

Greater Essex Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP)

2026–2029

Essex, Southend and Thurrock

Business driven,
employer led



Funded by
UK Government

Secretary of State Approval

This Local Skills Improvement Plan has been approved by the Secretary of State in accordance with the requirements of section 1 of the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022, and the relevant published statutory guidance.

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1. Foreword

It is a great pleasure to introduce our new Greater Essex Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP). Building on the fantastic work undertaken for the [first LSIP](#), this is an exciting new chapter which will enable us to deliver for and with local businesses.

This report is the result of extensive input and collaboration from employers and stakeholders locally across our priority sectors. Over recent months, we have undertaken a series of roundtables and engagement events to ensure that we're truly reflecting local priorities and needs. We have also had feedback through a questionnaire, which has had 411 responses. This has highlighted some key themes and issues which are reflected through the report, such as the need to keep pace with digital advancements like AI and a call from businesses to access more flexible, modular training. As always, we have been struck by the strong engagement and collaboration in Essex and by the wealth of work already underway, which we can build on. This report will explore these in more detail, and the accompanying annexes provide further context and information.

Although this is a new LSIP, we won't lose the foundation of the existing work which will continue alongside new and emerging needs, opportunities and the changing local and national landscape.

This includes aspects such as the government's industrial strategy, devolution and local government reorganisation. We continue to work closely with local stakeholders such as our local authorities and the DWP to shape and co-design the approach to skills and employment, to which the LSIP remains a key thread to ensure join up and continuation. Although timescales for local devolution have recently been postponed, this will still be a significant factor for delivering against the LSIP and our ability to shape funding and programmes. We are also now working with Higher Education colleagues who are officially part of the LSIP within Skills England national guidance and locally, this includes a Strategic Pathway Development Group for Further and Higher Education.

Most importantly, this is about action and responding to the skills needs of businesses for the benefit of our local economy. This work will continue to grow and evolve and we will keep track to ensure delivery. We are excited to get work underway and look forward to delivering further for Essex. Our sincere thanks to everyone involved and here's to the next chapter for Essex!

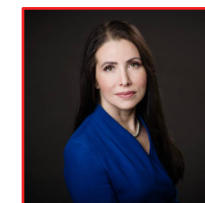


Denise Rossiter,
Chief Executive,
Essex Chambers of
Commerce
(to June 2026)

As incoming CEO of Essex Chambers of Commerce, I am pleased to echo and endorse Denise's foreword to this LSIP.

This report and the progress made through the first LSIP reflects a strong, employer-led commitment to meeting local skills needs and supporting business growth. At a pivotal moment, with devolution and political changes set to reshape our future landscape, the LSIP sets out clear, shared priorities across employers and partners right now.

I look forward to working closely with Jo Giles (LSIP Executive Director) and partners to ensure our approach continues to respond directly to the needs of Essex businesses. My sincere thanks to Denise for her leadership in shaping this work.



Ruth Gilbert,
Chief Executive,
Essex Chambers of
Commerce
(from June 2026)

2. Supporting Statements

The Essex Provider Network (EPN) bring together the majority of local and national Independent Training Providers (ITP's) operating in Essex, all Essex FE/Adult learning colleges, Higher Education Institutes (HEI's), a range of awarding bodies and influential partner organisations. Together, we pursue a collaborative approach to developing a unified skills strategy for Greater Essex.

EPN maintains robust strategic partnerships across Essex, ensuring our priorities and responses are closely aligned with local skills needs. We value our strong relationships with the three Local Authorities, the Federation of Essex Colleges (FEDEC), and the Essex Chambers of Commerce Local Skills Improvement planning team, who enable the Independent Training Sector to play a central role in skills delivery planning.

As the unified voice of the Independent Training Sector on the Essex Skills & Business Board (ESBB) and LSIP sector skills groups, we champion member participation in LSIP Education & Provider roundtables. We are committed to working collaboratively to drive the change and development necessary to meet the evolving skills demands identified in the Greater Essex LSIP. We pledge continued support for major infrastructure projects across the county, whilst recognising and nurturing the dynamic community of small and medium-sized enterprises that define Essex. Our approach is to deliver innovative, inclusive education and training tailored to meet the diverse needs across the region.

EPN will actively engage in strategic decision-making that reflects the current and future needs of Essex businesses, with a steadfast commitment to maximising the region's economic growth.

