increasing demand for automation, robotics, systems integration and regulatory capability.

In Construction, it requires increased capacity in retrofit and low-carbon installation roles alongside clearer progression into supervisory and site management positions.

Across all sectors, employers highlighted the need

for technical pathways to reflect the increasing convergence of disciplines, with roles requiring a combination of technical expertise, digital capability and applied problem-solving. This is particularly evident in areas such as digital engineering, AI-enabled roles, automated production environments and data-driven laboratory settings.

“When we recruited for an AI Product Engineer, we found many candidates with strong academic knowledge, but far fewer with the skills needed to move models into production and scale them in a business environment.”

Micro IT Company (Interview)

construction and critical services), expanding T Levels where they align to employer demand, supporting high-quality industry placements (for example, with the pilot project for the Creative sector) and preparing for the introduction of V Levels to provide clearer technical progression at Level 3. Alongside this, there is a need to strengthen the role of HTQs and modular higher-level qualifications, ensuring that they are aligned to priority occupations and provide clear progression into specialist and higher technical roles. This also relates to the LSIP recommendation of a coherent, promoted Thames Valley modular offer.

These priorities are reflected in the LSIP action plans, which set out coordinated, employer-led approaches through WDPs to strengthen technical pathways across sectors.

Change 4: Upskilling the Existing Workforce to Support Productivity

Employers across Berkshire consistently linked productivity improvements to the skills and capabilities of the existing workforce. While recruitment pressures remain significant, many businesses emphasised that improving productivity will depend equally on strengthening the skills of employees already in work. Employers highlighted gaps in digital capability, data use, automation, regulatory compliance and sector-specific technical skills.

Across all priority sectors, digital capability is now a core requirement for the existing workforce. Employers reported that staff at many levels need greater confidence in using digital systems, interpreting data and working with automation and AI-enabled tools. In part, the proposed Thames Valley AI framework will respond to this need.

across the priority sectors, with a particular focus on improving both the scale and relevance of provision at Levels 3 to 6, alongside clearer progression from Level 2.

In Digital, this requires a stronger higher-level pipeline

“We often saw gaps in leadership, communication and teamwork. The biggest challenge was finding people who could combine hands-on expertise with the softer skills needed to manage teams.”

Small Engineering Company (Interview)

The LSIP also identifies the need to make full use of current and forthcoming qualification reforms to support these pathways. This includes promoting and supporting new Level 2 occupational routes to strengthen entry-level progression (particularly in

In regulated and technical sectors, employers also identified increasing demand for compliance and standards-based capability. This includes areas such as Good Manufacturing Practice in Life Sciences, regulatory and export compliance in Defence, and quality, safety and environmental standards in Construction and other sectors. Employers emphasised that these requirements are becoming more complex and require ongoing upskilling of the existing workforce.

Sector action plans reflect this shift. In Digital, there is a focus on expanding modular training to support SME adoption of AI, cyber and data tools. In Life Sciences, provision is being aligned to include digital

“The priority is helping staff use AI in a meaningful and strategic way.”

Small Life Science Company (Interview)

laboratory systems, automation and data-driven processes. In Defence and Advanced Manufacturing, there is a focus on automation, robotics, digital manufacturing and regulatory compliance capability. In Construction, digital tools such as Building Information Modelling (BIM) are being integrated alongside retrofit and low-carbon skills. Across Critical Services, the emphasis is on short, practical upskilling in digital systems, compliance and operational capability.

A consistent theme across sectors is the need for more flexible delivery. Employers, particularly SMEs, reported that traditional training models are often not accessible due to time and operational constraints. There is therefore a need to expand modular and flexible provision that can be accessed alongside work. Across sectors, flexible modular courses supported by the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE), the new flexibilities from the Growth and Skills Levy (GSL) and new apprenticeship units will allow employees to build new capabilities over time. The LSIP will support these new initiatives and help to ensure effective implementation across our geography, including promoting a Thames Valley wide modular offer.

Change 5: Building Leadership and Management Capability Within SMEs

Small and medium-sized enterprises form the backbone of Berkshire's economy. The Berkshire Economic Strategy highlights the county's strong levels of business formation and entrepreneurial activity, with high rates of new business creation across sectors such as professional services, technology, hospitality and construction. While this supports economic growth, it also means many businesses scale quickly without structured approaches to developing supervisory and operational management capability.

