



DRAFT – FULL FIRST DRAFT

Surrey Skills and Talent Research Report

Workforce Capability, Leadership Development and Future Skills Readiness

Commissioned by the Surrey Chambers of Commerce in partnership with the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP). Prepared by YouBecome.



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Table of Contents



Executive Summary



Chapter 1 — Research Methodology



Chapter 2 — Context from the Surrey Skills and Talent Survey



Chapter 3 — Cross-Company Leadership Insights



Chapter 4 — Employee Survey Insights



Chapter 5 — Integrated Findings



Chapter 6 — Implications for Employers



Chapter 7 — Implications for the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP)



Chapter 8 — Conclusion: Bringing the Evidence Together

Executive Summary

This research looks at how organisations in Surrey develop the skills and capability of their workforce.

It draws on three sources of evidence:

- a Surrey-wide skills and talent survey
- interviews with business leaders
- surveys of employees within participating organisations.

By bringing these together, the report provides a clearer picture of how organisations are developing their people and preparing their workforce for future changes.

Six Consistent Findings Across the Research

Workforce Capability Is Generally Strong

Employees report high confidence in performing their current roles.

Leadership Capability Is a Key Priority

Leaders and employees highlight the importance of developing leadership and people-management capabilities.

Recruitment Reflects Capability Alignment

The core recruitment challenge is alignment between candidate capability and employer expectations.

Learning and Development Are Widely Valued

Operational pressures often make consistent delivery of training difficult.

Awareness of Change Is Relatively High

Employees broadly understand their roles will continue to evolve.

Preparedness for Ai Change Is Mixed

Confidence in adapting to automation and AI varies significantly across the workforce.

Executive Summary (continued)

Key Takeaways

Strong Foundation Existing workforce capability is generally robust.	Leadership is Key Developing leadership and people-management skills is crucial for future success.	Strategic L&D Needed Learning and development requires overcoming day to day hurdles for consistent delivery.	Bridging the Tech Gap The challenge now is turning awareness of new technology into practical skills and capability.
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Participating Organisations

