

Kent & Medway Local Skills Improvement Plan

Progress Report
June 2024



Funded by
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This progress report has been prepared in accordance with Local Skills Improvement Plans: Stage 2 Guidance (dated November 2023) and is intended to review progress against the local skills improvement plan published in August 2023.

This report was produced in June 2024, but publication was delayed due to the pre-election period.

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Kent & Medway LSIP Progress report 2024

1. Aims & Objectives

1.1 Building on the Local Skills Improvement Plan in August 2023¹, this report aims to provide employers, providers and stakeholders an update 10 months after the publication. It is an opportunity to reflect on the progress made to date in Kent & Medway and what comes next to address the employer identified skills needs.

1.2 This report is not an exhaustive list of the activities and impacts of the LSIP to date but aims to provide some insight into some of the activities undertaken by stakeholders, education providers and the LSIP team since the publication.

1.3 This report also showcases the activities stemming from the investments linked to the Trailblazer LSIP² and the initial employer informed skills work³ within the region.

1.4 Through this report we will:

- Summarise the Local Skills Improvement Plan.
- Provide an update on the economic and strategic landscape.
- Provide a brief overview of the priorities and actions.
- Illustrate the progress made to date.
- Outline the next steps and what remains to be achieved.

1.5 As part of this report, it is important to understand the principles upon which the Kent & Medway LSIP set out the agenda for change it sought to address:

- **The agenda has not been to set out an employer ‘demand’ for further education action**, although the Education Providers have a central role in delivering it. It is important to note that employers will themselves

be key to the better communication of industry opportunity and demand. Employers also have a role in supporting the Education Providers to ensure that any additional offer meets evolving need.

- **Understanding the barriers to meeting these needs remains important going forward.** These relate to funding and qualification structures and balancing employer demand with the wider range of objectives that Education Providers must meet.
- Ultimately, and possibly most importantly, when looking at what has been done in the last 10 months, **change can be incremental and ‘marginal’, as well as systemic.** Tackling specific, distinct challenges in the short term where they address the needs of a group of engaged employers can help to make the case and build confidence in the delivery of wider measures in the longer term.

1.6 Throughout the LSIP process, we have worked with, and through, existing employer groups and forums wherever possible, ensuring that we work together towards the goal of embedding the skills need conversation. This reinforces the approach taken for this region which focuses on embedding the skills agenda within the regional structures and enabling education providers to access employers in a coordinated and meaningful way avoiding, where possible, duplication and confusion from the employer perspectives.

1.7 Therefore, this report is a reflection on the way the region has, as a whole, embraced and taken forward the Kent & Medway LSIP agenda and provides snapshots of the activities carried out by a number of them in support of the blueprint approach set out in the LSIP.

¹ [Kent & Medway Local Skills Improvement Plan](#) – August 2023 – Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce

² [Trailblazer LSIP](#)

³ [Work skills evidence base](#)

2. Summary of the Local Skills Improvement Plan

The LSIP in Kent & Medway

- 2.1** The Kent & Medway Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) 2023 is a roadmap designed to address the skills needs and shortages in the region. It was developed through collaboration between employers, training providers, and other stakeholders, and has been approved by the Secretary of State for Education.
- 2.2** The Kent & Medway LSIP's primary goal has been to provide a blueprint to support Education Providers, Regional and Local Authorities, as well as other key stakeholders of the employer needs to be addressed in our region.



- 2.3** This was done through clear actions, set out for each of the sectors and priority themes in order to ensure that the work was focused on the needs, but also acknowledging that each of the parties have a part to play to articulate the best responses for the region based on their expertise and working collaboratively.
- 2.4** Key points of the LSIP 2023:
- **Focus on key sectors:** The plan identifies priority sectors in the region, including **Construction, Manufacturing & Engineering, Fresh Food & Food Production, Health & Social Care** and **Education**. And some sectors with potentially emerging skills needs such as **Transport & Logistics** and **Creative Industries**.
 - **Cross-cutting themes:** The LSIP also addresses cross-cutting themes that affect multiple sectors, such as **Decarbonisation, Digitalisation** and **SME engagement in skills**.
 - **Collaboration:** The LSIP encourages greater collaboration between employers, training providers, and other stakeholders to ensure that the workforce has the skills needed to succeed in the 21st-century economy.
- 2.5** The key driver of the LSIP is to ensure that employers are, and remain, at the heart of the skills conversation, and drive and inform the future of skills in Kent & Medway.
- 2.6** Overall, the Kent & Medway LSIP 2023 aims to create a more skilled and adaptable workforce in the region, better equipped to meet the challenges and opportunities of the future. It builds on previous work and analysis, providing a clear direction for skills development in Kent and Medway.
- 2.7** You can find the Kent & Medway Local Skills Improvement Plan 2023 here: <https://kentemployerskillsplan.org/kent-medway-lsip-2023/>

3. Strategic and economic context update

Strategic Landscape

- 3.1** Since the publication of the LSIP in August 2023, the economic landscape has evolved with the Government's closure of local enterprise partnerships.
- 3.2** As the role of the former South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) transfers to Kent and Medway, its roles and responsibilities have been transferred. For our region, this has been done through continuity with the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership (KMEP), established under SELEP originally, continuing in its role as the county-wide economic growth board, including the Kent & Medway Employment Task Force which supports the skills agenda at a regional strategic level.
- 3.3** As part of the work to ensure alignment on a strategic level, Kent County Council and Medway Council have with KMEP published the Kent & Medway Economic Framework⁴, setting out the ambitions of the region towards 2030. The framework highlights the skills challenges of the region and acknowledges that a concerted effort is yielding results, and the Kent & Medway LSIP is central to this.

