

Annex B.2 – Employer Engagement Summary Reports

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Understanding the Education Landscape (1 February 2023)

This was a launch event hosted by the LSIP project team and was themed around the topic of “understanding the education and training landscape”. A range of guest speakers were invited to help frame the session and share their knowledge and experience. These included representatives from the Strategic Development Network, Balfour Beatty, ALPS ALPHI and Activate Learning.

Attendees were then invited to share feedback and comments related to three core themes:

1. Skills needs and challenges (now and in the future)
2. Relationship with the education and training system
3. Potential solutions and opportunities

Key themes and findings

- **Employability skills** – Young people struggling to develop the right soft skills. Requires employability skills to be embedded in curricula and courses.
- **Young people** – Difficulties attracting young people into careers and inspiring them into sectors they are less familiar with (e.g. Construction). Particular issue around making links between employers and young people. Opportunities for employers to align employment opportunities with autumn term and prioritise promoting locally and making it visible to young people.
- **SMEs** – Challenge for SMEs often raised is lack of capacity to invest time and money in training and development. Make assumptions about SMEs being aware of their skills needs, but in reality many need dedicated support to understand their needs.
- **Return on Investment** – More support needed for businesses to understand the Return on Investment from apprenticeships and T-levels, such as future proofing and sustainable recruitment. Careers and Enterprise Company a good contact to explain and share best practice.
- **Skills/provider portal** – General support from attendees that some form of “portal” solution would be welcomed.
- **Education sector capacity** – Cost of living crisis leading tutors to go back to old careers in industry where they can earn more money. Engineering and IT referenced by different colleges in which demand from learners is high, but unable to recruit staff. Key barrier is schools not having time or capacity to open up to businesses and develop interactions with learners.
- **Developing provider and business relationships** – Importance of engaging with providers as a network. Providers have specialisms but could support businesses when they make enquiries by pointing them in the right direction. Curriculum planning for most colleges happens during the summer, so good window of opportunity for

businesses to be engaged and influence. Best practice example from HSDC college in co-designing their T-Level construction course with employers.

- **Hidden pools of talent** – “Older means bolder”- opportunities to attract older workforce and returners with reskilling opportunities. Engineering and construction sectors have a particular interest in attracting more females into the workforce and to be more inclusive.

Basingstoke and Andover employer engagement event (21 February 2023)

The Hampshire Chamber of Commerce hosted an in-person LSIP event with local businesses and stakeholders. The objective was to engage with those present and seek feedback regarding the following questions:

- What are the current skills needed in your business to make it thrive and grow?
- What kind of skills training is required to address these needs?
- What method of partnership and delivery would best suit your business?

The event was opened by a representative from Hampshire Chamber of Commerce, who presented how Government had introduced the LSIP programme with an emphasis of putting employers at the heart of the skills system, ensuring it is responsive and fit for purpose going forward. Ross set the scene in terms of those currently experiencing labour shortages, skills gaps, productivity problems and an aging work force, outlining that having the right plan would deliver for businesses, the next generation, adapting the work force and customers.

A representative from Surrey Chambers of Commerce, presented Process and Emerging Priorities, sharing information that EM3 LSIP & Surrey Chambers of Commerce had already gleaned.

What are the current skills needed in your business to make it thrive and grow?

- The emerging priority arising from discussion was the need for soft skills, including listening, time keeping, politeness, and good telephone skills. Employers wanted someone who was curious, willing to be challenged, and flexible. In many cases it was not possible to recruit salespeople because they didn't want to talk on the phone as it was easier to send emails. There was agreement that we all learn from making mistakes, it creates people who problem solve and become more creative and have agile minds with critical thinking skills.
- Employers showed willingness to upskill their employees but needed various levels of funding, relative to the size of the company, for this. This could support more internal promotions and would lead to greater demand for management and leadership training, which would filter down throughout the business giving career development to individuals. Upskilling existing staff is a good way to retain a workforce that understands the culture of the business.

- Recruitment was highlighted as a particular issue, especially in the construction industry, as well as sales and telemarketing.
- Opportunities might be found in refugees as many had transferable skills and qualifications from overseas that would work in high and low skilled vacancies.

What kind of skills training is required to address these needs?

- It was said that in past times young people had a “Saturday job” while still at school. This was the time when they learnt social skills, how to be on time for work, how to communicate with employers, colleagues, and customers.
- It was thought that businesses would be able to help with this through offering good work experience placements, having a clear plan of what the young person would learn whilst there, not just sitting at a desk doing very little for a week or two. Thoughts that maybe a structure could be set up by the school as to what needed to be achieved during the placement. Another solution to this might be soft skills courses should be available at school and college for young learners to help them to be work ready. There was also a thought that businesses should go and mentor young people in all parts of education.
- It was said that “Education should be the path to the rest of your life” – not “Education for education’s sake”, often university is put as the best future rather than an apprenticeship. Employers also said that young people were being encouraged into further education, without consideration to their being right for an academic future. Employers also felt that often friends follow the crowd rather than making the right decision for themselves, a possible solution was to have a more focus on career options for all ages to help prevent this.
- Employers also said, “schools don’t understand business and commerce because they have not had experience of these sectors”, due to this it was felt teachers were not able to help young people assess “what they want opposed to what an employer wants”. It should be explained that employers want aptitude, people who want to learn and are happy to develop skills.
- It was agreed that upskilling should feature throughout the business, as well as on the job training, and people development. This might be achieved in house or by day release, even setting up an apprenticeship scheme for older people within the workplace. There are short courses for managers, this would involve employers letting educators know what their needs are. The educator would need to be accessible and flexible, this should then provide a full circle support of employers, education & providers.

What method of partnership and delivery would best suit your business?

- Looking at apprenticeships, often there was confusion from education providers which put employers off. The reverse of this was the poor wages put young people off being an apprentice.
- A suggestion was to have onsite delivery with the education being provided on site by a lecturer, or have bespoke programmes to suit each business, to ensure flexibility. Education needed to be timely, accessible, and cost effective was the overarching view.

Winchester employer engagement event (22 February 2023)

The Hampshire Chamber of Commerce hosted an in-person LSIP roundtable session with local businesses and stakeholders. The objective was to engage with those present and seek feedback regarding the following questions.

- What are the current skills needed in your business to make it thrive and grow?
- What kind of skills training is required to address these needs?
- What method of partnership and delivery would best suit your business?

The event was opened a representative from Hampshire Chamber of Commerce leading on the LSIP in the Solent region and supporting the Surrey and North/mid Hampshire LSIP. A representative from Surrey Chambers of Commerce, presented Process and Emerging Priorities; sharing information that EM3 LSIP & Surrey Chambers of Commerce had already gleaned.

What are the current skills needed in your business to make it thrive and grow?

- The emerging priority arising from discussion was the need for life skills, being resilient and able to cope, also front of house skills being able to be polite with good customer service. Admin, marketing, and sales were also considered good skills to have. Included in this was the thought that ethical skills should be applied in education, how would you support/treat colleagues, how to keep a confidence and the reasons why.
- There was a feeling that the IT school curriculum would benefit from including common workforce skills such as Excel. There was an agreement that there should be some understanding of professional level social media skills. There was agreement that IT was such a large part of the business life that there should be some understanding of data, coding, and programming.
- They felt that recruitment and retention was difficult as they were unable to match with larger business salaries, it was said that people can earn more if they have the right education. For this reason, they all wanted to upskill their employees but needed funding for this, different levels of funding relative to the size of the company, this would lead to more internal promotions.
- Recruitment was an issue particularly in hospitality, rural skills and food production.

What kind of skills training is required to address these needs?

- Agreement that soft skills were needed in finance, communication, behaviour, and accountability. Employers agreed that potential employees need to be taught how to recognise what they can bring to a business.
- Apprentices would be better taught by employers, as the employee would learn from their experience. This would include a system for small businesses to send staff to colleges or training provider to bring them up to speed.
- It was agreed that upskilling should feature throughout the business, as well as on the job training, and people development. This might be achieved in-house or by day release, even setting up an apprenticeship scheme for older people within the workplace. There are short courses for managers, this would involve employers letting educators know what their needs are. The educator would need to be accessible and flexible, this should then provide a full circle support of employers, education & providers.
- There was agreement that there was better support for engineering in the north of the county. Employers wanted funding for re-training people after long term sickness or maternity leave.
- Educators said there were health and safety concerns when going for site visits, they needed funding for safety equipment, resources, and licensing. Employers said it was an issue that employees often must go off site for training which leaves the business with a shortage.

What method of partnership and delivery would best suit your business?

- The Kickstart scheme was agreed to be a brilliant programme, employers thought they needed this type of funding to run these schemes more often.
- It was agreed that there needed to be a greater coordination between the business, schools, colleges and universities, to create a cohesive ready for work learning programme.
- Understanding of T-levels is limited by some employers. There is some work to be done to sign post employers to relevant information and additional support to help employees progress onto an apprenticeship after completing a T-level.

Farnborough Employer Engagement Event (24 February 2023)

The Hampshire Chamber of Commerce hosted an in-person LSIP roundtable session with local businesses and stakeholders. The objective was to engage with those present and seek feedback regarding the following questions.