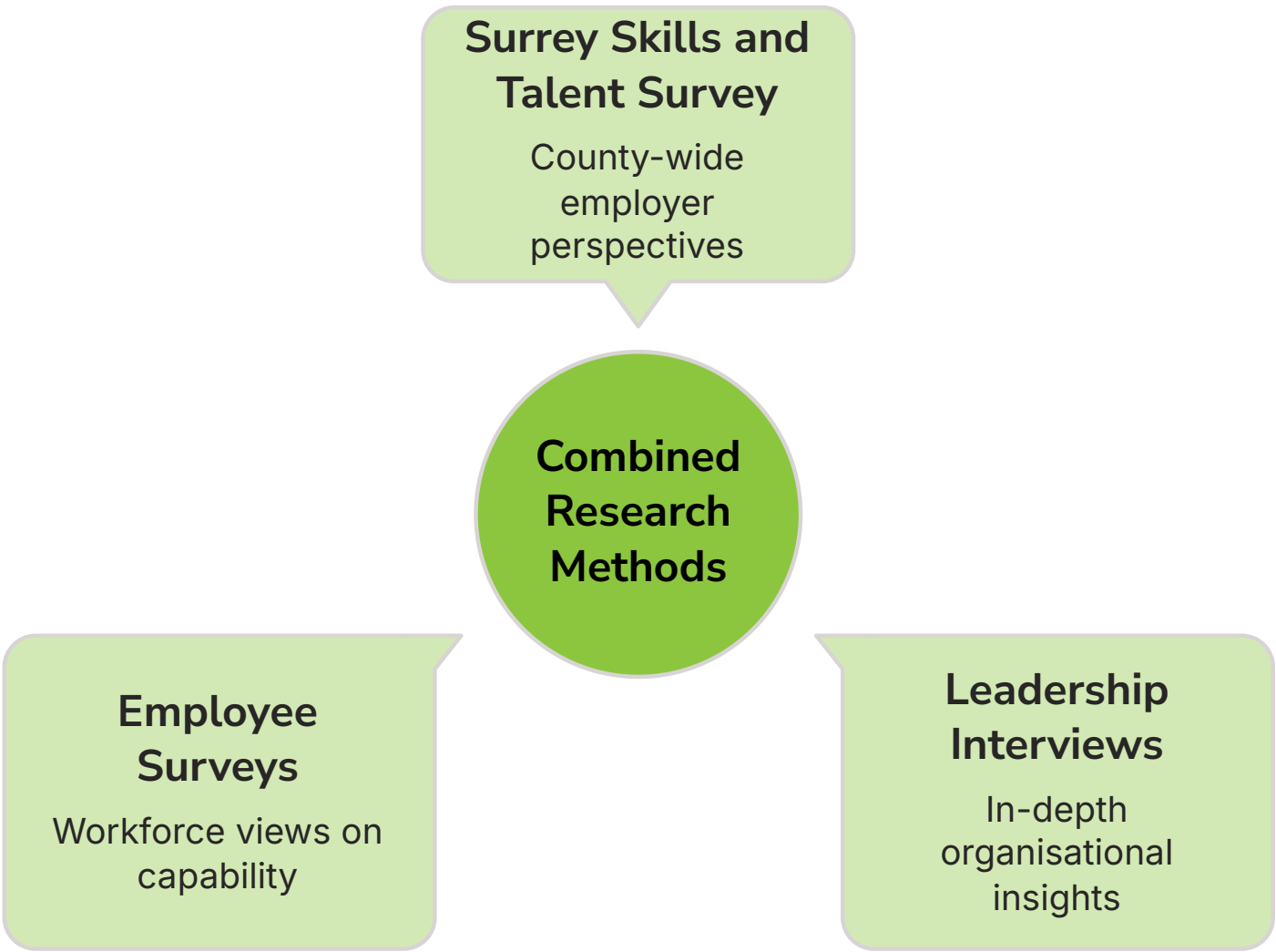
Organisation	Sector	Focus Area
Art-K	Creative education	Skills and creative learning
Aspen Construction	Construction and property development	Technical and site skills
IT Support Plus	Business IT services	Digital and technical capability
KONE	Engineering and infrastructure	Engineering workforce development
Mettle & Bond	Social care services	People and care capability
UKIOT	Internet of Things technology solutions	Emerging technology skills

Chapter 1 – Research Methodology

Purpose of This Chapter

This chapter explains how the research was carried out.

The study uses several sources of information to understand how organisations develop the skills and capability of their workforce, and how prepared they are for future changes in skills and technology.



Together these sources provide insight into workforce capability from multiple perspectives — capturing employer-level signals, leadership experience, and frontline employee views within the same organisations.

Surrey Skills and Talent Survey

A county-wide employer survey captured perspectives from organisations across Surrey on skills shortages, recruitment challenges, and workforce development.

Leadership Interviews

A series of leadership interviews were conducted with senior leaders from participating organisations. These interviews explored how workforce capability challenges are experienced within organisations.

Employee Surveys

Employee surveys were conducted within participating organisations to understand workforce experience, development needs, and perceptions of leadership and future readiness.

Chapter 2 – Context from the Surrey Skills and Talent Survey

Purpose of This Chapter

This chapter summarises insights from the Surrey-wide skills and talent survey which gathered responses from over 100 organisations across a range of sectors.

The Survey Explored:

- Skills shortages
- Recruitment pressures
- Training practices
- Attitudes to apprenticeships and T-Levels
- Future workforce capability requirements

Sectors Represented:

- Professional services
- Construction
- Hospitality and tourism
- IT and technology
- Creative industries
- Health and social care

Key Signals from the Employer Survey

Behavioural Capability Is a Persistent Recruitment Challenge

Employers most frequently identified communication skills, self-management, and industry knowledge as difficult capabilities to find when recruiting.

Soft Skills Are Viewed as Highly Important

Employers consistently ranked communication, adaptability, and leadership as critical workforce capabilities.