Employer engagement during the LSIP process consistently highlighted gaps in first-line supervision and operational management, particularly in SMEs and across critical sectors. Employees are often promoted into supervisory roles based on technical expertise or experience rather than formal preparation. As roles evolve, these individuals are expected to coordinate teams, manage performance, oversee compliance and operate increasingly digital and data-driven systems, often without the necessary support or training.

“We often saw gaps in leadership, communication and teamwork.”

Small Engineering Company (Interview)

Across sectors, the required shift is towards more practical, work-based development focused on managing teams, overseeing digital workflows, maintaining compliance and supporting operational performance. This includes integrating supervisory

capability within technical and higher technical provision, particularly in sectors such as Construction, Life Sciences, Defence and Critical Services where these roles are critical to delivery.

Changes to the apprenticeship system (March 2026), including a stronger focus on younger entrants and entry-level pathways, reinforce the need to embed supervisory and operational management capability earlier within the skills pipeline and also in a modular, flexible way for the existing workforce. The LSIP asks providers

“The most urgent skills gaps are among staff moving into supervisory or management roles.”

Small Logistics Company (Interview)

to integrate these skills within study programmes, including new Level 2 occupational routes and other pathways leading directly to employment, so that learners enter the workforce with the core competencies required to progress into supervisory roles. This shift reduces reliance on apprenticeships as the primary route for developing management capability and ensures that progression is supported from the outset of an individual's career. In addition, the LSIP recommended Thames Valley modular offer can incorporate leadership skills in response to need.

Change 6: Preparing The Workforce for Net Zero and Emerging Technologies

The transition to Net Zero and the adoption of new technologies are reshaping skills requirements across multiple sectors. Employers highlighted growing demand for technical skills linked to sustainability, low carbon technologies and energy systems, alongside the need for staff who can understand regulatory expectations around environmental performance and reporting. The LSIP Progress Report in 2025 showed that providers have begun responding to this demand through new provision including short courses in sustainability, carbon literacy and green technologies, as well as technical training in areas such as heat pump installation, retrofit and low carbon construction systems. However, the demand continues to increase.

The action plan reflects this need through several strands of activity. WDPs are being used to connect employers and providers so that emerging technologies and regulatory changes can be reflected more quickly in training provision. In sectors such as construction the plan sets out the requirement for short courses linked to retrofit and sustainability. In the plan for health and life sciences, a key action is partnering with the Association of Health Tech Industries (ABHI) to better understand the specific skills required for net zero in this sector.

Change 7: Improving Work Readiness and Exposure to Real Workplaces for Learners

Alongside sector specific skills needs, employers consistently raised concerns about the work readiness of people entering the labour market. While many young people and graduates have strong academic foundations, employers across multiple sectors reported that awareness of local industries, confidence in workplace settings and understanding of professional expectations remain uneven. These issues are particularly evident for smaller businesses, which often lack the capacity to provide extensive early career training but still require new entrants who can adapt quickly to workplace environments.

In response, for the construction industry, the LSIP is promoting the development of Electrotechnical Training and Careers Alliances (ETCAs), bringing together employers, providers and partners to address regional challenges. Evidence from other areas shows that these alliances can support progression into apprenticeships, expand recognition of prior learning as well as upskill the existing workforce. The introduction of an ETCA in Berkshire and Oxfordshire reflects a growing need for coordinated, locally led solutions to strengthen the electrotechnical skills pipeline and support industry demand.

In addition, the LSIP recommends a Thames Valley wide Industry Associates programme for Defence. This Gatsby sponsored project will promote training for industry experts to provide their expertise to education and training providers, bridging the gap between industry and education, and providing lived experience of the workplace.

The LSIP will help the region prepare for significant reforms to the post 16 qualifications system. Government plans to introduce new V Levels as a third major Level 3 route alongside A Levels and T Levels, while also expanding T Levels. These reforms aim to create clearer progression routes into skilled employment, apprenticeships and higher technical education, with stronger employer recognition and engagement in qualification design. The LSIP sets out local implementation plans, driving collaboration through WDPs.

The LSIP also sets out plans to help develop and promote employer input into the new occupational certificates at level 2 introduced through qualification reform (particularly in critical services and construction). This change, if implemented well at local level, offers an opportunity for young people to enter the workforce with practical work ready skills.