- What are the current skills needed in your business to make it thrive and grow?
- What kind of skills training is required to address these needs?
- What method of partnership and delivery would best suit your business?

The event was opened by a representative from Hampshire Chamber of Commerce, who pointed out that for many employers there, would have said at some point skills is a number one priority, be it the lack of skills, skills gaps or recruitment of a skilled workforce; there are issues in the region with labour shortages, skills gaps and productivity problems as well as an ageing workforce.

A representative from Surrey Chambers of Commerce, presented Process and Emerging Priorities; sharing information that EM3 LSIP & Surrey Chambers of Commerce had already gleaned.

What are the current skills needed in your business to make it thrive and grow?

- The emerging priority arising from discussion was the need for a good attitude, to be passionate about what they did, resilient and to be good with people.
- Employers said that there should be courses at school/college that dealt with employers' expectations, such as time keeping, communicating with colleagues, answering the telephone, encouragement to be flexible and adaptable, having a pro-active nature. Along with this would be good CV writing, interview techniques with mock interviews being given, probably educators will need to have training in these areas themselves.
- Similar to the event, above, feedback from employers focused on potential changes to the IT school curriculum on skills such as Excel, data, coding and programming, and an understanding of professional social media such as use of LinkedIn.
- In Farnborough, recruitment was an issue particularly in the aviation sector (all departments), the health and social care workforce, lab technicians, software developers, general, digital & technical, electricals and fire alarm engineering, all these sectors struggled to fill their positions.

What kind of skills training is required to address these needs?

- A high priority was training to be given on social skills, time keeping, communication with employers, colleagues, and customers.
- Employers also need to be trained regarding inclusivity and accessibility in the workplace, with a need for more inclusive language generally.
- Employers said training needs to be shaped to reflect a career not a job, this is the beginning of a pathway on which people can see how they would grow. Employers thought they would benefit from younger employees who were very sustainably focused, these skills should be encouraged to aid the company to get to Net Zero carbon.
- Employers said more information or guidance should be given before training is set up. Equally, information of the various training organisations and their offers needs

to be more visible. Although apprentices were considered a great way of taking on new employees, there was a problem with the 20% release time / 6 hours a week and seeing this through, it puts pressure on the business having someone out for this length of time.

- Consideration was given to teachers/mentors/trainers/lecturers pay. It was said “The best ones don’t teach” this was because they received a greater salary doing the trade itself, rather than having the hassle of teaching others. The educators themselves need to have more training or salaries need to increase to encourage a greater skill set to become educators.
- It was agreed that upskilling should be done with people returning to the workplace, there should be bespoke focus on training older workers (50+), women, and those returning to work after an absence.

What method of partnership and delivery would best suit your business?

- There needed to be a greater coordination between the business, schools, colleges, and universities to create a cohesive ready for work learning program, with a clear career pathway that links colleges to businesses for apprenticeships. Perhaps flexible apprenticeships could be looked at, a candidate shared between two companies. An older apprentice may have more transferable skills providing an opportunity for a front-loaded apprenticeship which might accelerate the learning process.
- Employers wanted a more coherent link to private training providers. Sector specific career fairs matching the young people/potential employees who attend to have meaningful conversations. 16 - 18-year-olds or even older should also be invited to these, this might address a local recruitment issue, both at a technical college level and at a mid-career level. There should be workshops, influential speakers, and calls to action with measurable outcomes.

Electrical Contractors Skills roundtable (1 March 2023)

On behalf of the LSIP project, the [Electrical Contractors Association](#) (ECA) hosted an in-person roundtable session with their local member businesses to discuss the skills needs and challenges of the industry. A curriculum specialist from [North East Surrey College of Technology](#) (Nescot) joined the session to help provide a college perspective to the discussions. The objective of the semi-structured session was to cover three core themes:

- Skills needs and challenges (now and in the future)
- Relationship with the education and training system
- Potential solutions and opportunities

Executive summary

- **Digital and low carbon technology** – Industry becoming more innovative with increasing use of IT, digital, and data skills. This is alongside acceleration of market to

low carbon and greater efficiency. Opportunity to align with promotion of exciting careers routes as electricians.

- **Progression from technical diplomas to apprenticeship** – A key challenge highlighted is the progression/conversion of people from Level 2 or Level 3 technical (knowledge-based) diplomas onto apprenticeships or another work-based route to develop practical experience with employers for them to become fully competent and qualified. The sector needs more fully qualified electricians, many are being educated in FE colleges, but are then being left behind in the middle. Opportunity to improve how you bridge the gap from technical diplomas to becoming a fully qualified and competent electrician.
- **Aging workforce** – The industry faces challenges around a mature/aging workforce, with some experienced electricians due to retire. Businesses are then struggling to replace those experienced electricians and thereby don't have the resource to mentor apprentices.
- **Challenge to support micro and small businesses** – There are many micro and small companies in the industry which makes it harder for them to engage with colleges and take on apprentices as they lack the resources and capacity. There is an untapped potential for more apprenticeship starts, but there are challenges around the consistency of work in order to be able to take on an apprentice full-time.
- **Connections between industry and education system** – There can be a disconnect between businesses and colleges in terms of businesses knowing what support is available and ways they can work more strategically with a college. Colleges are also facing challenges around recruiting experienced trainers and offering work experience/interactions with electrician businesses to support their learners to develop necessary skills and experience.

Key themes and findings

Digital and low carbon technology

The industry continues to develop and become more innovative, but the increasing skills needs related to IT, digital (including Computer-generated imagery), and data present a challenge. This is even more of an issue for older electrical engineers with them being able to use laptop/tablets effectively. Greater focus and investment is needed to ensure courses match industry needs, and for businesses to upskill their staff.

Alongside new digital technology needs, there is an acceleration in the market towards low carbon and greater energy efficiency. Everything is moving towards electric (including heat pumps and electric heating) and that is bringing significant demands to the industry now and in the future. There appears to be little training for these emerging new technologies, with battery storage specifically mentioned. There was a sense that companies should be prepared

to invest more in training and development for their teams to help future-proof their businesses.

There was a sense that some schools continue to direct students towards A levels and university, rather than promoting apprenticeships. As an industry, it is often not promoted to young people in the same way as other sectors, but there is an opportunity to align these new innovations with the promotion of exciting career routes as an electrician.

Progression from technical diploma to apprenticeship

A key challenge highlighted is the progression/conversion of people from Level 2 or Level 3 technical diplomas onto apprenticeships or another work-based route to develop practical experience with employers for them to become fully qualified.

Attendees reflected on there being many electricians' "mates" and labours in the market who undertake short electrical courses with an expectation that this will mean they are fully qualified. There is a lack of understanding amongst learners and also the way certain courses are promoted that encourages people to take these short courses. As a result, learners then typically do not want to do the apprenticeship or develop the necessary practical experience, but at the same time have expectations around good rates of pay. Many "drop off the radar" and pick up more informal work elsewhere as unqualified electricians which presents a challenge for the sector.

There was significant support from attendees for the apprenticeship route to become a qualified electrician, and each business in the room has consistently taken on multiple apprentices each year. There was a general consensus, that the industry needed to take on more apprentices, but with the necessary support to unlock some of this demand.

Overall, the industry needs more qualified electricians, there are many are being educated in FE colleges and by commercial providers on technical diplomas and short courses, but many are then being left behind in the middle and not progressing to become fully qualified through the apprenticeship or other work-based route. There is a need for greater focus on improving how to bridge the gap from courses like the Level 2 technical diploma to becoming a qualified electrician.

Aging workforce

A key challenge highlighted was around a mature/aging workforce, with some experienced electricians due to retire. Businesses are then struggling to replace those experienced electricians and thereby don't have the resource to mentor apprentices. For effective apprenticeship programmes, there needs to be a balance between the number of experienced staff who are then matched up with new starters to impart their knowledge, but also ensure a safe working environment.

Challenge to support micro and small businesses

There are many micro and small companies in the industry which makes it harder for them to engage with colleges and take on apprentices as they lack the resources and capacity.

There is an untapped potential for more apprenticeship starts, but there are challenges around the consistency of work to be able to take on an apprentice full-time. It was felt that there is not enough support for SMEs to explain the different opportunities and options available (e.g. work experience, T-Levels, apprenticeships) that would support their business or to join up conversations with larger employers in the industry.

Connections between industry and education system

There was a sense of a disconnect between local businesses and colleges in terms of businesses knowing what support is available and ways they can work more strategically with a college. However, there was a positive example of a business having a more “strategic” partnership with the local college to reserve places on their upcoming apprenticeship courses before having found suitable candidates. It was noted that this helps the college with their forward planning and recruitment of young people on to their programmes. Attendees noted their preference to have a partnership with a set college and get a good consistent quality and pipeline of candidates coming through.

The college representative mentioned that their ability to respond to businesses’ needs can sometimes be limited due to requirements from the relevant accrediting body or apprenticeship framework, however they were always open to hear from businesses about their needs to see if it might be something that could support.