Many Organisations Rely Heavily on Internal Training

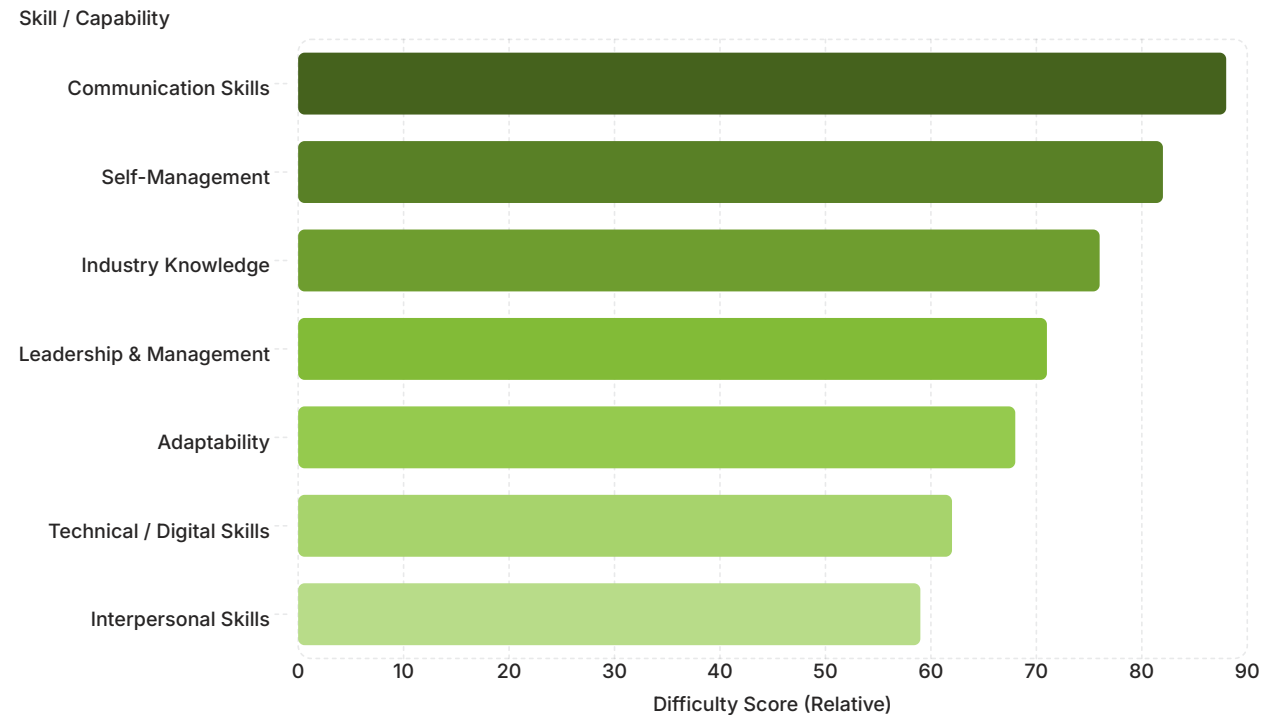
Most organisations reported relying primarily on in-house learning and development rather than external training providers.

Awareness of Ai Technology Change Is Increasing

Employers recognise that automation and Ai technologies will influence future roles. However, many organisations are still exploring how these changes will affect their workforce.



Skills Employers Report as Most Difficult to Recruit



Key Insight

Employers across Surrey say the hardest skills to recruit are **communication and self-management**. These behavioural skills are often harder to find than technical knowledge or sector-specific expertise.

Chapter 3 – Cross-Company Leadership Insights

Purpose of This Chapter

Senior leaders from the participating organisations were interviewed to understand how workforce skills and capability challenges are experienced inside their businesses.

Although the organisations work in different sectors, several common themes emerged from these conversations.

Behavioural Skills and Workplace Effectiveness

Leaders across different sectors said that behavioural and interpersonal skills are often the most important factors in how well people perform at work. In service-based industries in particular, the ability to work well with customers and colleagues is seen as essential to success.