Business Landscape

- 3.4** Like most of England, the number of businesses in the region has reduced, from 75k in 2021 to 73k in 2023⁵. This has not affected the size distribution of the region which remains at 90% of businesses with fewer than 10 employees.
- 3.5** A few closures or announced closures of regional organisations are worth noting. Such as Pfizer, one of the major employers of the region, which announced it will be cutting 500 of 940 jobs at its Sandwich Discovery Park⁶ site. And a pharmaceutical manufacturing company⁷, which closed its manufacturing plant at Queenborough, Isle of Sheppey, with a loss of 150 jobs in December 2023 having made 100 redundant earlier in the year.

⁴ [Kent & Medway Economic Framework March 2024](#)

⁵ [ONS, UK Business, activity, size and location, 2023](#)

⁶ [Discovery Park](#), formerly a wholly owned Pfizer site, currently hosts more than 160 businesses with a combined workforce of over 3,500.

Education Landscape

- 3.6** The overall education landscape has remained stable since the publication of the LSIP, and all providers have engaged in a meaningful way with the LSIP plans and activities and have focused on addressing the issues raised by the employers within the key sectors and themes identified in the LSIP.
- 3.7** In addition to the facilities supported by LSIP related funds, there has been some additional developments responding to the needs identified in the LSIP. This includes the extension of Ashford College⁸ opened in Autumn 23, which provides modern and up to date facilities for learners and EKC Canterbury College Spring lane site⁹ focused on developing green skills.
- 3.8** One of the major investments that has not been a direct result of the LSIP but was informed by the Trailblazer information, is the Institute of Technology (IoT), based at MidKent College Maidstone campus which is a partnership across the former South East Local Enterprise Partnership area. The IoT, opened in May 2024, focuses on engineering skills for both construction and manufacturing, in line with the needs identified in the LSIP.
- 3.9** It remains more difficult for ITPs to address some of the elements that require significant capital expenditure to implement, this will remain an issue for sectors such as Construction and Manufacturing. However, FE colleges, which have benefitted from this investment, have, where relevant and possible, engaged in collaborative discussions on this subject.
- 3.10** It has been encouraging to see that through the activities, different partners have found increased opportunities for collaboration and identified synergies. These take time to develop but should increase the opportunities to provide meaningful pathways across the different levels and support employers in a more holistic way.

⁷ Recipharm AB

⁸ Phase 2 Ashford College (EKC Group) – Post-16 Capacity Fund & Strategic Development Fund Round 1 (SDF1)

⁹ Spring Lane – Canterbury College

4. Priorities and Actions (Roadmap)

Priority	Action	Partners involved	Timescales	Method of implementation and outcomes expected	Monitoring arrangements	Progress Status
Construction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perception of the industry and engagement Modernising the training offer Upskilling & reskilling 	<p>KFE – MKC lead Employers KCFG Major Projects Group K&M Careers Hub National Career Service Prison Service * LSIP team</p>	Throughout the LSIP 2023/25	<p>To improve collaboration between the construction sector and careers, with a focus on attracting a more diverse and skilled workforce.</p> <p>This includes providing better information to career advisors and educators, making construction careers more appealing to underrepresented groups, and developing new courses that align with industry needs.</p>	Monitoring of materials progress to production and increase in offer related to employer demand.	In progress and on track
Manufacturing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Image and perceptions Modernising the training offer Understanding the skills landscape 	<p>LSIP LSIF KFE – NKC lead KMFG Careers Hub Employers ITP</p>	Throughout the LSIP 2023/25	<p>To improve collaboration between the manufacturing & engineering sector and careers, with a focus on promoting automation and digital skills.</p> <p>This includes providing better information to career advisors and educators, making manufacturing & engineering careers more appealing to underrepresented groups, and developing new courses that align with industry needs, including up-skilling the existing workforce.</p>	<p>Monitoring of materials progress to production and increase in offer related to employer demand.</p> <p>Sector surveys on skills offer.</p>	In progress and on track
Food & Food Production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruitment and retention challenge Regional sector-specific offer (Level 2 & 3) 	<p>KFE – NKC lead DWP LSIP Sector lead Growers & Food Producer Group KCC (for Bootcamps) Industry 4 Council</p>	<p>1. 2024/25 2. & 3. Throughout the LSIP 2023/25</p>	<p>To support the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> co-development & Delivery of sector focused pre-employment programmes. curriculum improvement & co-development at levels 2 & 3. development of Engineering curriculum for Food Production. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitoring of pre-employment pilots & rollouts. 	In progress and on track