Colleges are also facing challenges around recruiting experienced trainers and being able to offer work experience/interactions with electrical businesses to support their learners to develop necessary skills and experience. This challenge is particularly acute with T-Levels. There is significant demand on the learner side, but limited interest from employers, who often reference they lack the right insurance coverage to have a young person on-site. There was a practical issue referenced about a learner having the appropriate ECS “card” to be allowed on commercial sites.

The ask of the FE sector on businesses is to have better access to them and support with providing meaningful interactions with their learners to encourage their development. This would have benefits for local businesses in shaping the candidates coming out of colleges to better reflect their needs, particularly when it comes to employability and soft skills.

There was a feeling that greater collaboration and partnership working was required to support both local businesses and local colleges to deliver on their shared ambitions.

Possible solution and next steps

Several ideas and possible solutions were highlighted as part of the session. On a practical level, the college agreed to look into ways they could solve the issue with on-site health and safety cards for their younger learners.

There was a key theme around the importance of collaboration and partnership working between local colleges and businesses. Through the ECA group there could be more opportunities to build those connections and consider ways that a strategic grouping of

electrical businesses could work together. This could support the local education and training system to be more responsive to their needs, but also better understand what colleges need from them to make this a reality. This could also help to support the micro and small businesses in the sector to raise awareness about the opportunities available.

There was a discussion about improving the visibility of potential candidates that businesses could recruit from local colleges, potentially through some form of online brokerage. This could be a solution that is considered in the future and also help to improve the conversion of Level 2 learners onto apprenticeships.

Other suggestions were for some form of graduation event for learners when they complete their Level 2 course where there would be awards, presentations and networking with local recruiting businesses. Another initiative that mentioned was a “finishing school” approach where learners on the Level 2 course could be supported to get the practical experience needed with a local employer to become fully qualified. There was a feeling that the industry needed initiatives like this and to work in partnership to demonstrate a trusted route for prospective electricians.

Hospitality and Tourism roundtable (9 March 2023)

This session was held with businesses that sit on the Board of *Visit Surrey*, and focused on the three core LSIP themes:

- What are the main skills gaps your business faces now and in the future?
- Describe your businesses’ experience with the skills and training system (i.e. what has worked well, what could have been improved, are there any barriers?)
- What are some of the solutions to the challenges identified? (inc. what role can businesses plan in supporting colleges and training providers?)

Key themes and findings

- **Confidence –**
 - Starting a new role can be challenging. Employees often lack the confidence in themselves and their existing skills. Employees are lacking the confidence to ask questions and show an interest in learning on the job.
- **Employability skills –**
 - There is a lack of basic skills, for example, how to answer a phone, write an email, hold a team meeting, socialise in an office.
 - Educational institutions struggle to offer soft skills as they are non-accredited, and it is usually an optional choice which means it is not taken up.
- **Digital skills –**
 - Social media skills are not the same as running a company website or creating promotional material. A better definition of the skills required at CV and interview level is needed.
 - Older generations can be reluctant to learn new skills and may need additional support / incentives.

- Technology is so fast paced it can be difficult to keep up. When you look into bringing someone in for training, by the time you find the right course, book them in, get them in – the course may have changed, or your requirements could have changed.
- Would like to see digital capabilities added to all curriculums.
- **Hybrid working**
 - We have not recovered from this. We are still focused on hybrid working, we need to come out of this and get back to the office environment.
 - Many employees starting now had their entire degree delivered virtually. This causes huge issues when joining a workplace.
- **Expectations**
 - Younger staff sometimes lack ambition for promotion and can have unrealistic salary expectations. There are also observations of young people job- and company hopping.
- **Work Placements**
 - Very valuable for students and the unemployed. It is a great way to ‘shape’ an employee into what you need.
 - Sector has an ability to take volunteers on as they do not have the right experience.

IT sector focus group (14 March 2023)

This LSIP focus group was held to do a deep dive into the main skills gaps and challenges facing employers in the IT sector. The session was introduced by representatives from Surrey Chambers of Commerce. Labour market intelligence and a snapshot of employer survey insights related to the sector were used to help set the context for the session. Discussions were based around the following topics:

- What are the main skills gaps your business faces now and in the future?
- Describe your businesses’ experience with the skills and training system (i.e. what has worked well, what could have been improved, are there any barriers?)
- What are some of the solutions to the challenges identified? (inc. what role can businesses play in supporting colleges and training providers?)

Key themes and findings

- **Sales and business development** – Struggling to recruit into sales and business development roles- tech sales can be challenging for new starters. More selling down virtually and less in-person, which requires a more specific skillset. Have found recruiting outside of IT sector to be effective. Recruit for skills based on selling and account management and then upskill on the technology/product.
- **Engaging with the skills system** – Employers said they don’t know how to share or don’t have time to share what problems they are facing to inform training providers and what exact courses etc colleges/training providers should introduce.

- **Technical skills** – Hardware engineers cited as being needed. One Cyber security business highlighted a need for skills in networking, fire walls, and a “deep knowledge” of the suite of Microsoft 365 products.
- **Employability and basic digital skills** – Attitude and employability skills are important as well as an interest in the sector. Other important non-technical skills included: cyber awareness, presentations, and customer service. Frustration that the level of basic skills on Microsoft Office was lacking in many candidates. This should be embedded as standard.
- **In-house training** – There was a higher prevalence of “in-house” training being delivered compared to other sectors. One business had found value in “Google Classroom” which internal staff use to upskill and do short bitesize courses.
- **Apprenticeships** – Challenge with apprenticeships is retention and staff being headhunted following completion of the programme. Hybrid-working also an issue. Requirement to have apprentices in the office a certain amount of time, but many IT businesses have moved to either virtual or hybrid working, so less aligned to their needs and ways of working. Employers need more confidence to see that apprenticeships can be delivered properly by a provider. Although one employer mentioned that their younger apprentices are great to train up, easier to mould, and deliver value to the business quickly.
- **T-Levels** – Lack of awareness about T-levels and benefit of them to employers. College representatives highlighted a significant challenge in finding businesses to sign-up to take on T-level work placements.
- **Diversity and inclusion** – Diversity was discussed and the lack of women in IT being a key challenge the sector faces.

Construction sector focus group (14 March 2023)

This LSIP focus group was held to do a deep dive into the main skills gaps and challenges facing employers in the Construction sector. The session was introduced by representatives from Surrey Chambers of Commerce. Labour market intelligence and a snapshot of employer survey insights related to the sector were used to help set the context for the session. Discussions were based around the following topics:

- What are the main skills gaps your business faces now and in the future?
- Describe your businesses’ experience with the skills and training system (i.e. what has worked well, what could have be improved, are there any barriers?)
- What are some of the solutions to the challenges identified? (inc. what role can businesses plan in supporting colleges and training providers?)

Key themes and findings

Overall, there was a lack of understanding and awareness from businesses about what was available and how they could be working more closely with local colleges.

- **Promoting the sector** – Inspiring young people is key, but there is a missing link between the exciting opportunities and demand in the sector and what is being promoted in schools and colleges.
 - Careers guidance is limited on the construction sector and schools' promotion of the sector can be limited in targeting, scope and prospects.
 - A solution for this might be more interactions between teachers/careers advisors and business to help improve understanding about the sector.
- **Employability skills** – Challenge finding the right people for jobs based on basic employability skills and attitude.
 - Evidence shared of some young people who want to go into construction not enjoying more “formal” classroom-based learning and are instead keen to start working. Challenge for learners on non-apprenticeship college courses can be that they are still required to do most of their learning in the classroom/on campus, rather than develop experience with employers.
 - Learners still lacking basic levels of English and Maths (despite the requirement in many courses). Opportunity to “make it real” and embed learning these skills into job roles and focusing on ways these skills are practically used.
- **Skills gaps** – The sector faces a skills shortage currently, but this will only be exacerbated by transition to net zero and retrofitting.
 - Specific skills needs referenced were roofing, dry-liners, quantity surveyors and scaffolding.
 - Data and digital is becoming increasingly important.
- **Supporting SMEs** –
 - Responsibility on larger employers in the sector to work with their SME supply chains and contractors to support them and develop courses that meet industry needs – some examples of this happening.
 - Opportunity for colleges to provide additional support targeted at SMEs to improve their awareness of what is available and better understand their skills gaps.
 - SMEs would benefit from upskilling courses that “bolt on” to existing qualifications. Less of an interest in apprenticeships as lack capacity to make them work for their business.
- **Collaboration between industry and education** – Collaboration between the FE sector and business is crucial.
 - Employers need trainers at colleges to be from industry. More could be done to get employers to support in upskilling some of their staff as tutors and colleges then provide “backfill” for elements of teaching that require more formal qualifications. Could there be funding for this type of training, or could colleges offer discounts to employers that upskill industry trainers?

- CITB provide significant support (advice & guidance and financial) to construction businesses. Opportunity to promote this more widely through the LSIP process and have greater join-up with their support offers.
- **Strategic networks –**
 - Industry bodies and institutes could play a key role in facilitating discussions with education and training providers to ensure they are receiving information about the sector to support how they respond through curricula and business engagement.
 - Appetite to set up a strategic network amongst local construction employers and training providers to continue to take this conversation forward and deliver change.
- **Diversity and inclusion –** Is a challenge and the industry is missing out on hidden talent.

