

LSIP Priority Spotlight – “Building dynamic relationships between businesses and the education system”

Surrey Chambers of Commerce has been leading on a project called the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), which is designed to give employers a clear and strengthened role in shaping the local skills system. This article focuses in more detail on one of the priorities that emerged from engagement with local businesses.

Building dynamic relationships between businesses and providers

A key finding from the research was the importance of meaningful interactions between industry and education providers in ensuring the skills system is more responsive to needs of employers. This was seen first-hand through our sectoral focus groups where there were numerous examples of employers building direct relationships with local colleges.

It is this more informal “connective tissue” that will better enable providers to be responsive and support a move from basic transactional relationships with businesses to closer partnerships that deliver wider benefits.

Throughout the project we found that employers are generally not aware the state-of-the-art facilities available at FE providers, so the LSIP report highlights the importance for FE providers to consider different ways to “open up” campuses and make them more accessible to local businesses. This might involve:

- Providing dedicated facilities for use by SMEs
- Loan equipment or provide at below commercial rates to SMEs
- Secondments/shadowing opportunities for teaching staff
- Open day events
- Direct business involvement in course delivery.

Case study: The University of Surrey recently received funding for their [SpaceCraft project](#) to offer access to high quality space engineering facilities to businesses and colleges at below commercial rates.

Case study: As a new employer in the region facing a critical skills shortage, Ringway Infrastructure Services, needed a local partner to set up a new apprenticeship programme. East Surrey College responded promptly and coherently from day one, demonstrating their business-focused approach. Ringway and the College are now co-creating a Highways Maintenance apprenticeship, due to be launched in October 2023, that will have benefits for local residents, employers and the economy.

Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF)

The Department for Education has made available around £6 million of investment funding to support FE providers to collectively respond to the priorities set out in the LSIP. The investment is designed to support transformational activity and will be a key mechanism to help fund initiatives that identify ways to build these more dynamic relationships between businesses and providers. Local businesses should look out for further announcements about the specific local projects that will be funded and opportunities to get involved.

If you want to find out ways to partner with your local FE college, contact that LSIP team to help connect you: lsip@surrey-chambers.co.uk