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased engineering skills and provision Sector-specific leadership and management skills 	LSIP team		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> development of leadership and management curriculum for the sector. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> increase in offer at levels 2 & 3. Employer survey in 2025	
Health & Social Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruitment and retention in social care Digital skills in social care 	Skills for Care Careers Hub Medway Health and Social Care Skills Board KFE – EKC lead Employers KCC Medway Council LSIP	Throughout the LSIP 2023/25	Support with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing visibility of existing tools to promote careers. Providing enhanced career resources for educator and careers advisors. Expanding social care offerings and uptake. Integrating digital skills into existing courses. Offering new programmes for existing staff to support digitalisation. 	Monitoring of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Materials progress to production Social care offer and take-up Social care workforce trends and positive changes Change in offer related to digital skills. 	In progress and on track
Education	Tutor Shortages in construction and manufacturing & engineering	Originally through the SELEP - Going forward: Construction led by CITB – Major projects group. Manufacturing led by Manufacturing Industry 4 Council	Throughout the LSIP 2023/25	Support with ways to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> alleviate skill shortage areas through increased use of technology, division of roles and staff deployment. improve recruitment and retention by looking at the role of employers/employees and graduates, local collaborative recruitment models and mechanisms to aid retention (such as ITT, and technical CPD) Pilots to take forward the options identified in the workshops and increase in tutor retention and recruitment.	Monitoring impact of pilots. Progression of some pilots to rollouts.	In progress and on track

Cross Cutting Themes

Priority	Action	Partners involved	Timescales	Method of implementation and outcomes expected	Monitoring arrangements	Progress Status
Decarbonisation	To ensure this is addressed in all relevant areas, as outlined in the key sectors.	LSIF KFE	Throughout the LSIP 2023/25	Expand net-zero skills training by leveraging the successful programs developed in SDF1 and integrate best practices from those programmes into relevant courses across all sectors to maximize the impact of green skills initiatives.	Monitoring of provision related to green skills	In progress and on track
Digitalisation	To ensure this is addressed in all relevant areas, as outlined in the key sectors.	SDF2 LSIF KFE ITP	Throughout the LSIP 2023/25	Support with implementing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Digital skills training on existing courses, with extra focus on specialised skills across the sectors. New courses to address basic digital skills needs for the existing workforce. 	Monitoring of provision related to digital skills within existing courses. Employer survey on digital skills progress	In progress and on track
Skills Engagement with SME's	To work towards facilitating SME understanding and engagement with the education landscape and associated opportunities.	KFE LSIP KICC Careers Hub	Throughout the LSIP 2023/25	Create an SME-focused guide(s) outlining regional skills provision, leveraging existing resources to highlight: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunities for engagement: Career development pathways The regional skills offer. 	Employer surveys on education landscape understanding to monitor progress	In progress and on track



5. What has been achieved so far?

Stakeholder Engagement and Impact

- 5.1** One of the key achievements of the Kent & Medway LSIP has been to provide all the actors in the skills conversation with the same blueprint with an agreed set of priorities, based on data and significant input from employers.
- 5.2** The LSIP has provided a strategic direction to strengthen the skills conversation between employers, education providers and stakeholders.
- 5.3** The LSIP has been used by economic players within the region, and endorsed by Kent County Council and Medway Council, both in action and support of the initiatives of the LSIP and in recognising its role within the new Kent & Medway Economic Framework.
- 5.4** Local Authorities, have, when setting out their priorities for UKSPF round 3, considered the LSIP and, where relevant to their geography, taken forward one or more of the sectors or themes.
- 5.5** The approach in Kent & Medway has been to involve as many of the stakeholders in the skills arena as possible. This includes the career organisations, Kent & Medway Careers Hub and National Careers Service¹⁰, the Department for Work & Pensions, University Technical College's (UTC), Higher Education Institutions, Supported Internship Providers and in the last year we have also started engaging with the HM Prison Service.
- 5.6** Additionally, we recognise the roles schools have in provision especially in Kent where a selective system impacts the proportion of students in technical pathways. Kent County Council and Medway Council have each carried out a review of the 16-19 provision, which the LSIP team has actively supported, to ensure that the employers are a part of the conversation and actions.

Investment in Skills

- 5.7** The Capital investment in the region is the most visible achievement for regional employers, concretely demonstrating the impact of their input to

the LSIP. The developments linked to capital projects take time and through the collaborative work with employers supported by the LSIP, the projects ensured that investment impact addressed employer need.

- 5.8** The capital work has been carried out by the region's three colleges, EKC Group, MidKent College and North Kent College across the 3 rounds of Strategic Development Fund (SDF) and subsequent Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF) funding. Details of the investment is outlined in the sector updates below.
- 5.9** These investments have galvanised the efforts to address the needs identified by the employers and have strengthened the joined up working of the colleges to the benefit of employers as well as learners.
- 5.10** KFE has successfully built upon investments to maximize their regional impact, as noted by employers and stakeholders. The developments have become increasingly interconnected as they've developed, and with the LSIF, each theme will be spearheaded by one college group, but all three will deliver each theme within their geography.