Leaders highlighted the importance of:

- Communication
- Customer Interaction
- Relationship Management
- Professionalism
- Reliability

"Technical skills are important, but communication and reliability are what really determine whether someone succeeds in our organisation."

— Senior Leader

Leadership and People Management Capability

Across several organisations, leaders highlighted that managing people effectively can be more challenging than performing technical aspects of the job.

This issue was particularly visible as organisations grow and employees move into supervisory or managerial roles. Leaders described the need for individuals to develop confidence in taking responsibility and managing others.

This suggests that leadership capability, particularly at first-line management level, is a critical area of development for many organisations.

"One of the biggest challenges is when strong technical people move into leadership roles. Managing people requires a completely different skill set."

— Senior Leader

Leadership Themes – Recruitment, Training & Development

Recruitment Challenges

Leaders across several sectors described difficulty recruiting individuals with the right combination of skills and experience.

→ Sector-Specific Expertise

In some cases the challenge relates to sector-specific expertise or practical experience.

→ Interpersonal Capability

In others it relates to interpersonal capability and the ability to work effectively within teams.

→ Capability Alignment

These insights suggest recruitment challenges often reflect alignment between candidate capability and employer expectations rather than simply a lack of applicants.

"We often meet candidates with qualifications, but they lack the practical experience we need on the job."

— Hiring Manager

"The technical knowledge can be taught. What's harder to find are people who communicate well and take responsibility."

— Business Leader

Training and Workforce Development

Across participating organisations, leaders emphasised the importance of workforce development in maintaining organisational capability. However, several leaders also highlighted that delivering training consistently can be difficult within operational environments.

"We want to invest more in training, but operational pressures make it difficult to release people."

— Operations Director

Many organisations rely on:



On-the-Job Learning



Mentoring



Internal Training

Leadership Themes Emerging Across Organisations

Behavioural Capability

Communication, professionalism & relationship management

Leadership & People Management

Supervisory transitions, team management & accountability

Recruitment Capability Alignment

Candidate capability variation, technical vs practical experience

Training & Workforce Development

On-the-Job Learning, mentoring & internal development

Chapter 4 – Employee Survey Insights

Purpose of This Chapter

Employee surveys were conducted to understand workforce capability and development from the employee perspective. The surveys explored confidence in current roles, perceptions of leadership, development opportunities, and readiness for future change.



Confidence in Current Roles

Across participating organisations employees reported high confidence in their ability to perform their roles effectively. This indicates that the workforce across participating organisations is largely capable in current roles.



Demand for Training and Development

Employees frequently highlighted the importance of training opportunities, mentoring, and career development. Many respondents expressed interest in training courses, coaching, shadowing experienced colleagues, and clearer development pathways.

"I would really value more opportunities for training and development."

— Employee

"Shadowing more experienced colleagues would help me develop my skills."

— Employee



Leadership Relationships

Employee responses indicate that relationships between employees and leadership teams are broadly positive. Many respondents described supportive working environments and positive relationships with managers.

"I feel supported by my manager and know I can ask for help if I need it."