Creative sector focus group (20 March 2023)

On behalf of the LSIP project, Hampshire Chamber of Commerce and Surrey Chambers of Commerce held an in-person roundtable session with Surrey-based employers to discuss the skills needs and challenges of the creative industry. The objective of the semi-structured session was to cover three core themes:

- Skills needs and challenges (now and in the future)
- How can freelancers and creative professionals on short contracts maintain and upgrade their skills
- How can the creative career sector attract new talent and diversify the workforce

Executive summary

- Creative education is not currently meeting creative industry needs. The games industry perceives an international talent pool and is increasingly drawing on talent from overseas which has been trained in digital art from the age of 12.
- Entry is largely degree level and above so the cost of training and risk, therefore, falls on entrants to the sector rather than employers which make creative careers inaccessible to a wide range of people. Opening pathways for a more diverse labour force are essential.
- Graduates from local colleges and universities find it difficult to get work experience either as part of the course or informally but employers are looking for people joining the industry to have this experience.
- A hub, catalyst or brokerage service is needed to make the transition from education to employment smoother and we need to be bold and innovative in this approach.
- An unusually high percentage of the creative workforce is freelance, the digital skills of this group are at risk if affordable bite sized training is not made available. The highly

fluid creative labour force also needs opportunities for CPD which are not dependent on employers and requirements include leadership, project management, securing funding including grant funding and financial management.

Key themes and findings

Skills shortages are a problem

The creative industries contribute over £100 billion to the UK economy, and it is estimated that by 2032 the sector will need to recruit 1.2 million entrants. However, meeting the needs of this vibrant and growing sector is a challenge and the existence of a skills gap is the most significant challenge to overcome. To address the skills gap will require a multi-faceted approach that is bold and innovative, requiring change across the education sector and in recruitment whilst public policy will need to be closely examined. Issues of diversity and inclusivity need to be addressed and bridges to support the transition from education to work need to be built. An effective support network needs to be developed and the establishment of a regional hub should be explored.

Connection between the education system and industry

A key challenge that emerged from the discussion is that creative education does not meet industry needs. Arts subjects such as Music and Art at GCSE level, for example, are seen to be outdated and require modernisation to inspire young people and meet the needs of a fast-changing creative and digital sector. Soft skills such as self-efficacy, networking and collaboration should be introduced to children from an early age to equip them with the necessary tools to eventually work in the industry, whilst inclusive extra-curricular activities should be encouraged.

To progress in the creative industry, education to degree level is seen as a minimum requirement. However, as a representative from the gaming industry explained, a skills gap exists amongst graduates due to the siloed nature of the British degree system and that teamwork and collaboration are only developed at master's degree level. It is essential that a creative pathway to tech is developed, and greater focus and investment are needed to ensure courses match industry needs.

Conversely, further education colleges are facing challenges around setting up work placements in the creative sector due to issues around the small size of many creative companies and the growth of a working from home culture, which are limiting the opportunities available for young people to enter the workplace. Farnborough College of Technology outlined the difficulties they have faced in this respect with only 28 out of 300 digital students lined up with work placements this year and their representatives explained that the prevalence of homeworking has meant there are considerable difficulties contacting the person in charge to organise placements.

Challenges to support creative professionals

The average size of creative businesses, including digital creatives, is about half the size of businesses in other sectors and twice as many freelancers work in the sector compared with

other sectors. Non-digital creative businesses are even smaller. As such, there are few opportunities for engagement with infrastructure such as educational establishments and apprenticeship hubs. There are few opportunities for work placements and promotion whilst career progression and CPD is limited. Furthermore, creatives need to understand how to maintain a healthy work-life balance to avoid becoming burned out and require mentoring and ongoing support to ensure they do not become overwhelmed.

Attendees reflected that freelance creatives require support to work effectively and identified several areas in which this could be provided: supporting freelancers to make the transition from education to work; enabling access to affordable training and CPD; examining the issues of low pay and insecure work, particularly from under-represented groups. Recognition that a significant number of people working in the sector are neurodivergent and may have different learning styles is also important to note.

Development of business skills such as marketing and bookkeeping were also identified as key requirements for freelancers; a skills gap analysis should be carried out to identify needs and support in identifying the availability of these services or the provision of training.

Why the region matters

Our region is among the biggest producers of creative graduates, but graduate retention is low and first jobs within the sector are often London-based, whilst local businesses are unable to recruit the skilled staff they require. Opportunities for work-based placements and collaborative working are greater in London so a strong regional sector is required to avoid the necessity of moving to London to facilitate career progression.

The missing link

An overarching conclusion that emerged from the discussion was that across the board, graduates are not completing their studies in a way that is industry ready. In the high-tech digital sector, for example, collaborative skills are lacking amongst graduates whilst smaller micro-business lack the resources to train recruits. Within the art gallery sector, for example, employment prospects for non-Masters students are stagnant and pay for highly qualified employees is poor.

To broker the transition from university to business, a catalyst is required to ensure graduates are nurtured and given the support they need and are equipped with the necessary skills to successfully launch a successful career in the creative sector.

We need to think globally.

Without a doubt, creative talent is abundant within our region but knowledge gaps in the education of our young people exist that are already influencing the sector. An example was provided by a representative from the gaming industry to illustrate this point: we don't teach digital art in schools in the UK while our European counterparts are ensuring their young people are taught these skills. Of note, the gaming industry is highly successful on a global scale but is increasingly reliant on sourcing skilled employees from outside the UK to meet industry requirements.

Meeting the demand for skilled professionals is further complicated by barriers to international recruitment following the introduction of a points-based visa system post-Brexit; recruitment of skilled professionals to fill vacancies within the sector is both expensive and time-consuming.

Regional hubs

An idea that emerged from the discussion which resonated with the group was the establishment of a central creative hub within the region. Mark Bounds from TIR Music is involved with a project currently in development in Sweden and spoke in detail about the opportunities that a central regional hub could provide. In brief, a central creative hub that is a control centre with a broad knowledge base would provide a focus which feeds into satellite hubs that in turn feed back to the central hub. The hub would provide access to skills development, knowledge exchange, networking, peer support and mentorship across the region. It will foster collaboration and help to establish strong community links. The Manchester Creative Network was cited as a source of inspiration.

Risk needs to be acknowledged

Working within the creative industry comes with risk. Entry to the sector is largely degree level and above so the cost of training and risk falls to entrants rather than employers. Obtaining a degree requires parental support and is a significant financial commitment, particularly in sectors of the industry where master's or PhD level qualification are required. This makes creative careers inaccessible to a wide range of people. Employment in occupations that are traditionally low paid such as museums and art galleries, comes with risk due to low levels of pay. Working in a micro-business or a freelance capacity on short term-contracts is also risky with little or no support or opportunities for skills development.

Diversity needs to be addressed

To meet the challenges of a growing workforce, barriers to study such as cost must be addressed. Women, people from minority populations and people from working class backgrounds are underrepresented in the sector, should be encouraged, and supported to follow this path. Neuro-diverse individuals are over-represented in the sector and neuro-diverse young people should be encouraged to follow their passions and feel supported in their transition to work.

Possible solution and next steps

- Several ideas and possible solutions were discussed in the meeting with an emphasis on the development of fully formed, work-ready employees equipped with the skills to work effectively in the creative sector. The gap between study and work needs to be closed but this should start at secondary school level with the transformation of the curriculum to incorporate the teaching of digital skills and digital arts along with softer skills such as collaboration and self-efficacy.
- Greater collaboration between employers and educational establishments to create a dialogue around the needs of employers would be of benefit to ensure graduates are ready for work. It was suggested that micro-businesses require

assistance to offer work placements perhaps using an approach based on the government Skills Boot Camps which would guarantee financial support or guaranteed work for one day a week.

- Many people enter the tech world from an arts background, highlighting the value of these subjects alongside 'STEM' areas. Barriers to educational achievement such as the cost of studying for a degree also need to be addressed.
- Greater connectivity between employers and the education sector is required with collaboration and partnership between the two. A dialogue to establish where the skills gaps lie is required whilst greater collaboration in areas such as work-placements would be of benefit to all.
- It was felt that the establishment of a strong regional sector with a central hub will enable graduates to remain in the region and avoid the necessity to move to London.
- Hubs could potentially provide a focus for collaboration and a base for the establishment of skills bootcamps and apprenticeships, they could be a source of support and a knowledge exchange and provide a strong link to the local community. They could function as an incubator or accelerator while Chambers of Commerce or LEPs could provide a focus for this type of activity.

Professional Services sector focus group (21 March 2023)

This LSIP focus group was held to do a deep dive into the main skills gaps and challenges facing employers in the Professional Services sector. The session was introduced by representatives from the Surrey Chambers of Commerce. Labour market intelligence and a snapshot of employer survey insights related to the sector were used to help set the context for the session. Discussions were based around the following topics:

- What are the main skills gaps your business faces now and in the future?
- Describe your businesses' experience with the skills and training system (i.e. what has worked well, what could have been improved, are there any barriers?)
- What are some of the solutions to the challenges identified? (inc. what role can businesses plan in supporting colleges and training providers?)