Embedding the Skills conversation

- 5.11** As illustrated in the sections below, one of the key impacts of the LSIP has been to strengthen the skills conversation. The importance of the dialogue is that whilst a key role is to amplify the skills needs of employers it is also essential to also support employers in understanding their role in addressing those needs.
- 5.12** To support this and foster discussion the LSIP team have interacted through LinkedIn¹¹, website content¹² and also through publications such as Thinking business¹³.
- 5.13** Additionally, the team has promoted the LSIP objectives across the region through events organised by stakeholders, education providers and businesses as well as LSIP ones.

¹⁰ In Kent & Medway this is provided by [CXK limited](#)

¹¹ Kent & Medway Local Skills Improvement Plan [LinkedIn](#)

¹² [Kent & Medway Local Skills Improvement Plan website](#)

¹³ Publications can be found on the [KICC website](#)

Construction

Activities

- 5.14** To promote the activity of the LSIP and demonstrate to the sector the impact their engagement had, we exhibited at the Kent Construction Expo and invited MidKent College, which has led on this sector, to showcase the achievements to date and future plans. Engagement was high, with many organisations interested in engaging with the developments.
- 5.15** Work on changing perception of the sector and wider career engagement has been supported by the Kent & Medway Careers Hub and carried out by employers as part of social value engagement, and the region's major projects (Ebbsfleet Garden City, Lower Thames Crossing) have supported this in particular.
- 5.16** To showcase the careers within the built environment within the region the Ebbsfleet Development Corporation, Early Careers Show and Kent and Medway Careers Hub have co-produced a new video entitled "On Your Doorstep"¹⁴, to showcase the diverse career paths available in construction, architecture, engineering, and related fields.
- 5.17** Updates and engagement with the sector take place regularly by the LSIP, LSIF and Careers Hub teams, through KCFG, CITB, skills boards of major projects as well as specific events.
- 5.18** Employer engagement activities have also taken place in the form of LSIF focused round tables with employers and the Construction, Engineering & Manufacturing Skills Conference, details of which are in the mind map of the event in Annex 1.

Capital Investment

- 5.19** The Skills Factory¹⁵, built at MidKent College Maidstone from old mobile buildings and refurbished for energy efficiency, provides a focus for green construction technology for students and externally. The kits available for teaching the newest green skills in a hands-on way to students enable and

enhance the provision of high-quality courses meeting the Employers current and future needs.

- 5.20** The Home Energy Centre⁸ has provided an excellent platform not only for developing skills provision in ground, air, and PV installation, but also to engage with Employers on the technologies being showcased and taught. This facility allows employers to consider the upcoming technologies and interact with them in a training environment, giving them the opportunity to upskill /reskill their staff.
- 5.21** The Retrofit Centre¹⁶ which is being currently built will address the employer identified need for skills in retrofitting existing building stock to meet Net Zero targets.



¹⁴ [On Your Doorstep video](#)

¹⁵ MidKent College Maidstone campus - SDF1

¹⁶ Building in progress at MidKent College Maidstone campus - Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF)



5.22 These facilities and kits are now being adapted and mirrored across the college groups with a Green Energy Centre¹⁷ and a Green Skills & Retrofit Centre¹⁸ in development within the region to ensure accessibility to more learners and amplify the increase in these skills to meet future demand.

5.23 The Immersive classrooms and associated technologies¹⁹ have, in addition to the different technologies used to enhanced learning like VR and AR, enabled more effective use of opportunities to learn from employers. The new classrooms, masterclasses and employer engagement opportunities can benefit more students and enhance the curriculum in a more meaningful way.

Skills Provision

5.24 Throughout the developments of Green Construction focused facilities, courses have been developed to address employer needs identified in the LSIP, this includes a suite of Green Construction courses from both FE colleges and Independent Training Providers. These include training on renewable energy installation, retrofit skills, leadership & management.

5.25 This has been further enhanced by the provisions of the IoT, which has introduced courses that address needs identified in the LSIP including quantity surveying and construction project management.