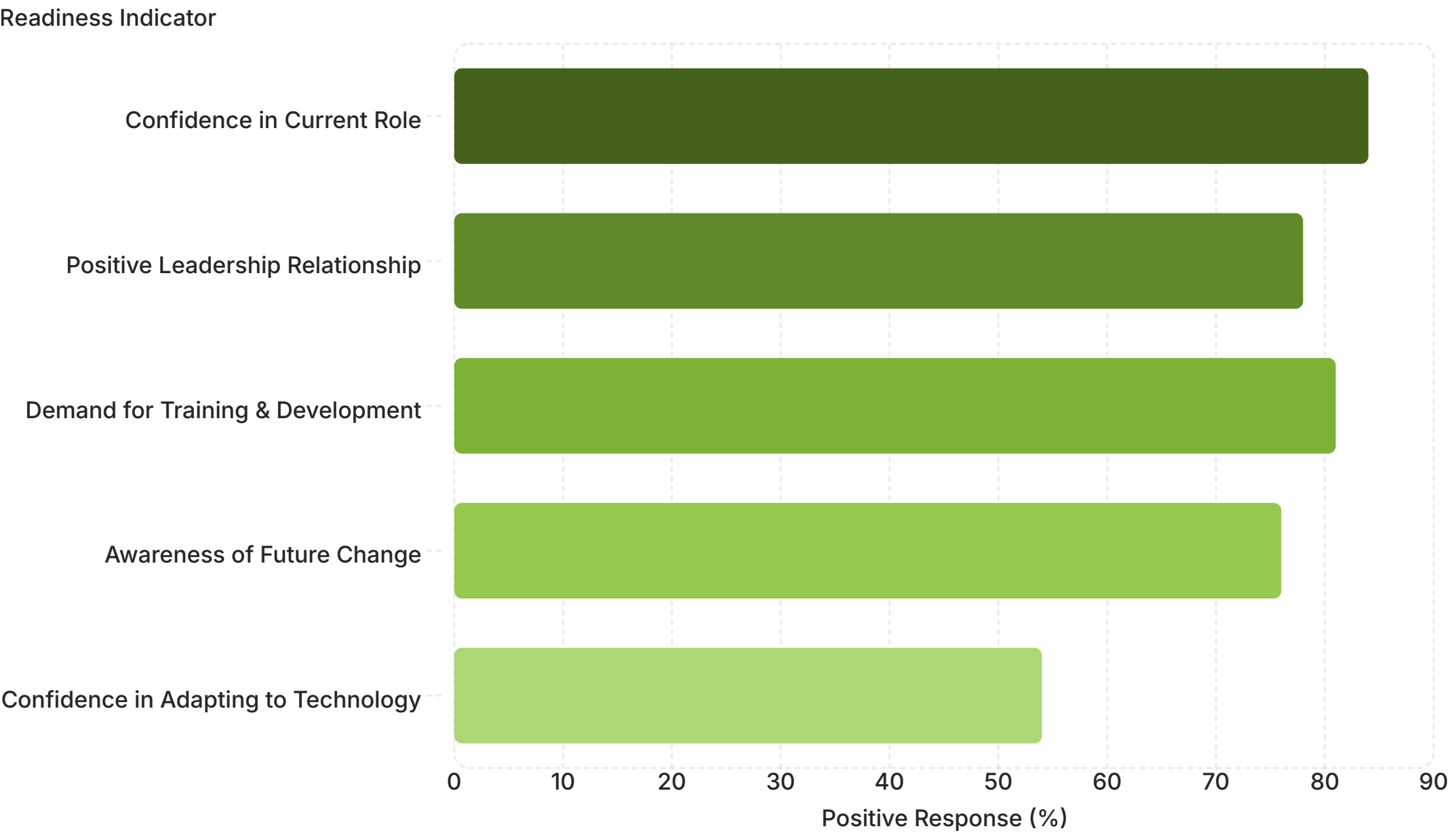
— Employee



Awareness of Future Change

Employees broadly recognise that technological developments and industry change will influence how work is performed in the future. Many respondents expect their roles to evolve as technology continues to develop.

Employee Readiness Indicators



❏ **Key Insight:** Employees report strong confidence in current roles and broadly positive leadership relationships. However, confidence in adapting to technological change is notably lower — highlighting a gap between awareness and practical preparedness that organisations should address.

Chapter 5 – Integrated Findings

Purpose of This Chapter

The previous chapters presented insights from three sources: the Surrey employer survey, leadership interviews, and employee surveys. When considered together these datasets reveal several consistent patterns relating to workforce capability, recruitment, and future readiness.

Three Sources, One Picture

Employer Survey

Identified key skills gaps and recruitment challenges across approximately 100 Surrey organisations.

Leadership Interviews

Revealed consistent themes around supervisory transitions, behavioural capability and workforce development.

Employee Surveys

Showed strong current capability but variable confidence in adapting to future technological and organisational change.