Key themes and findings

- **Challenge to find candidates with the right skills** – Sales and a commercial mentality is crucial as well as customer service skills. Individuals who can sit in front of clients and speak confidently and build relationships. Soft skills equally as important as technical knowledge. For example, an accountancy firm mentioned they have found that Sports Management degrees were high performers on their trainee accountant programmes.
- **Perceptions about the industry** – Can be seen as “boring” (e.g. all spreadsheets) and lack of awareness of what the occupation is like in reality. Challenge for insurance

sector is typical people “fall” into the industry and not something discussed at school or as part of careers guidance.

- **Employability skills** – Businesses want “readiness for employment”. Basic digital/IT skills and emphasis on English and Maths are important.
- **Neurodiversity** – Greater focus on neurodiversity in professional services becoming more of a focus and how to enable and support staff from these backgrounds.

Advanced manufacturing and engineering sector focus group (21 March 2023)

This LSIP focus group was held to do a deep dive into the main skills gaps and challenges facing employers in the Advanced manufacturing and engineering sector. The session was introduced by representatives from the Surrey Chambers of Commerce. Labour market intelligence and a snapshot of employer survey insights related to the sector were used to help set the context for the session. Discussions were based around the following topics:

- What are the main skills gaps your business faces now and in the future?
- Describe your businesses’ experience with the skills and training system (i.e. what has worked well, what could have been improved, are there any barriers?)
- What are some of the solutions to the challenges identified? (inc. what role can businesses plan in supporting colleges and training providers?)

Key themes and findings

- **Challenges for SMEs** – SMEs in the sector lack capacity and require additional support to help them provide the support apprentices need. One example shared from an employer about a negative experience they had taking on an apprentice and the expectations the training provider placed on them that it was felt the provider was better able to deal with.
- **Tailored support** – Businesses in this sector are all very unique and are highly specialised in what they manufacture and produce. This requires a greater emphasis on 1:1 support from providers to build relationships, provide support, and really understand the needs of an employer in order to be able to properly advise on solutions.
- **Specialising too soon** – Sense that learners are specialising too soon, and this is presenting a challenge for businesses, who typically want candidates with a broad understanding of engineering principles and then develop specialisms through experience. Occupational standards are a challenge for this sector as no two engineering firms are the same, and engineering has many different roles it can be applied to.
- **Flexibility in course delivery** – There was interest in courses that offered block release or “front loading” knowledge and skills development before a learner starts working.

- **Teaching** – Colleges highlighted the biggest barrier is teachers. Colleges need people to come and teach. Businesses can come out and teach. But the issue is they don't have time to do it.

Aerospace and space sector focus group (13 April 2023)

This LSIP focus group was a deep dive into the main skills gaps and challenges facing employers in the Aerospace and space sector. It was jointly organised by Hampshire Chamber of Commerce, Farnborough Aerospace Consortium (FAC), and Surrey Chambers of Commerce. Labour market intelligence and a snapshot of employer feedback related to the sector was presented to attendees by FAC to help set the context for the session. Discussions were based around the following topics:

- What are the main skills gaps your business faces now and in the future?
- Describe your businesses' experience with the skills and training system (i.e. what has worked well, what could have been improved, are there any barriers?)
- What are some of the solutions to the challenges identified? (inc. what role can businesses play in supporting colleges and training providers?)

Pre-focus group engagement

FAC engaged with a number of aerospace businesses ahead of the session to generate insights that could be used to help inform the focus group discussions. The main feedback has been summarised below:

- Need for level 2/3 apprenticeship in engineering & manufacture, IT Services, Cyber security, Cloud computing, Agile methodology all underpinned by the need for graduate recruitment in the right skills area.
- There is a real mix between companies where some are experienced in using skills training systems and some that are not. The main consensus was the need to focus on "Broad Based Training" (Hand Skills), there is an apparent gap between NVQ and/or technological advancements.
- All companies approached, expressed an interest in supporting local skills and training systems, some would like more knowledge of the system before committing to support it.

Specific responses to each question have been anonymised:

What are the main skills gaps and challenges that you face in the short-term, but also what will be required in the next 3 years?

- **Employer 1:** Engineers, Toolmakers, Welders, Benders, Tinsmiths, Non-Destructive Testing technicians, Radiographers, CNC machinists, Programmers, Planners, Operational leads, Logistic specialist, Spray Painters, Maintenance Engineers, Commercial Engineers, Aerospace graduates, and Engineering apprentices.

- **Employer 2:** Selling the level 2/3 apprenticeship is near impossible now for SME's as they aren't at all promoted by schools / careers advisors as a valuable route to a skill / trade / career. It's in schools' interests to promote full time FE at 16-18 instead and this is damaging the entry level supply that fill so many positions and lead to strong engineering careers. We seem to be heading towards a period where the average age of skilled hands-on engineers is going to continue to increase dramatically. This is a big concern. Apprenticeships aren't valued highly enough, and businesses alone can't do enough to promote them.
- **Employer 3:**
 - Currently, we are experiencing skills gaps within the technical department, specifically in the IT services area. In the short-term, this may lead to challenges such as decreased productivity, slower response times to technical issues, and potential project delays.
 - To address these challenges in the short term, we have invested in training programs, mentorship, and recruitment to fill the skill gaps within the technical department. We have also started to look at 3rd party software to help fill the gaps.
 - Looking ahead to the next 3 years, it will be important to keep up with technological advancements and industry trends to ensure that our technical department remains relevant and competitive. This may require additional training and upskilling efforts to ensure that our team has the necessary skills and knowledge to work with emerging technologies.
 - Some of the main skills gaps and challenges that our organisation may face in the next 3 years could include:
 - Cybersecurity: As cyber threats continue to evolve and become more sophisticated, it will be important for our technical department to have strong cybersecurity skills to protect our organisation's data and systems.
 - Cloud computing: As more organisations move towards cloud-based systems and services, our technical department may need to develop skills in areas such as cloud infrastructure, cloud security, and cloud migration.
 - Data analytics: With the increasing importance of data in decision-making, our technical department may need to develop skills in areas such as data visualisation, data management, and data analysis.
 - Agile methodologies: As more organisations adopt agile methodologies for project management and software development, our technical department may need to develop skills in areas such as agile planning, agile team management, and agile software development.
 - Emerging technologies: With the rapid pace of technological advancement, our technical department may need to stay up to date with emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, and the internet of things (IoT).

- **Employer 4:** As a business we look for highly skilled, experienced design & stress engineers - generally degree educated, but not necessarily. They are required to perform the design development of structural systems in aerospace, defence, and other highly regulated industries. There is a lower pool to search through the last few years, post Brexit & the pandemic. We use agents and our network to find people. We try to offer placements to students (school age work experience, A Level/BTEC stage and year in industry for under graduates. If we are lucky some of these may turn into people who will wish to join our business. Help around this would be good, but experience, is that red tape around the help (which we understand needs to be justified) often means it is easier just to do it ourselves.
- **Employer 5:** Skill gaps & challenges: still looking for sales engineers (customer focus, to identify customer needs and relay that information internally to build a proposal). Engineering wise there is an open position for Drawing Office manager, looking for someone with experience (5-10 years ideally). Within the next 3 years, will be looking for more electro-mechanical engineers to support our growth in this product line.
- **Employer 6:** Scaling from start-up to deliver our capability is our main gap and the knowledge of the markets we're targeting. NDT inspection and composite manufacturing in aerospace.
- **Employer 7:** Support to the growing fleet of Gulfstream Models and numbers, particularly in Europe, Middle East and Asia. MRO and FBO support are the two key areas. Not only is the aerospace/aviation struggling to retain licenced B1 and B2 engineers but also with the experienced Quality Control, SMS, Material Support etc.
- **Employer 8:** Recruiting Mechanical Engineering, Engineering Managers, Electronics and Control engineers, Project Managers – all have been proven to be difficult within the last 12 months. Salaries are increasing strongly, to compete for available talent. Over next 3 years we expect to grow in production and development. To the list of hard-to-find candidates we will therefore expect to add Manufacturing engineers, technicians.

What experience have you had with the skills and training system. What works well, what could be improved, what are the main barriers to training staff?

- **Employer 1:** We have a training hub on each site that provides basic HSE training. We also hire consultants to train on site in Farnborough to a classroom or a small group and they then certify employees with new standards and qualifications. We have sent employees to university on a 3-year degree course, some employees attend day classes locally. Training takes employees away from output and in lots of instances slows production. Skills are short so training is difficult if they slow experienced employees down. Most external support doesn't provide bespoke training required to manufacture the Sigma Products.
- **Employer 2:** We have apprentices in Mechanical Engineering and Business Administration and a Degree Apprentice in Manufacturing Engineering so we're familiar with these provisions and how they work and organisations that work in that area locally. They broadly do a good job. Perhaps too broadly in places, Engineering

apprenticeships can be a little vanilla and the ability to tweak curriculum to suit specific businesses (like Polymers for MEP but could be any speciality) would be a massive advantage and improvement. I'm also aware that as a non-levy payer we have very affordable access to some training but that currently these funds can only be used for courses of 1 year or more. We could upskill young people on shorter courses (at machine manufacturers for example) very well and very quickly but the costs are large, so being able to use levy funds to access that more economically would have a large advantage.