¹⁷ North Kent College Tonbridge campus - LSIF

¹⁸ EKC Group - Ashford College - LSIF

¹⁹ 12 Rooms across the 12 college sites of Kent Further Education Colleges- SDF2

Manufacturing & Engineering

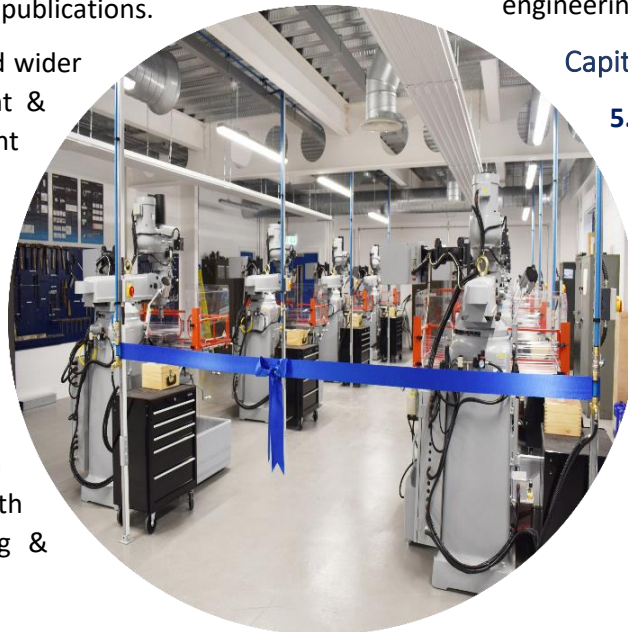
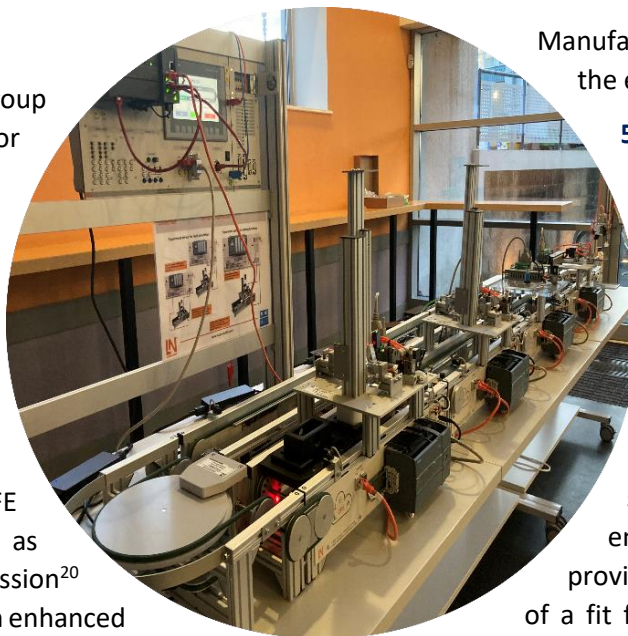
Activities

5.26 The Kent & Medway Manufacturing Focus Group (KMFG) has been the key engagement vehicle for the LSIF, with monthly meetings giving the opportunity for education providers and manufacturers to network and collaborate. To date, over 50 manufacturers have engaged with the group and those numbers are steadily rising as visibility increases.

5.27 Every month KMFG showcases the different skills provision in the region, including those provided by UTC's, ITP's, schools, HEI and FE colleges and collaborative opportunities such as Innovate UK Edge, the Manufacturing Commission²⁰ and the Industry 4.0 Council²¹. This has also been enhanced through articles published online and employer publications.

5.28 Work on changing perception of the sector and wider career engagement has been led by the Kent & Medway Careers Hub through sector engagement and KMFG. The main focus has been to support manufacturing employers finding ways to promote their industry to schools and colleges, which has been supported by very engaged employers such as Wire Belt Company Ltd. The outputs include the creation of an online video resource²².

5.29 Employer engagement activities have also taken place in the form of LSIF focused round tables with employers and the Construction, Engineering &



Manufacturing Skills Conference, details of which are in the mind map of the event in Annex 1.

5.30 One of the most impactful activities was a 3 site KMFG meeting where employers were hosted simultaneously at EKC Dover College, MidKent College Maidstone, and North Kent College Gravesend. Employers were shown the facilities and then a meeting was held in the immersive classrooms at each site, chaired from Gravesend around the LSIF plans with interactive participation from the other locations.

5.31 The creation of the Industry 4 Council in Kent & Medway, launched at KMFG in March 24, seeks to address a number of skills issues faced by the sector by having a focused group of employers dedicated to considering the future skills needs. It will provide valuable support to the development of solutions and delivery of a fit for purpose training offer for the future of manufacturing and engineering.

Capital Investment

5.32 The launch of the Green Engineering Centre & Mechatronics Lab²³, Engineering Hub²⁴ and CNC Workshop²⁵ in response to the needs identified in the Trailblazer LSIF, have provided cutting edge technology for students to train on. These have in part been mirrored within the IoT.

5.33 Moreover, these facilities enable businesses to access emerging technologies and support the development of the sector towards Industry 4.0. The facilities are unlocking increased engagement and innovation opportunities for the colleges they are located at.

²⁰ [Upskilling Industry: Manufacturing productivity & growth in England, October 23.](#)

²¹ [Industry 4 Council](#) - LSIF initiative led by North Kent College

²² KMFG business bite ["Why would a local business engage with schools & colleges?"](#)

²³ [EKC Canterbury College](#) - SDF1

²⁴ [EKC Ashford College](#) - SDF1

²⁵ [EKC Dover College](#) - SDF1



5.34 As part of the next phase of capital investment (LSIF) more of these facilities are being set up across the region increasing the access to Industry 4.0 skills.