Six Integrated Findings

1. Workforce Capability in Current Roles Is Generally Strong	2. Developing Leadership Capability Is a Consistent Priority
3. Recruitment Challenges Reflect Capability Alignment	4. Development Is Valued but Constrained
5. Workforce Awareness of Change Is High	6. Preparedness for Technological Change Is Mixed

Integrated Findings in Detail

6.1 Workforce Capability in Current Roles Is Generally Strong

Employees across participating organisations generally report high confidence in their current capability. This suggests organisations are operating with workforces that are experienced and effective in current roles.

6.2 Developing Leadership Capability Is a Consistent Priority

Leadership capability emerged as a consistent development priority across the research. As organisations grow, employees increasingly transition into supervisory roles where people-management capability becomes essential.

"As organisations grow, leadership skills become just as important as technical capability."

— Senior Leader

6.3 Recruitment Challenges Reflect Capability Alignment

Recruitment challenges often relate to alignment between candidate capability and employer expectations rather than simply labour shortages. Employers frequently seek candidates who combine technical expertise with behavioural capability.

6.4 Development Is Valued but Constrained

Leaders and employees both recognise the importance of workforce development. However, operational pressures can make structured training programmes difficult to deliver consistently.

6.5 Workforce Awareness of Change Is High

Employees broadly understand that technological change and evolving industry practices will influence their roles.

6.6 Preparedness for Technological Change Is Mixed

Although awareness of change is widespread, confidence in adapting to technological developments appears more moderate. Organisations may benefit from additional support in translating awareness of technological change into practical workforce capability.

Chapter 6 – Implications for Employers

Purpose of This Chapter

This chapter considers the practical implications of the research findings for employers and outlines key recommendations to support workforce capability development.

		
Strengthening Leadership Capability	Supporting Workforce Development	Balancing Technical and Behavioural Skills
Many organisations would benefit from providing training for supervisors and new managers. As businesses grow, more employees move into leadership roles and need the skills to manage people and teams effectively. Developing these skills can help organisations run more smoothly and prepare for future challenges.	Organisations often need training that fits around day-to-day work. Flexible approaches can help employees develop their skills without disrupting normal operations. Examples include mentoring, short training sessions, and learning from colleagues. These types of approaches can help organisations continue developing their workforce while keeping the business running smoothly.	Training programmes should focus on both technical skills and interpersonal skills. Employees need the knowledge to do their jobs, but they also need skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving. Developing both types of skills helps create more capable and effective teams.

1.

Preparing for Technological Change

Organisations should help employees develop practical digital skills and become familiar with new technologies. This will help the workforce adapt as technology continues to change how work is done.

Investing in these skills can help organisations stay competitive and encourage new ways of working.

"Technology is changing our industry quickly, and we need our teams to keep developing digital skills."

— Business Leader

Chapter 7 – Implications for the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP)

Purpose of This Chapter

This chapter looks at what the research findings mean for the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP). It considers how education providers and skills initiatives can better support workforce development across Surrey.

By taking these insights into account, the LSIP can help ensure that training and education are relevant to the needs of local employers and employees.

Supporting Leadership Development Training providers need to focus on innovative programmes that help people develop leadership and management skills. This would support employees moving into supervisory roles and help prepare the next generation of leaders in local businesses. Stronger leadership skills can help organisations work more effectively and support the wider regional economy.	Strengthening Applied Skills Pathways Innovation in programmes that combine technical learning with practical work experience can help people be better prepared for jobs. When students apply what they learn in real workplace settings, it helps bridge the gap between classroom learning and the skills employers need. This can help graduates contribute more quickly when	SME-Friendly Training Delivery Flexible training options, such as short courses or workplace-based learning, can make training easier for smaller businesses to access. Many small and medium-sized businesses struggle to release staff for traditional training because of day-to-day work pressures. More flexible options would allow them to develop their workforce without disrupting normal operations.
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Supporting Ai and Digital Capability Helping employees develop Ai and digital skills and become familiar with new technologies will be important for future workforce needs. As technology continues to change, people need the confidence and skills to use new tools effectively. Supporting this will help the local workforce stay adaptable and competitive.