Katharine Ball, EPN Chief Operating Officer

FEDEC (the Federation of Essex Colleges) is a well-established group of further education, sixth form and community learning colleges in Essex, delivering high quality education and training to over 16,000 adults, 4,200+ apprentices and over 23,000 young people in Essex. Our mission is to work collaboratively and collectively to support the region's economy and drive up the prosperity of all people in Greater Essex through the transformational power of learning and skills development.

We are committed to continuing our close partnership with Essex Chambers of Commerce to influence and inform the LSIP, through our connections with industry and sector specialists. FEDEC members fully support the LSIP and recognise the need for a coherent skills strategy that addresses geographic and sectoral 'cold spots' and gaps in skills provision that FEDEC and partners can deliver on. We will take a systems approach in response to the LSIP priorities identified, creating a skills system which is truly joined up, drives inclusion & work ready behaviours, works with employers from all sectors and gets the basics right.

David Warnes, FEDEC Chair

Businesses need access to a workforce with the right mix of skills to enable growth. Greater Essex's business community is already a major driver of skills development across Greater Essex funding, designing and delivering programmes, including through partnerships with colleges, universities and training providers. We will work with Essex Chambers of Commerce in support of the Greater Essex Local Skills Improvement Plan establishing a link between GEBB and the Greater Essex Employment and Skills Board.

Greater Essex Business Board (GEBB) Manifesto



2. Supporting Statements (cont.)

Colchester Institute has been named as one of five national Clean Energy Technical Excellence Colleges. This follows the recent launch of a £0.5m Net Zero and Renewables Centre as part of the College's broad and ambitious Climate Action Strategy.

As a Clean Energy Technical Excellence College, the College will work collaboratively with other providers, regionally and nationally, to boost skills across the range of Clean Energy industries, including nuclear, wind, solar and hydrogen.

This designation comes at a critical time for the East of England, where up to 60,000 direct clean energy jobs are needed by 2030. As a Clean Energy Technical Excellence College, we will work with employers and delivery partners to develop the skilled workforce to meet that huge demand. The TEC will provide system leadership, aligning multiple providers into a single structure, with the ability to scale up employer-led, demand-driven skills supply for the full range of roles required by major clean energy projects. This co-ordinated approach will ensure consistency, coverage and use of regional provision, with clearly defined progression routes for learners to progress from training into sustained employment in one of the many occupations outlined in the UK Clean Energy Jobs Plan.

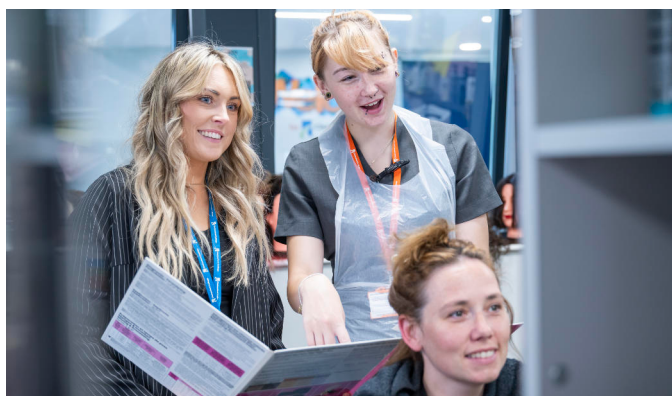
Alison Andreas, Principal and Chief Executive

The University of Essex is committed through our excellence in education and research to support the LSIP ambitions for Greater Essex and join the newly established FE/HE Stakeholder Group to help support skills development for everyone.

Professor Chris Greer, Deputy Vice Chancellor and Rachel Brown, Senior Apprenticeships and Summer Schools Manager

Anglia Ruskin University's new ten-year Strategy places collaboration with partners across the East of England to drive inclusive, sustainable growth at its heart. We work closely with employers and other stakeholders to develop our courses, closing skills gaps and promoting lifelong learning, and are fully committed to delivering on the ambitions of the new LSIP.