5.35 Immersive classrooms²⁶, with added technologies like virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), are not only enhancing learning but also expanding opportunities for students to engage with employers. These classrooms facilitate masterclasses and other employer engagement initiatives, benefiting a broader range of students and enriching the curriculum in more impactful ways.

Skills Provision

5.36 The facilities have unlocked further provision within the region including increased provision at levels 3 and above and short courses, as per the need identified in the LSIP. To date, these have principally been to the East of the region due to the location of investments, however with the progress of LSIF and IoT, this has started to increase across the geography with new courses launching from 2024/25.

5.37 A suite of modular one day courses has also been developed as part of the Industry 4 initiative and after a pilot are being launched over the summer. These cover automation and digital skills and will further address the specific short course demand of employers identified.



Industry 4 Council
Kent & Medway

²⁶ 12 Rooms across the 12 college sites of Kent Further Education Colleges- SDF2

Fresh Food & Food Production

Activities

5.38 The Fresh Food and Food Production sector is supported in Kent & Medway by the Growing Kent & Medway (GKM) programme which focuses on supporting innovation and the innovative food and drink regional businesses.

5.39 GKM set up several programmes to support the sector skills needs. Since the LSIP report publication they have launched a new Green Careers Digital Hub for Kent & Medway²⁷, in partnership with The Institute for Agriculture and Horticulture (TIAH).

5.40 One of the employers leading the way in engagement is Thanet Earth which has partnered with Hadlow College to provide students with hands on experience of hydroponic growing within the Thanet Earth Centre of Excellence @ Hadlow College²⁸.

5.41 The sector has a vibrant Growers & Food Production Group²⁹ supported by the LSIP sector lead, which meets every other Friday online to discuss issues affecting the sector. They have a programme of actions, and one key focus is skills.

5.42 The Growers & Food Production Group and the Kent & Medway Careers Hub organised a Teachers Encounter at the National Fruit Show in November 2023, to showcase the sector to Headteachers and career leads. Growers

and food producers were able to showcase their industry and career opportunities, including exhibitors and other employers from the sector.

5.43 The LSIP sector lead has actively fostered stronger connections between growers and food producers with the skills agenda, while also assisting education providers in building relationships with these industries. These efforts have measurably increased engagement between these groups and the education sector.

5.44 To address the engineering skills gap in the food production sector, the Industry 4 Council has initiated a collaboration with food producers. This is an ongoing process that will require time to fully establish.

Capital Investment

5.45 The main investment linked to LSIP identified needs has been the Green Skills Accelerator at Hadlow College, part of North Kent College, with a sustainable concept vineyard and orchard, automated spraying, robotic harvesting, and robotic tractor as well as a wealth of monitoring equipment. This provides a great basis for decarbonisation and sustainability training.

Skills Provision

5.46 Skills provision is evolving with new courses being implemented at Hadlow College and the newly refurbished EKC Canterbury College Spring Lane.

5.47 The Growers & Food Production Group has been working with Kent County Council to identify the areas where Skills Bootcamps can address identified employer needs, increasing the provision.



²⁷ <https://tiah.org/kent-medway>

Picture: Teacher's encounter at the National Fruit show, 2nd November 23, speakers Carol Ford and John Shropshire.

²⁸ [Thanet Earth Centre of Excellence @ Hadlow College](#) – North Kent College

²⁹ KMET sub-group for Growers & Food Producers

Health & Social Care

Activities

- 5.48** The Health & Social Care sector was one of the new sectors included in the 2023 LSIP.
- 5.49** The social care sector is supported locally by several organisations and forums such as Skills for Care, Kent Integrated Care Alliance (KiCA), Medway Health & Social Care Skills Board.
- 5.50** For the report we focused on the Social Care sector as the Health (public sector) element was in progress through the Kent & Medway People Strategy 2023-2028 and was awaiting publication.
- 5.51** When the people strategy was published it outlined elements which are being addressed within the NHS and with existing provision. It also flagged that a key element required was digital skills, which linked to the existing priorities flagged for Social Care and tied into the identified LSIP priorities for the sector.
- 5.52** As part of the engagement for the LSIF³⁰ project, a conference on Digital Skills and Assistive Technologies was held in February 24. This event enabled the 48 employers present to get further information about the developments in the region, interact with education providers and hear from keynote speakers from across the industry including suppliers of digital and assistive technologies which will be available to view within college's new classrooms.
- 5.53** Employer engagement activities have taken place in the form of LSIF focussed round tables with employers from the sector to ensure effective co-development of skills provision for the region.
- 5.54** Work on improving the perception of the sector and promoting wider career opportunities has been supported by the Kent & Medway Careers Hub.
- 5.55** Engagement is ongoing with local stakeholders and providers, with Skills for Care, to support the implementation in the region of the new Care



Workforce Pathway and the upcoming Care Certificate for entrants to the sector, both of which are launching in 2024 and will improve the career prospects of the domestic care workforce and provide a clearer care career pathway.