Chapter 8 – Conclusion: Bringing the Evidence Together

Purpose

This research looked at how organisations across Surrey develop the skills and capability of their workforce and how prepared they are for future challenges.

The study brings together information from three sources: a Surrey-wide employer survey, interviews with business leaders, and surveys of employees within participating organisations. By combining these different perspectives, the research provides a clearer picture of the current state of workforce capability.

The aim is to help identify the key areas where organisations may need to focus their efforts as they plan for future workforce development.

Current Capability Appears Strong Employees generally report that they understand their roles well and feel confident in their ability to do their jobs effectively. Leaders also describe their teams as experienced and capable in their day-to-day work. While these responses reflect employees’ perceptions rather than independently measured capability, they suggest that most organisations are operating with workforces that feel confident in their current roles.	Future Demands Are Increasing Organisations are facing a number of pressures that are increasing the importance of workforce development. As businesses grow, more employees move into supervisory and management roles and need leadership skills that may not have been required in their previous positions. At the same time, technological change is affecting how work is carried out and creating demand for new digital skills. Ongoing recruitment challenges are also encouraging organisations to place greater focus on developing and upskilling their existing workforce.	Strategic Response Required Addressing these challenges will require organisations to focus on several areas. Strengthening leadership capability at different levels will help employees manage teams and take on greater responsibility as organisations grow. Supporting ongoing workforce development is also critical. This includes providing accessible training and development opportunities that help employees build new skills over time. Organisations need to adapt to technological change by developing practical Ai skills and encouraging familiarity with new tools and systems.
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"The biggest challenge for organisations now is helping people keep learning as technology and industries evolve."

— Senior Leader

**Key Insight:** Workforce challenges often arise when employees move from technical roles into leadership positions, where different skills such as managing people and making decisions become important.

Another issue is the gap that can exist between the skills employers expect and the capabilities candidates bring to a role, particularly in terms of practical experience or sector knowledge.

Organisations also find it difficult to create enough time and space for training and development alongside.

Key Actions for Employers

Based on the integrated findings, the following four actions are recommended for organisations seeking to strengthen workforce capability and prepare for future demands.



Strengthen Leadership & Supervisory Capability

Provide structured development in people management, communication, and team leadership to effectively support employees transitioning into leadership roles. This includes training on delegation, conflict resolution, and motivational techniques, ensuring new leaders are well-equipped to guide their teams.



Embed Continuous Workforce Development

Utilize flexible approaches like mentoring, peer learning, and short targeted training programs to maintain development momentum, even amidst operational pressures. These adaptable methods ensure that employees can continuously upskill without significant disruption to their daily responsibilities.



Develop Technical & Behavioural Capability

Strengthen essential communication, collaboration, and professional behaviors, complementing existing technical expertise to enhance overall workforce performance. Fostering these soft skills is crucial for improving team dynamics, problem-solving, and ultimately, organizational effectiveness.

1.

Build Practical Readiness for Technological Change

Actively support the development of AI and digital capabilities, encouraging experimentation with emerging technologies. Implement applied learning initiatives to ensure that theoretical awareness is effectively translated into practical, usable skills across the workforce.

Implications for the LSIP

The research highlights several opportunities for collaboration across the local skills ecosystem. Education providers and training organisations can support workforce capability development by:

Leadership Training

Expand leadership and supervisory training opportunities for employees transitioning into management roles.

Applied Learning

Strengthen applied learning pathways that combine technical knowledge with practical workplace experience.

SME-Friendly Formats

Provide flexible, modular training formats that are accessible for smaller organisations with operational constraints.