Roderick Watkins, Vice Chancellor



3. Executive Summary

The Greater Essex Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) 2026–2029 sets out how Essex will improve skills training to meet employers' needs. Progress will be tracked using clear measures and this will help fill vacancies and more people move into good jobs. Led by Essex Chambers of Commerce on behalf of local employers, the LSIP builds on the foundations of the first plan published in 2023 and responds to major economic, technological and policy change at local and national levels. The LSIP is for:

- **Employers:** (particularly SMEs) who have had a direct voice in setting out the priorities and future skills needs articulated in this report
- **Education and training providers:** including Further Education (FE) colleges, Universities (HE) and Independent Training Providers. The plan provides educators with clear information on local needs and priorities so that curriculum, courses and facilities are available to respond
- **Local authorities:** who can coordinate economic planning and target funding to support identified priorities
- **Key stakeholders:** such as local Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Careers Hubs and employment support providers who can ensure aligned support for job seekers, students and advisors

The LSIP is relevant to Greater Essex because it:

- Tackles regional Skills shortages and helps to plug any gaps
- Future proofs the local economy in embedding forward-thinking requirements directly into local training
- Optimises public funding by ensuring there is consensus on priorities for investment
- Drives collaboration by bringing together a range of stakeholders to agree and deliver against priorities

The plan has been shaped by extensive employer engagement, including sector roundtables, events and a business survey with over 400 responses. Through such feedback, over 2,000 local employers consistently identified challenges around skills shortages, essential and employability skills gaps, digital capability, leadership capacity within SMEs, and the complexity of navigating the skills system. These insights, combined with labour-market intelligence and local growth forecasts, inform a clear set of priorities for action over the next three years.

Greater Essex has a diverse and growing economy, dominated by SMEs and micro-businesses, and is experiencing significant growth driven by housing

delivery, major infrastructure projects, clean energy investment, digital transformation and public-sector demand. At the same time, employers report difficulties in recruitment, mismatches between training and business need, low take-up of apprenticeships, and concerns about work readiness—particularly among young people at risk of becoming NEET. Addressing these issues is critical to productivity, inclusion and long-term economic resilience.

Evidence and engagement has shaped agreement on seven **Priorities 2026–2029**. Some headlines are provided here, with further information through this report and in the annexes. Specific actions to deliver against these are also set out in section 7:

1. **Employer Participation in Skills Activities and Workforce Solutions: Simplifying employer access to skills support, improving coordination and increasing SME engagement.** The strategic aim is to significantly increase employer participation in skills activity, ensuring training provision is aligned to real business needs and supporting stronger workforce pipelines.

3. Executive Summary (cont.)

By simplifying engagement and designing SME-friendly approaches, Essex will enable more businesses to contribute meaningfully to curriculum development, workforce planning and training pathways. Enhanced employer involvement will boost productivity, reduce recruitment challenges and strengthen innovation. A coordinated system will provide clearer access points, allowing employers to engage consistently and effectively. This approach will unlock the full potential of Essex's SME base and drive long-term economic resilience.

2. Essential Skills and Behaviours: Tackling the skills gaps in communication, teamwork, problem-solving, Maths, English and workplace readiness. The strategic aim is to ensure all residents develop the foundational skills needed to succeed in modern workplaces. By strengthening communication, teamwork, problem solving, Maths, English and spoken English, Essex will improve employability, workplace readiness and long-term progression. Earlier exposure to the world of work, high-quality placements and real-world learning will help young people build confidence and adaptability. Alongside this, strengthening enterprise and entrepreneurial capabilities will support Essex's predominantly small-business economy.

By embedding these skills across pathways, the region will accelerate onboarding, increase productivity and create a more resilient, opportunity-rich workforce.

3. Modern Leadership and Management: Supporting SME leaders and accidental managers through flexible, practical and modular training. The strategic aim is to strengthen leadership and management capability across Essex's SME-driven economy, enabling businesses to adapt, innovate and grow. By championing collaborative and agile leadership models and improving digital and data confidence, the region will help employers navigate rapid technological and workforce change. Expanding accessible, modular and flexible leadership training will support "accidental managers" and build future talent pipelines. Improved people management approaches will boost retention, workplace culture and resilience. Through targeted support, Essex will equip leaders with the skills and confidence needed to drive productivity and secure long-term business success.

4. Inclusive, Future-Ready Skills Pathways (Entry Level–Level 8): Creating clear progression routes aligned to labour-market demand, including for NEETs and SEND learners. The strategic aim is to design a future-ready skills

system that fully aligns with national reforms and ensures every resident can progress from Entry Level to Level 8. By integrating V Levels, new Level 2 pathways, the LLE and employer-aligned short courses, Essex will build seamless learning journeys that reflect modern workforce needs. NEET young people will be prioritised through early intervention and coherent support. Embedding Bootcamps and SWAPs into longer-term pathways will open rapid entry into high-demand sectors. This inclusive, coordinated approach will meet employer shortages, widen opportunity and secure long-term prosperity.