Capital Investment

- 5.56** The LSIF focuses on the needs for Digital Health & Social Care facilities and skills development, as identified in the LSIP. The work is being led by EKC group and developed across the region within the three college groups.
- 5.57** The new facilities are in development and will consist of six assistive technological classrooms which will showcase cutting edge digital tools including therapeutic interactive robot seals. These rooms will provide a platform for training future workers for the sector in the latest technologies as well as the general digital skills they need for the sector.
- 5.58** The assistive technological classrooms will provide a space for the employers in the sector to engage with the technologies being showcased and make informed decisions for their specific setting and the upskilling/reskilling needs of their staff.

Skills Provision

- 5.59** As part of the LSIF focus, the professional development (CPD) of the staff delivering the courses in the sector has been an essential element. CPD has been delivered to staff across the 3 college groups and more events are planned to ensure that the new skills are embedded within delivery and curriculum for Health & Social Care.
- 5.60** Two new curriculum pathways have been developed around assistive technology (level 2 to 5) and Digital Skills for Health & Social Care (L1 to 4). These new courses and pathways will be rolled out over the coming academic year.

³⁰ Local Skills Improvement Fund

Education

5.61 The focus is on addressing tutor shortages, in particular in Construction and Manufacturing & Engineering as key sectors. This work was originally led by the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) which has wound down, so the work has been picked up by different groups as set out below.

Construction

5.62 Addressing the tutor shortages has been a key issue of the Major Projects Group (MPG) which was instrumental with the SELEP in raising the barriers caused to the sector by the skills shortages. Although the changes with the SELEP have led to some delays, the group is now being taken forward by the CITB and the agenda is progressing.

5.63 The employers have engaged with the education partners in finding ways to support the agenda and are working together to address the issues. Some national initiatives are also coming on stream to support this, including through the CITB.

5.64 As mentioned in the construction section above, the immersive classrooms have also enabled FE colleges to maximise any masterclass and input from employers.

Manufacturing

5.65 For Manufacturing & Engineering, this was a challenge that was not as visible to employers, and the LSIP team has worked with providers to raise the awareness through forums such as KMFG.

5.66 Addressing the challenge has been taken forward by the LSIF initiative through the Industry 4 Council and the pop-up toolkits.

5.67 The Industry 4 Council aims to develop lasting employer partnerships to increase the number of expert technical tutors and trainers who can deliver industry standard higher-level training.

5.68 The LSIF pop-up toolkits will facilitate the co-creation of content with employers at their premises enabling real world examples to be used within the curriculum.



Cross Cutting Themes

5.69 The cross-cutting themes activity can be seen throughout this report in the different sectors, we have picked below the highlights that were not expanded on above.

Digitalisation

5.70 As demonstrated above, in particular for Construction, Manufacturing & Engineering and Health & Social Care, digital skills are an essential part of the activities and progress made towards meeting more of the employer skills needs.

5.71 The introduction of the Immersive classrooms in each of the 12 FE college sites has provided support for digital skills across the curriculum. The classrooms have required a change in delivery methods and ways of teaching which will take time to embed but has substantially raised the digitalisation agenda.

5.72 These facilities and tools (Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality) increase the opportunity for students to experience and engage with latest digital tools, including and outside the sectors identified.

5.73 This has been amplified by LSIF, IoT and other investments which have digital and future of digitalisation at their heart and give an impetus to collaborative working with employers to ensure digital skills within the curriculum are fit for the needs of the future workforce.



Decarbonisation

5.74 The decarbonisation and net zero agenda is most visible in the activities and investments in construction across the different projects.

5.75 In addition, the LSIP team supported employer skills engagement in Green Skills week working with MidKent College to raise awareness of the green related roles available and the businesses focusing on the agenda.

5.76 One of the key elements to come out of the engagement on this subject was the fact that too often, SME's which are not at the heart of the agenda are unaware of what they can do to support it and the skills agenda focus is an essential element to raise this knowledge.

SME Engagement in Skills

5.77 One of the key elements identified in the LSIP in 2023 over and above the initial trailblazer was the need to support the SME engagement in the skills agenda. With the limited amount of large employers in the region, SMEs have to drive the agenda in Kent & Medway, which is not something most of them are confident or feel equipped to do even when they are aware.

5.78 By engaging with a large number of employer forums and working with stakeholders to harness resources, showcase best practice and generally engage SMEs in the skills conversation, the agenda is progressing.

5.79 Good examples of SME engagement in skills include video resources like the KMFG Business Bites "Why would a local business engage with schools & colleges?"³¹ which features a highly skills focused manufacturer and the Employer Standards LSIP Vlog³². The latter showcases a CEC tool empowers businesses to undertake skills outreach.

5.80 Initiatives like the Skills Bus³³, visiting business parks in the region, further demonstrate commitment to showcasing career opportunities and local skills development projects.

5.81 In the regional forums, supported by a consistent messaging across the region and with stakeholders, there is an increased interest in positive engagement with the skills agenda.