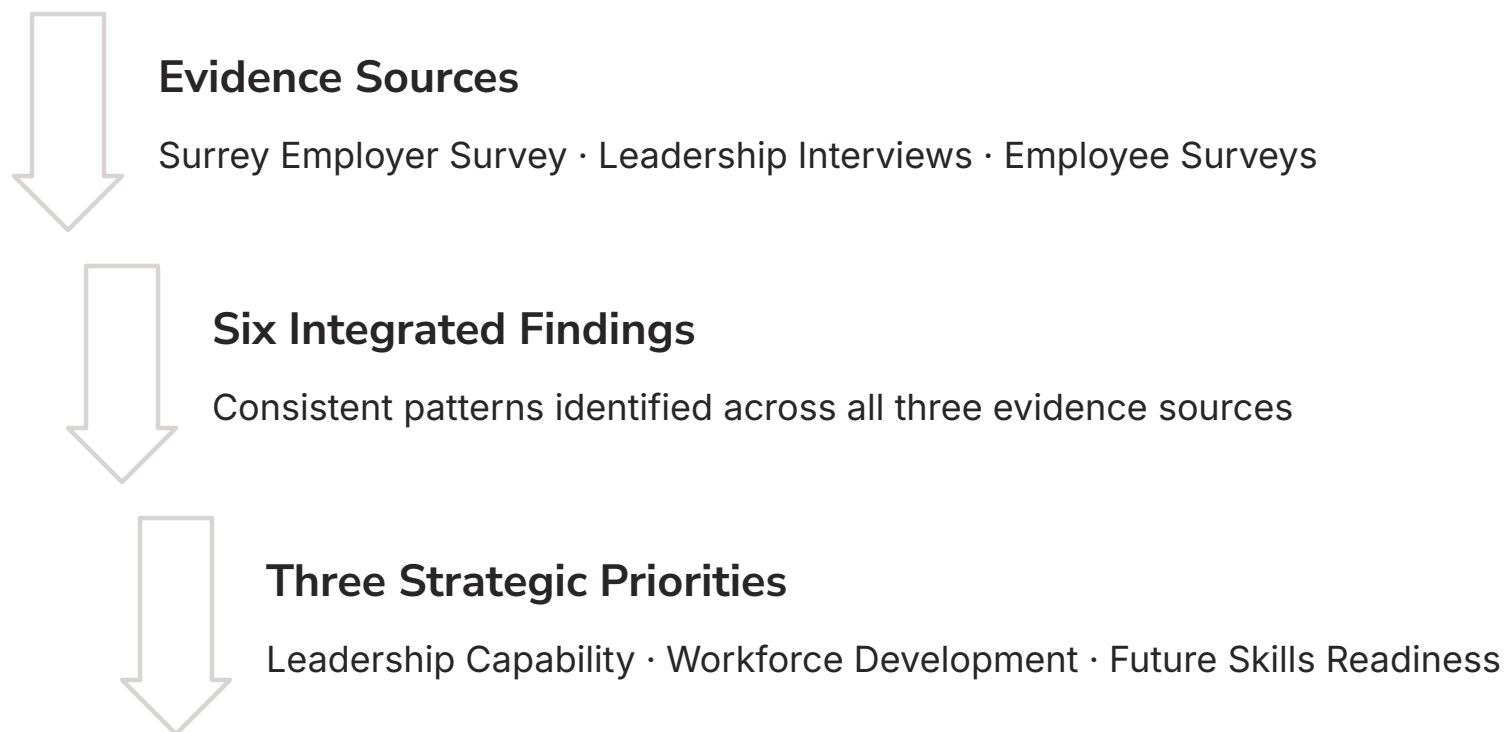
Ai and Digital Capability

Support Ai and technological capability development to prepare organisations for future workforce demands.

Closer collaboration between employers and education providers will be important in ensuring training provision continues to reflect evolving workforce needs.

From Evidence to Action

A three-layer strategic framework summarising the research journey from evidence sources to strategic priorities. This framework illustrates how initial data collection and analysis directly informed the formulation of actionable strategies for the LSIP.



- ❏ **Final Reflection:** The research presents a largely positive picture of workforce capability across participating organisations, revealing a resilient and adaptable local talent pool. Employees consistently report positive working environments, supportive leadership relationships, and a strong willingness to learn and develop new skills. The primary challenge moving forward is to strategically build on this robust foundation by further strengthening leadership capability and fostering practical workforce development initiatives. This will ensure organisations are not only equipped to respond to current demands but are also proactively prepared for future technological advancements and significant organisational changes.