- **Employer 3:** We don't really have much on this side of things as mainly the training has been done in house.
- **Employer 4:** We mainly take on experienced people that don't need to be trained, other than when there is a specific business need for a project. For younger engineers, we often rely on "on-the-job" training rather than courses - which relies heavily on choosing the right young engineer in the first place.
- **Employer 5:** Skills & training system: this will need to be developed in our company. We have group training (Hutchinson) and will be looking for specific trainings in UK for sales negotiation, IT trainings (incl. office 360).
- **Employer 6:** We've not had any experience with the skills and training system, or haven't taken up the opportunity, should I say. We learn a lot on the job, pivot where we need to, then for specific skills gaps we put a business case forward to attend the relevant course which will both enhance our overall qualifications (such as a few of us being chartered engineers) and the specific skills gaps for what the job requires.
- **Employer 7:** We need to focus on "Broad Based Training" (Hand Skills), there appears to be a gap between NVQ and/or technological advancements.
- **Employer 8:** We recruited two apprentices with help of OXLEP and Abingdon College and this was a good experience. We found people in whom we wished to invest, and they have turned out to be valuable additions to the business

How, if at all you would like to be involved in supporting the local skills and training system?

- **Employer 1:** Yes, we would be interested if we felt we could get some return on our investment in time. We have recently partnered a new HR company so they would be very keen to investigate some of the options for Sigma Farnborough.
- **Employer 2:** This is a difficult question to answer, we're heavily engaged with colleges, schools, universities at a local level and we do support regional / national debate frequently as it's so important to the business. We're always willing to support better engineering outcomes for young people but of course it must be balanced with other business needs given our size. If there are specific ways of being involved that you are promoting, then we'll absolutely look at them case by case.
- **Employer 3:** We are happy to be involved if we can be.
- **Employer 4:** We have an aspiration to help young engineer come into the industry, both to help them, but also it is a good way to find talent. Since, last September we have had 4 school age children with us for a week of work experience and one graduate engineer for 2-3 weeks over the Christmas holidays and likely, he will re-join us in the

summer holidays or maybe for a whole year (possibly in 2 years' time). If there were access to help in relation to these activities or similar, then we would be willing to investigate it or a more structured approach to how these individuals get in touch with us or can be screened.

- **Employer 5:** Supporting local skills & training system: our company is willing to integrate trainees in various departments: sales, engineering, manufacturing & process (technical college), quality.
- **Employer 6:** Would like more knowledge of the system before committing to support it.
- **Employer 7:** Happy to support in an adviser capacity.
- **Employer 8:** We are happy to support Technician Apprenticeships and at the moment I think this is the correct use of our available resources and effort. Additionally, we admit, on an ad hoc basis, students for work experience, from school or University.

Key themes and findings from the focus group

- **Industry and education sector collaboration** – Industry wants to engage with the education system, but not clear on best ways to do that or what is available locally.
 - Providers find it challenging to respond to sector needs as they have to ensure what they put on is financially viable and often there is a lack of demand for some of these courses.
 - Great opportunity through the LSIP to bring education sector and industry together to discuss these issues in more detail. There needs to be a “middle person” that facilitates this and brings key partners together.
- **Careers advice** Careers advice and guidance provision across schools and colleges can vary considerably. Important for the industry to engage with young people earlier, as many will drop important subjects like science, which then limits their choices later.
- **Professional skills** – Key skills gap for the sector is “professional skills” that support businesses to grow (e.g. sales and business development). Soft skills and communication tend to be overlooked as important. Learners lack confidence and presentation skills.
- **Understanding skills needs is a challenge** – There is also a challenge about employers not knowing what they need and lack the ability to plan for what skills they need in the future.
- **Technical skills gaps** – Specific technical skills gaps mentioned for system engineers, software engineers. Sub-systems are also a challenge (e.g., Radiation, Thermal engineers, Radio frequency). Also noted that spacecraft software tends to be “older tech”, and this can sometimes present a challenge as skills being developed tend to be for the newer technologies.

- **Diversity and inclusion** – Initiatives like “Code for girls” and sponsoring courses were referenced as being particularly effective.

Health and Social Care sector focus group (18 April 2023)

This LSIP focus group was held to do a deep dive into the main skills gaps and challenges facing employers in the Health and Social Care sector. Discussions were based around the following topics:

- What are the main skills gaps your business faces now and in the future?
- Describe your businesses’ experience with the skills and training system (i.e. what has worked well, what could have be improved, are there any barriers?)
- What are some of the solutions to the challenges identified? (inc. what role can businesses plan in supporting colleges and training providers?)

Key themes and findings

- **Leadership/management skills** – Proactively support staff to upskill in structured way. Also key for supporting career pathways and development within the sector.
- **Employability skills** – Consistent gaps in basic levels of English and Maths and admin skills. However, the ways English and Maths is accredited ends up being a barrier for many to pursue further qualifications. Qualifications need to including units of English and maths that are relevant to our industry. For example, reading numbers/doing sums with injections.
- **T-Levels** – learners are not getting the right experience, they are put in basic/nonrelevant roles. Lack of education and real-life experiences are being offered. Does not provide for the students what is required. Adult social care pathway for the T-levels required.
- **Apprenticeships** – more collaboration with employers and education providers is needed.
- **Barriers for collaboration between industry and education sector** – communication, commitment, lack of marketing analysis. Bit of a disconnect currently.
- **Theory and practice** – Need a stronger link between theory and practice. Practice is essential in this industry. Too much online training, which does not work for the industry.
- **Improved in-house training** – if this was run better it would be a great resource.

East Surrey FSB event: Shaping Local Talent (19 April 2023)

Surrey Chambers of Commerce jointly hosted an employer engagement event with Federation of Small Business (FSB) aimed at businesses and stakeholders in East Surrey. The objective was to engage with those present and seek feedback regarding the following questions. Discussions were based around the following topics:

- What are the current skills needed in your business to make it thrive and grow?
- What kind of skills training is required to address these needs?
- What method of partnership and delivery would best suit your business?

Notable feedback

- There were general comments about the need for more people with data analysis, finance knowledge and risk management skills.
- Apprenticeships were highlighted as being important and there needed to be more opportunities and linked to clearer career pathways.
- Local opportunities need to be made more accessible for local residents, as confusing to know where to look.
- Clarification on T-Levels was requested.
- It was reflected that information is difficult to get a hold off. Suggested solution would be to create one place to access everything. Create a local portal for young/old to view nearby placements and opportunities.
- Upskilling current staff is a good option – quick and easy way of learning and developing new skills.
- There are very few work experience opportunities.
- Improve banding to make the younger generation aware of what local businesses can offer. Communicate with the younger generation, just because you have trained in one area, does not mean you cannot move to different departments within a company.
- Offer rotations in work places when an employer starts – allow them to see how the business works and use a variety of skills.
- A clearer brief from schools as to what is required from local companies.

Land-based sector focus group (20 April 2023)

This LSIP focus group was held to do a deep dive into the main skills gaps and challenges facing employers in the Land based sector. The session was led by a representative from Enterprise M3 LEP with support from representatives from Sparsholt College, Hampshire and Merrist Wood College in Surrey. Labour market intelligence was used to help set the context for the session. Discussions were based around the following topics:

1. What are the main skills gaps your business faces now and in the future?
2. Describe your businesses' experience with the skills and training system (i.e. what has worked well, what could have be improved, are there any barriers?)
3. What are some of the solutions to the challenges identified? (inc. what role can businesses plan in supporting colleges and training providers?)

Key themes and findings

Promoting the industry and managing expectations –

- Seasonal impact on the industry. Does not help when you are recruiting, can be off putting. Big drop in interest from young people – the work is outside and physical.
- There is such a variety of skills required and learnt on the job. Work experience is invaluable to the younger generation.
- Young people bring a different way of thinking and new skills to your existing industry.
- Digital side has so much potential – younger generation can find it hard to visualise, however with new way of seeing things online it encourages new interest.
- Expectations and attitudes of the younger generation towards the industry is sometimes incorrect. There is a 30%+ element of the job where you need to interact with the public, provide presentations, meetings people with people etc.
- We find we have some applicants who struggle/refuse to take on roles when they realise they are not working with animals 100% of the time.

Industry and education sector collaboration –

- Companies do not know enough about T-levels. How can we work with you if we have not been involved or understand what these are?
- We do go into colleges and provide talks, but limited student interested – how can we change this? The students have already chosen this industry so should be interested in talking to us and potentially working with us.
- Project-based learning – could employers put on a real-life project for the students? This gives them real life experiences – it provides a more memorable experience to learning.
- External training – Colleges are not providing for all skills' needs and/or at a quick enough pace. Systems need to be quicker and easier to access. There were examples given of large companies who choose not to work with colleges but independent training providers.
- The industry can be daunting at a young age. How can we make the courses more enticing and attractive? Students need to know they can jump around careers if they want to later in life.
- There is a large disconnect from the real world. We used to go outside and play and learn. This never happens in an educational environment anymore. If you look at Scandinavian countries, they come over on a transfer programme and have a completely different outlook and way of thinking towards the industry as they spend so much time outside.
- We provide 'Forest Schools' at a young age; opportunities to continue this in secondary and tertiary education?