5.82 This is being felt by providers of all types, with more employers engaging in the conversation and understanding the options available as well as the limitations of the different provisions, discussion are starting to bear fruit.

³¹ KMFG Business Bites "[Why would a local business engage with schools & colleges?](#)"

³² The CEC [Employer Standards LSIP Vlog](#)

³³ LSIF Skills Bus Fe2024 – run and operated by [Runway Training](#)

6. What still needs to be achieved?

Overview

- 6.1** Ensuring that we maintain engagement, and the skills conversation remains embedded within employer forums and the open conversation with education providers maintains momentum, will be crucial to ensure a meaningful impact and legacy for Kent & Medway.

Construction

- 6.2** The LSIP will continue to foster a collaborative approach with its partners to maximise the benefits of the SDF and LSIF Projects, through the continued monitoring of the curriculum offer to address the elements outlined in the LSIP and enable lasting employer engagement, collaboration, and recruitment and retention of staff to the construction sector.
- 6.3** It is also recognised that more understanding is needed around sector requirements for shorter, modular courses to support upskilling and reskilling of current workforce. We will continue to work with stakeholders and employers to gather further intelligence to support this and ensure that employer needs analysis remains a priority for the LSIP.
- 6.4** As provision grows, including potentially through Bootcamps, the LSIP will continue to support employers understand and benefit from the developments in skills and support our education and training providers to meet local employer needs.
- 6.5** Emphasis will continue to remain on the major projects in the region which are key drivers for this sector, locally, and will have a significant impact on skills and labour demand.

Manufacturing

- 6.6** Unlocking the full potential of SDF and LSIF projects requires ongoing collaborative and partnership working. We will continue our employer engagement and sharing of best practices within the sector through the development and growth of the Industry 4.0 Council.
- 6.7** The LSIP will maintain its commitment to fostering sector skills collaboration through KMFG. We will continue our engagement with employers and

education providers, keeping them at the forefront of the skills conversation. KMFG site visits will continue to support the sector's performance by showcasing best practice and promoting broader collaboration among stakeholders.

- 6.8** We will continue to support the sector in raising awareness of the opportunities it offers and the skills required with our career focused stakeholders and through the engagement of the sector.

Health and Social Care

- 6.9** The LSIP will collaborate with its partners to maximise the impact of the LSIF project for employers, leveraging the region's assets to drive tangible benefits. Specifically, we will work together to integrate the assistive technology centres and related curriculum within the sector.
- 6.10** The LSIP team will continue to support stakeholders with careers education and pathways into social care for new entrants, and in particular care leavers. Engagement with care leavers is an area of focus with a proposed event for Autumn 24 to showcase the new assistive technology centres and curriculum and highlight the various roles in care including Occupational Therapists, Social Workers, Community Nurses and Nurse Associates and the pathways into these roles, to encourage new entrants to the sector.
- 6.11** We will continue to closely monitor the implementation of the Care Workforce Pathway and delivery of resources showcasing the diverse roles within the sector.

Food and Food Production

- 6.12** The LSIP team will work with education providers, DWP and the sector to introduce a reimagined Sector based Work Academy Programme (SWAP) following the original pilot in 22/23.
- 6.13** We will support the engagement of the sector with the Industry 4 Council to ensure that the sector's engineering skills remain a priority.
- 6.14** We will work with the Sector lead to ensure that provision, including potential bootcamps, meets the needs identified by the sector and where appropriate builds on the SDF capital investment.

Education

- 6.15** The LSIP team will continue working with the MPG on addressing the tutor shortages for Construction through CITB and Industry 4.0 Council for Manufacturing to ensure progress can be made.

Cross Cutting Themes

- 6.16** Emphasis on the cross-cutting themes across the priority sectors will continue to be monitored, in particular the provision related to green skills and digital skills within existing provision.
- 6.17** The LSIP team will continue to facilitate the application of these themes throughout the priority actions set by working in partnership with employers and education providers.
- 6.18** We will further support employers around work readiness and soft skills development of new entrants to ensure they are better placed to succeed in employment within our priority sectors. We will achieve this through working in partnership with careers organisations.
- 6.19** The LSIP team will continue to communicate and demystify the complexity of the education landscape for the SME community, so they better understand the impact on skills and workforce, areas for collaboration and engagement and benefits.

Watching Briefs

Creative Industries

- 6.20** The sector is starting to show signs of development, and the LSIP team has fostered connections with key stakeholders from within the sector. Further engagement is planned to increase understanding of the sector's skills needs and provision gaps and where relevant offer targeted support to drive employer-led skills solutions.

Transport & Logistics

- 6.21** The needs of the sector are evolving with further setbacks due to the development of a freight focussed airport at Manston, which would significantly change the skills needs of the region. We will continue to monitor and review for development of this sector moving forward.

Conclusion

- 6.22** Ten months into the Kent & Medway Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), this report spotlights and celebrates the region's collaborative embrace of the LSIP agenda. Through highlights of the impactful contributions of various stakeholders, all driving progress towards our shared goals.



Kent & Medway
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