Employers emphasised the importance of stronger exposure to real working environments during education, including placements, project based learning and closer collaboration between employers and providers. WDPs and the successful [Care Festival](#) have already demonstrated the value of this approach by bringing employers, students and educators together in practical settings and supporting more direct dialogue about the realities of working in different sectors.

The LSIP action plan therefore places continued emphasis on strengthening relationships between employers, colleges, universities and training providers. This is particularly important in sectors where perceptions remain outdated or where career routes are not well understood, including construction, defence, health and social care and the visitor economy. A range of activities in the plan address this- from the planned careers festivals, the T Level placement pilot, skills passports, through to the potential of the Industry Associates programme.

HOW SUCCESS WILL BE MEASURED

Employers expect that these changes will strengthen the supply of skilled workers across Berkshire, improve recruitment outcomes in specialist roles and support the adoption of new technologies across the economy. Over time, the LSIP aims to improve the alignment between employer demand and local skills provision, strengthen progression pathways for learners and increase opportunities for residents to access high-quality employment.

The Berkshire LSIP will take a pragmatic approach to monitoring progress over the three-year implementation period. The intention is not to attribute wider economic outcomes directly to the LSIP. Measures such as productivity, labour supply and recruitment pressures are influenced by a range of national and local factors beyond the skills system alone. Instead, the focus will be on whether the local skills system is responding effectively to employer priorities and whether employers, providers and partners are working together to implement the actions set out in this plan.

Progress will therefore be assessed primarily through evidence of changes within the skills system itself. This includes the development of new provision aligned to priority sectors, adjustments to existing curriculum content, increased collaboration between employers and providers, and the level of employer engagement in shaping training and workforce development activity.

The main source of evidence will come through the WDPs operating across the priority clusters. Each partnership will review workforce developments within its sector and provide an annual update summarising progress against the actions set out in the LSIP, emerging skills issues and areas where further collaboration or intervention may be required. This approach ensures that employer insight continues to inform the LSIP throughout its life, rather than being captured only during the initial evidence gathering phase.

Education and training providers will also contribute to this process through an annual response outlining how provision is evolving in response to employer priorities. Where possible, this will align with existing accountability arrangements (for providers with statutory obligations) and planning processes, such as provider strategic plans or funding agreements (for providers without statutory obligations), rather than creating a separate reporting requirement. Colleges, universities and independent training



providers will therefore be able to demonstrate how curriculum planning, course development and employer engagement activity respond to the priorities identified through the LSIP and the work of the WDPs.

Evidence used to assess progress will include a combination of qualitative insight and measurable indicators. These indicators are intended to track how the local skills system is responding to employer priorities and how effectively partners are collaborating to address identified skills needs. They focus on practical changes within the system rather than wider economic outcomes.

Proposed indicators for monitoring LSIP progress include:			
Indicator	What will be monitored	Source of evidence	Frequency
Employer engagement	Number of employers actively participating in WDPs and related LSIP activity	WDP attendance records and OBIE	Quarterly
Delivery of LSIP Actions	Progress against the actions and milestones set out in the LSIP sector roadmaps	Updates from WDPs, quarterly reviews	Quarterly
Sector insight	Updates from WDPs summarising workforce issues and progress on LSIP actions	WDP updates and meeting summaries	Twice a year
Provider response	Evidence of curriculum changes, new courses or expanded provision aligned to LSIP priorities	Provider planning documents and annual responses	Annual
Collaboration	Examples of employer-provider partnerships supporting training development, delivery or careers activity	Case studies and partnership activity	Quarterly
Learner participation	Participation in training provision aligned to LSIP priority sectors where data is available	Provider data and national datasets	Annual

Overall oversight will sit with the employer led LSIP Board. The Board will meet twice a year to review progress, consider emerging labour market evidence and agree any adjustments required to the plan. This will include reviewing updates from WDPs, provider responses and wider labour market intelligence from regional and national sources.

An annual progress report will be published to summarise activity, highlight examples of change within the skills system and identify any areas where further action may be required. This reporting process will ensure transparency and enable partners to track how the LSIP is influencing skills provision over time.

This cycle of review is intended to ensure that the LSIP remains a live plan over the three-year period. Regular engagement between employers, providers and partners will enable the system to respond to emerging workforce needs, strengthen collaboration across Berkshire and the wider Thames Valley economy, and ensure that skills provision continues to evolve in line with employer demand.



LSIP BERKSHIRE
SHAPING THE FUTURE WORKFORCE