Soft Skills –

- Basic skills needs – communication, presentations, confidence, social skills etc.

Course delivery –

- There are not enough trainers in the industry.
- To run a course, need a minimum of 20 learners – challenging to make courses viable with SMEs.
- Trainers would benefit from more understanding for neuro-diverse learners in creating and delivering inclusive curricula.
- Health and Safety Courses – why do we have to put new employees on this? It is relevant at a colleges level and should be something learners can come to businesses with already. In response, college lack of funding to offer this.
- Ideally companies would like to train as a group but not possible when you have staff starting at all different times throughout the year.
- College enrolments are down for next academic year, so looking at having to cancel courses. It is concerning and provides a negative outlook for the future of the industry.

Education/FE sector focus group (21 April 2023)

An online webinar was held with representatives from the local FE sector to consider the main skills gaps and challenges facing colleges. This was led by Alton College and below is a summary of the feedback from the session to three key questions.

What are the main skills gaps and challenges you face within your college?

- Engineering and trades including Assessors
- Digital skills (particularly higher level, E Sports)
- Higher level construction (Retrofit skills / Groundworker / Surveying etc)
- Health and Social Care (T Level) – Sciences
- English and Maths
- Counselling
- Chefs
- Horticulture
- Business (becoming an issue when it wasn't previously)
- Learning Support Assistants
- Some administration roles (particularly around flexibility / pay)
- HE, Counselling, AAT, Maths and English inc ESOL, Trades, Digital Skills inc computing and Animal Management
- TAs are hard to recruit and retain as often have a higher turnover.

What are the challenges you face when recruiting new staff?

- Attracting and recruiting from industry and matching industry pay rates.
- Local college competition – pay (difference between FE pay and 6th Form pay)
- Benefits package is limited in most cases / Attraction strategies
- Local competition - 'fishing in the same pond'
- Skills deficits and turnover of non-experienced staff / quality of candidates (paperwork / additional pressures of working in education etc)

- Pressure of new staff in teams and support – time is a challenge (mentor / support etc) – creating a financial tension of under utilisation and indeed lack of support for new staff – People may be thrown in at the deep end.
- Level of bureaucracy
- Size of HR team in relation to the volume of recruitment.
- Recruitment process is more laboured than in other areas (Application and DBS rather than just CV and cover letter)
- Less people wanting to come into the sector
- Huge shortage of Learning Support Assistants across all colleges
- Lower scale support roles difficult due to low pay and they can earn more in local supermarket
- Maintenance and premises difficult to recruit to-better pay and flexibility elsewhere
- The key sectors in the LSIP chime with college key sectors and teaching staff in engineering and construction a real challenge
- Competing with London salaries for things like Finance Manager roles
- Not enough time to bring new teachers in slowly to get them up to speed- tend to throw them in at the deep end
- High level of bureaucracy on recruitment-MUST fill in application form whereas for other jobs CV and covering letter is sufficient. (DBS checks can also take a long time)
- Too many places to promote jobs-very confusing busy area and end up having to pay agencies
- Back in days it was easy to find lecturers and teachers. Now a days it is a challenge.
- If you bring someone out of industry, it takes lot of time to support, cost and other resources and in the end, they decide to leave the profession. Many of these people are not suited to this industry.
- Especially when the budgets are tight for this industry, spending lot of money and time investing in them/mentoring them is nearly impossible.
- Less people are dedicated to a teaching profession as a career.
- Advertising and marketing campaigns are also poorly targeted.
- Cost of living has impacted (Brexit)
- Industry individuals not having teaching experience.
- Retaining new staff members with support from the team. However, this is difficult with current staff workload and team sizes.
- Increasing hand over/training/support with new starters, however this can prove difficult with the current recruitment struggle.

Some considerations/solutions:

- Managers taking on teaching to support.
- Cover teaching by managers
- Post-graduate

- Sharing of posts across colleges
- Sponsorship – overseas candidates
- Greater collaboration between FE providers
- What should the teacher model be? Does it have to be a person in the classroom with a group of learners? – Use of technology (blended approach)
- Consideration of a 4-day week
- Need to work on an “Attraction” strategy to encourage more interest in teaching
- They are seeing a drop in construction activity which could generate more into education
- Think creative over teaching models where resources can be spread across and teaching resources like online teaching can be introduced.
- Should focus on LSA.
- Bring PHD students in to teach
- Continuing to maximise as many strategies as possible.
- Key area – bring people in to do workshops
- Recruitment through social media channels
- Hybrid and online teaching methods
- Support system should be introduced especially in the 1st year to retain the staff
- Meet their expectation during the induction period.
- Organic online blended models for recruitment (Quality models, peer, learning)
- Courses should be viable and be easily accessible.
- Collaborate with FSD providers.
- Powerful selling point should be advertised like (bursaries, pensions, paid holidays)
- Using new ways to attract passive candidates who are not looking on Teaching job sites such as AOC.
- Labour recruitment processes. Making recruitment process as easy as possible whilst wholly conforming with KCSIE.
- Possibility of hybrid or online teaching to attract candidates. Suggested peer reviews to assess how this working currently to develop a new model.
- Could adopt a visiting lecturer approach for hard to fill roles.

Creative industries (25 April 2023)

This LSIP focus group was held in collaboration with the University for the Creative Arts (UCA), to do a deep dive into the main skills gaps and challenges facing employers in the Creative sector. This was promoted to businesses in the sector as a follow-on from the Creative Industries Summit to help build greater relationships between industry, the university and FE colleges. Discussions were based around the following topics:

- What are the main skills gaps your business faces now and in the future?
- Describe your businesses’ experience with the skills and training system (i.e. what has worked well, what could have be improved, are there any barriers?)

- What are some of the solutions to the challenges identified? (inc. what role can businesses plan in supporting colleges and training providers?)

Notable feedback

- Need for generic business skills- finance, project management, organising events, entrepreneurship, tech skills.
- Large organisations have programmes in place, the medium and smaller companies do not. They then struggle.
- Soft skills (such as confidence and independent working) in younger employees sometimes need further work. This can sometimes be difficult for smaller companies to resource.
- Companies need to work with alumni closely about what they need.
- Apprenticeships – students are less interested in finding out about what to do/work available and using their initiative. Support can help address this.
- Often a big disconnect from the real world of work. Running a real-life project alongside being a student would work best instead of work placements.
- Improved knowledge of what is available and easy and quick access to relevant information. Do not know where to look for information on apprenticeships. We currently have two with us, but they contacted us through Facebook.
 - Portal – somewhere where we can find providers? Everyone would need to know about the source, how can we do this?
 - We had to go through an external recruitment company as we could not find apprentices. None of the colleges or university reached out directly. Becomes a lot of effort on our part as a business and should be easier.
- Kick Start Scheme – This was brilliant. It opened so many new opportunities for the company and employers.
- Students/employers should have more ambition to go freelance – they do require a new skill set for this e.g Business skills and sales. Bouncing between freelance and work is a difficult survival skill.
- Opportunity for bootcamps tailored to the Creative sector.
- Placements: we send a lot to small businesses – we are very aware of resources and capacity. It is beneficial to both sides.
- We are losing our skills to the modern, digital world – e.g Graphic designers – regular employers are taking on this role using apps like Canva. Takes all our freelance jobs.

CreaTech (3 May 2023)

This LSIP focus group was jointly held with Activate Learning to do a deep dive into the main skills gaps and challenges facing employers in the CreaTech industry. Guest speakers included representatives from Surrey Chambers of Commerce, University of Creative Arts, Activate Learning and the Digital Catapult. Discussions were based around the following topics:

- What are the main skills gaps your business faces now and in the future?

- Describe your businesses' experience with the skills and training system (i.e. what has worked well, what could have been improved, are there any barriers?)
- What are some of the solutions to the challenges identified? (inc. what role can businesses plan in supporting colleges and training providers?)
- What experience and/or environment should we be offering at Guildford College?

Notable feedback

- Young people can struggle to share/present their ideas in both an educational space and a work environment.
- Finding the right staff to teach is a challenge for the education sector.
- Some of the skills needs of the sector were highlighted as being:
 - Network engineers
 - Leadership and management skills
 - Office team working
 - Small company – need to be able to “punch above your weight”.
 - Discipline – drive to see things through.
 - Film industries: accounting, construction, art department and VFX
- With speed of developments, what are the best ways for providers to be able to respond?
- What is needed to improve things?
 - Improved careers advice in schools and define career pathways.
 - Work experience and industry experience for students.
 - Improve the awareness of parents and other key influencers about opportunities in the CreaTech sector.
 - Co-fund/co-use resources in our area. If a college cannot afford equipment for example, can they link up with numerous colleges to buy? Or work with a local company to use theirs?
 - Bringing courses together – more collaboration needed across the curriculum.