5. Digital Skills, DigiTech and Artificial Intelligence: Strengthening digital capability across all sectors and supporting SMEs to adopt AI and new technologies. The strategic aim is to equip Essex residents and businesses with the digital, DigiTech and AI skills required to thrive in an increasingly technology-driven economy. By expanding access to targeted, flexible and affordable digital training, especially for SMEs, the region will build capacity for innovation and competitiveness. Strengthening pathways into high-demand roles such as programming, cybersecurity and systems design will support local sectors undergoing rapid digitalisation.

3. Executive Summary (cont.)

Encouraging AI-aware working practices will boost productivity across all industries. Through coordinated action aligned with national Industrial Strategy priorities, Essex will develop a digitally confident workforce prepared for future growth.

6. A Stronger, Joined-Up Skills Planning System: Improving coordination, careers guidance, labour-market intelligence and system leadership. The strategic aim is to develop a coordinated, integrated and forward-looking skills system that meets the needs of learners, employers and communities. By expanding digital access, flexible learning and labour-market-informed careers guidance, the region will widen participation and support better decision making. Strengthening tutor recruitment and CPD will ensure providers can deliver emerging skills aligned to employer demand. A more collaborative planning system will reduce duplication, improve efficiency and create long-term stability. Through a data-driven, coherent approach aligned with devolution opportunities, Essex will build a resilient, inclusive and future-ready skills ecosystem.

7. Clean Energy: Developing employer-designed pathways to support growth in offshore wind, hydrogen, solar, sustainable fuels and energy decommissioning. The strategic aim is to position Greater Essex as a leader in the clean energy transition by developing a robust, future-focused skills pipeline. By aligning FE and HE provision with emerging technologies such as offshore wind, hydrogen, solar and sustainable aviation fuel, the region will support innovation and attract investment. Developing specialist capacity in clean energy decommissioning will help Essex build a unique regional strength. Through close employer collaboration, Essex will design pathways that meet the needs of evolving supply chains while ensuring residents can access high-quality green careers, contribute to environmental goals and drive sustainable growth.

Delivery and Impact

Delivery will be driven through a detailed LSIP Action Plan (Annex B), overseen by employers and partners including further and higher education providers, local authorities, DWP and Skills England.

Progress will be monitored through agreed measures of success, with the LSIP remaining a live, adaptable framework responsive to ongoing employer insight, devolution and economic change.

Conclusion

The Greater Essex LSIP 2026–2029 sets out a clear, shared commitment to turning employer insight into action. The LSIP aims to build a more productive and resilient workforce by:

- Simplifying the skills system
- Strengthening essential and digital skills, investing in leadership
- Building inclusive pathways and aligning provision to growth sectors such as clean energy

This will support business growth and improving opportunity for residents across Greater Essex.



4. Introduction

The LSIP is led by Essex Chambers of Commerce, working in partnership with local businesses and stakeholders. This follows on from the [first LSIP](#) which was published in 2023 and which continues to have significant impact locally, with some headlines including:

- New buildings and facilities built in colleges aligned to the LSIP priorities
- An employer guide published with case studies, to help navigating the skills landscape
- A range of courses delivering against the LSIP across Essex
- The LSIP newsletter, web pages and sector groups established
- Joined up approach with key stakeholders such as local authorities and DWP who align to the LSIP
- 2 x successful Festivals of Skills delivered locally

Further information on delivery against the first LSIP is available through progress reports at this [link](#).

This is one of 39 LSIPs nationally led by Employer Representative Bodies (ERBs) and overseen by Skills England.

LSIPs inform the work of local post-16 skills providers (now including Higher as well as Further Education). This is achieved by understanding the needs of local employers through data, research, direct engagement and questionnaires. This has ensured that agreed priorities are employer-led. Alongside this report, there is a detailed action plan (Annex B) which ensures a focus on action and deliverables against the agreed set of priorities set out in section 7. The LSIP is supplemented by annexes supporting this plan, which go into further detail on many aspects, including data and intelligence and the process for agreeing the priorities.

The primary audience for the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) is employers, supported by education and training providers, local authorities, and key regional stakeholders who collectively shape and deliver a skills system aligned to local labour market needs.