Green Skills Summit (4 May 2023)

The Green Skills Summit launched a research report into the current and future size of the green economy and the green skills that will be needed (across Surrey and North/mid Hampshire). The focus of the session was to bring together local businesses and HE/FE providers to consider the key findings of the report and discuss what changes are needed for the skills system to be more responsive to the needs of key sectors identified and support a quicker expansion of the local green economy.

Event programme and speakers –

National context for green skills

- A representative from Blue Mirror Insights outlined that there is currently a significant structural shift underway in the economy towards green jobs, that this represents a significant economic opportunity, that local coordination of the skills system to power

these green jobs is vital and that there is scope for LSIPs to influence national net zero skills policy. See slides 2-3 of the presentation.

Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) for Surrey and North-Mid Hampshire

- A representative from Surrey Chambers of Commerce outlined that they were developing a Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) for Surrey and North-Mid Hampshire. This is part of a central government programme of LSIPs, which puts employers at the heart of the skills system and will be the strategic basis for future funding decisions. The event today is part of ongoing engagement with businesses in the development of the LSIP. See slides 5-7 of the presentation for more information, and Surrey Chambers' Future Skills Hub

Strategic Development Fund (SDF)

- A representative from Enterprise M3 LEP outlined how £2.6m of central government funding through the Strategic Development Fund had been spent across green landbased, low carbon vehicles and retrofit skills provision across Surrey and North-Mid Hampshire. The objective of the fund was to stimulate employer engagement, build capacity within colleges, and upgrade facilities, equipment and course content.

Green skills demand in Surrey and North-Mid Hampshire

- A representative from WPI Economics presented an overview of their green skills demand research for the LSIP area. Headlines:
 - There are 35,000 green jobs currently, or 3.8% of total employees – this is 23% higher than the UK as whole
 - Top green occupations: Environment Professionals; Sales Accounts and Business Development Managers; Production Managers and Directors in Manufacturing; Physical Scientists; Refuse and Salvage Occupations
 - Top green sectors: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and Repair; Power; Climate Adaptation; Homes and Buildings; Green Financial, Professional and Research Services; Industrial Decarbonisation; Low Carbon Transport; Natural Environment
 - The number of green jobs will rise from 35,000 in 2022 to 57,000 in 2030 and 108,000 in 2050 – this represents a growth rate of the LSIP area's green economy of 6% to 2030 (1.5 times higher than the growth of digital from 2009-2019)

Panel discussion: The panel included representatives from Surrey County Council, WPI Economics, Ringway and Farnborough College of Technology.

- The panel discussed the importance of:
 - Employers engaging with colleges to increase progression rates into relevant roles and sectors linked to their college study (eg electricians, where transition rates are as low as 10%). There was recognition that this can be challenging for smaller businesses and that there might be a role for industry bodies and others in facilitating this.

- Improving collaboration between further education (colleges) and HE (universities) so that students consider local universities, but also recognising that university students are likely to be more mobile when choosing where to study compared to those choosing apprenticeships.
- Exploring how university students can be encouraged to stay where they studied after completing their degrees. Including through improving the ways opportunities and jobs are promoted to young people to make them aware of what is available in the area
- Exploring the ways employers can contribute to the delivery of skills training, for example Ringway signposting those later in their careers into becoming trainers with local providers

Key highlights from roundtable discussions –

A 45-minute roundtable discussion was held in which attendees were invited to join breakout groups themed around the key sectors in the report. Feedback and comments have been combined and summarised around themes and topics that emerged from conversations and sectors referenced where relevant.

Information, advice and careers guidance

- Significant appetite from young people to have a green career, but they are generally unaware of the opportunities that exist and there is a disconnect with what advice they are given. Careers education/guidance needs to “upskill” in order to help young people understand what the skills and jobs are for the next industrial revolution.
- “Green skills” is potentially too broad (like digital skills), and has to be more specific. Need to think about how to break down and make more specific. This is more obvious in some industries, but less so in others like history and finance courses.
- Important to demystify job roles and what they relate to and make them real for people.
 - For example – Construction skills are often focused on the “traditional” trades and skills (e.g. bricklaying). Need to think of ways to promote the new green skills or the ways these trades will support the green economy.
- Lots of support and information for the younger cohorts (e.g. children grow up interested in building things), but often lose interest 16-18 years old. Consider ways to keep this age group interested and inspired to go into green careers.
- Not just about completely knowing what skills are needed, and communicating that to young people, also about giving people the tools to find and navigate the market.

Soft skills and widening participation

- Remove barriers from apprenticeship descriptions (e.g. English and Maths requirement) as more important that applicants have key attributes and soft skills. Businesses will take anyone with those skills and the apprenticeship and training is there to give them the technical knowledge and skills (inc. English and Maths).

- With a tight labour market, it is more important to break down barriers and encourage people furthest from the labour market into key sectors. Skills based recruitment and think differently about how to recruit.
- Recruitment shifted to using algorithms and challenge for people that might want to change careers/roles, but often only get shown a “blinkered” view of what is available to them.

Remove barriers for business

- SMEs find it difficult to take on apprentices as many lack capacity or consistent work to make them work for the learner. Direct funding for SMEs to support them to take on apprentices would make a difference and unlock more roles.
- Colleges equally finding it difficult to find progression routes for learners.
 - For example – A college mentioned they have learners on electrical courses but finding really difficult to get placements for them with businesses.
- Useful to have routes to fast-track career changers, although a challenge would be to ensure the underlying competencies are not lost as this can take time and is developed through experience.
- Tradesmen want to train and upskill (e.g. heat pumps) but strict requirements creates barriers. No short-courses available to learn specific skills, instead need to have a range of other qualifications as well.
- A “carded scheme” for retrofitting is currently in development, but process is slow. LSIPs could put pressure on speeding up the pace at which these new qualifications come through.
- Important for colleges and providers to “go where the businesses are” (e.g. for Construction go to Tool Fairs) and to promote what is available to them and understand more about their needs.

Lack of clear policy direction to unlock demand

- Some businesses are not motivated to retrain staff as they do not see a short-term return/impact on their work, and they don’t want to release staff for training. There is a current lack of demand for the technology, lack of knowledge of policy direction, and in some cases older workers nearing retirement do not see future legislative changes as relevant to them.
- Lack of overall understanding of industry and policy direction - training needs to include things like context – for example, heat pump engineers need to understand the bigger picture and potential work alongside retrofit team.
- Consumers are key to unlocking and increasing demand for certain green technologies. Lack of awareness and understanding is holding this transition back. Idea for mass education of people on retrofit.
- Important to also consider consumers being trained to understand what they need.
 - For example – Heat pumps should last much longer than they do, but often not correctly sized for the property. Educating the homeowners so they know what

they are asking for, with the aim to drive demand and quality, as well as improve the reputation of the technology.

Supporting green transition within businesses

- Challenge for how businesses “green up” and get the right skill set to support.
 - For example – Barclays started developing green products based on a few keen/interested individuals. This was then filtered more widely across the organisation and embedded.
- It takes a mix of green skills and service sector/ professions to enable the change to happen within companies. Where there is only one and not the other, ideas tend to fizzle out because they cannot be developed in the right way.
- Companies should move from having a “green department” to embedding it into everything they do.

Heat Pumps

- Predicted that there will be a need for 30,000 heat pump engineers, but currently only 2,500 trained.
- Not enough uptake for existing heat pump training. Barriers for businesses and tradespeople to invest their money and time into this currently.
- Important to train surveyors so when they are in a property (e.g. looking at retrofit) they can do a proper survey for heat pumps and advise the resident. This means the correct demands will be made of the installers and drive both demand and quality in the industry.
- It was noted that for Low carbon heating technicians the qualification keeps getting delayed.

Challenges for the education system

- Often education system is behind the curve and there is a lag in what learners qualify in and then what the jobs/demands are in the real world.
- Significant capacity issues with finding teachers/tutors, and this exists across all sectors.
- Teacher/tutors are held to high expectations, so some concern around quality and ensuring new entrants are trained in the right way and their knowledge is up to date. Particular concern about moving people from industry to training – different skills required from teachers (e.g. lesson planning, managing a class).

Examples of possible solutions

- University of Southampton – uses a network of businesses large and small and holds similar events. More events and targeted sessions are a good way to raise awareness of projects, funding, and best practice.
 - Some examples of colleges hosting “sustainability events” for students and bringing alumni back to share their experiences.

- Hosting sector specific careers events that “pepper” green skills and sustainability throughout the event.
- Brookland College developed a new EV module for Vehicle Technician courses (BTECs) to support upskilling within garages where they often lack the necessary skills.
- “Taster days” to let students try different courses before so that they know they are interested.
- Identifying and sourcing green skills experts (e.g. solar alumni) to help support teaching on courses.
- Royal Holloway mentioned offering carbon literacy training course which teaches staff and students together.
- Developing a “skills portal” which have live vacancies and lists of local companies that are hiring into green occupations/industries. Up-to-date labour market information to show trends and growth areas.

Event slide deck – <https://www.surrey-chambers.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/LSIP-Future-of-Green-skills-vS.pdf>