Since the first LSIP was published, there have been some notable developments nationally and locally which this report will cover. These include the creation of Skills England by the new government, the new Industrial Strategy, publication of the post 16 Education and Skills White Paper, developments such as the Youth Guarantee, the Clean Energy Jobs Plan, plans

for devolution and local government reorganisation. These developments will be reflected through the report and local stakeholders such as local authorities and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) have been closely involved in the LSIP's development. This will also ensure that maximum benefit is achieved for Essex.

The LSIP will cover a three-year period and progress reports will continue to be produced to help ensure work is moving forward. The LSIP is overseen by the [Essex Employment and Skills Board](#), which includes employers from all priority sectors as well as key stakeholders such as local authorities, DWP, further and higher education and the Careers Hub.

This LSIP covers the local authority areas of Essex, Southend and Thurrock. All references to 'Essex' or 'Greater Essex' within this plan include these three areas unless otherwise stated.



5. Strategic and Economic Context

Greater Essex is one of the largest areas in England, with a population of 1,929,610, of which 61% are working age.

It is diverse, with one of the longest coastlines, rural and urban areas and some of the wealthiest and the most deprived parts of the country. Proximity to London is significant to the labour market, with high levels of commuting into the capital and other areas. Of 80,795 enterprises, 90% are micro and a further 8% are small.

It continues to be a time of significant growth for Greater Essex, with high numbers of large infrastructure projects and housing developments taking place across the area, which will have a big impact on the skills needed. This includes nationally significant projects such as the Lower Thames Crossing, Tilbury Port expansion and Longfield Solar Farm. These will be explored further in section 5.

At a glance – key facts and figures (see annex reports for more detailed information).

	Essex	Southend	Thurrock	Region	UK/ England
Skills Level 4+ (2024)	40.5%	39.2%	36.6%	43.7%	47.2%
Skills Level 3+ (2024)	65.1%	58.5%	55.8%	65.2%	67.6%
Skills Level 2+ (2024)	90.5%	87.4%	85.1%	88.4%	86.5%
Skills Level 1+ (2024)	92.1%	90.5%	87.0%	90.9%	88.9%
No qualifications (2024)	4.9%	5.1%	6.4%	5.2%	6.8%
Weekly earnings (residence based 2025)	£825.50	£810.50	£852.70	£804.90	£769.50
Weekly earnings (workplace based 2025)	£753.70	£670.80	£790.70	£766.60	£770.70
% of working age out of work benefit claimants (2026)	3% (28,800)	4.3% (4,905)	4.3% (4,945)	3.2%	3.9%
Total employee jobs (2024)	613,000	64,000	79,000		
Number of enterprises	66,875	6,915	7,005	270,380	2,368,350
Proportion of businesses which are SMEs	99.7%	99.7%	99.7%	99.6%	99.6%
NEET (number and %) (2025)	1523 (4%)	145 (3%)	198 (4%)	5730 (4%)	45990 (3%)
Claimant count 18-24 year olds (2026)	6,060 (5.7%)	960 (7.9%)	1,060 (7.8%)	5.6%	5.6%

5. Strategic and Economic Context (cont.)

The development of priorities for the LSIP has involved close working with the local authorities within Greater Essex (Essex, Southend and Thurrock).

In order to understand the local landscape and to ensure join up with work underway, local strategies and plans have been utilised. These have helped to inform priorities and sector focus for the LSIP, together with the government's Industrial Strategy and local employer feedback. Alongside these, are the emerging plans of key stakeholders such as the DWP including the Youth Guarantee and Jobs and Careers Service. Such stakeholders are also closely involved in the development of the LSIP and priorities. The most notable of these include:

The developing 'Get Essex Working' Plan

– the Government has asked every area to produce a local version of the national Get Britain Working Plan, which aims to improve employment outcomes, reduce economic inactivity, and strengthen the link between health and work. Essex's plan will outline the county's specific labour market challenges such as skills gaps, employer demand pressures, and barriers faced by residents, and set out targeted actions to address them. Essex County Council is leading the development of this plan, coordinating partners, shaping priorities, and ensuring it aligns closely with the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) so that employment support, health-related interventions, and skills provision are integrated and responsive to local needs.

A Greater Essex Innovation Framework is also in development to guide the approach to innovation-led growth. The framework will assess the current innovation landscape, identify strengths and gaps, and set out clear priorities and actionable work packages to support innovation across Greater Essex.

DWP's Youth Guarantee and Jobs and Careers Service – the development of a new Jobs and Careers service is underway and DWP have shared plans for the National Careers Service to be part of DWP from October 2026. There is also expansion of Youth Hubs in Essex as part of the Youth Guarantee. Local DWP colleagues have been closely involved in the development of the LSIP.

A Manifesto Proposition for Greater Essex (Federation of Essex Colleges) – a shared commitment from Essex colleges to deliver the skills that employers in Essex needs through a shared vision.

The Greater Essex Business Board (GEBB) Manifesto – this manifesto sets out the plans for growth across the Greater Essex geography and the commitment to work with the future Mayor of Essex. It emphasises the potential to generate up to £8 billion more on economic growth by aligning with the wider south east. It outlines four priorities – Infrastructure for Growth, Inward Investment, Skilled Workforce and Inspiring Business Growth. As per the supporting statements within this report, the manifesto also includes the commitment to 'work with Essex Chambers of Commerce in support of the Greater Essex Local Skills Improvement Plan – establishing a link between GEBB and the Greater Essex Employment and Skills Board.'

Greater Essex Economic Overview 2025–26

– this was produced by Essex, Southend and Thurrock Councils to set out the local economy and potential for growth. This also sets out the priority sectors for each authority and where they overlap and this has been used to inform the priority sectors for the LSIP. This also helped to establish that the visitor economy should be added as an LSIP Priority sector.

Southend-on-Sea Economic

Growth Strategy 2024–28 – this provides further information and detail on the Southend economy and plans for growth to 2028. This also sets out commitments to skills, such as upskilling and addressing skills gaps, which have informed the LSIP priorities.

5. Strategic and Economic Context (cont.)

This collaborative and joined up approach is important as Essex prepares for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and devolution.

LGR means that all 15 councils in Essex – those in the Essex County Council area (including 12 district, borough and city councils), along with the unitary authorities of Southend-on-Sea City Council and Thurrock Council will be replaced with a number of all-purpose ‘unitary’ authorities. The government confirmed proposals for five unitarities in March 2026

These unitary authorities would be responsible for all local authority services in their area. Subject to government approval, elections to shadow authorities could be expected in May 2027, with new unitaries going live in April 2028. County Council elections took place in May 2026.

Currently, Essex includes one county council (Essex County Council) covering most of the county and two separate unitary authorities (Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock), which operate independently of the county council.

Devolution regards the transfer of powers and funding from UK government to local Government. This includes the creation of a Mayoral Combined Authority (MCA, covering the Essex, Southend and Thurrock geography).

The government has confirmed that the Greater Essex Mayoral election originally planned for May 2026 will now take place in May 2028. This will allow more time for preparation and for LGR to take place. Once in place, the MCA will shape and determine funding for areas such as the economy, transport, housing, skills and infrastructure. Work is ongoing to ensure a joined-up approach and to achieve consensus on the LSIP priorities, led by employers.

Further information is available [here](#).





5. Strategic and Economic Context (cont.)

Skills levels have improved in recent years and whilst levels 3 and 4 are below the regional and national average, Entry Level is now above in most areas. NEET levels are comparable with regional and national levels but require improvement.

These are also large sectors of employment locally which are employing above the national and regional averages as set out in the table below.

	Agriculture, Horticulture & Animal Care	Arts, Media & Publishing	Business, Administration & Law	Construction, Planning & the Built Environment	Digital Technology	Education & Training	Engineering & Manufacturing Technologies	Health, Public Services & Care	History, Philosophy & Theology	Leisure, Travel & Tourism	Retail & Commercial Enterprise	Science & Maths	Social Sciences	Total
Basildon	10	10	210	40	60	30	70	190	0	20	60	0	0	700
Braintree	20	0	150	50	20	10	60	160	0	10	50	0	0	530
Brentwood	0	10	90	10	30	0	20	50	0	0	20	0	0	230
Castle Point	10	0	110	20	20	10	30	80	0	0	30	0	0	310
Chelmsford	20	0	210	40	60	10	60	150	0	10	60	0	0	620
Colchester	10	0	200	50	50	10	60	200	0	10	40	0	0	630
Epping Forest	10	10	130	30	40	0	50	90	0	10	40	0	0	410
Harlow	0	0	70	10	20	10	30	100	0	0	20	0	0	260
Maldon	10	0	70	20	20	10	20	50	0	0	10	0	0	210
Rochford	10	0	90	30	20	10	30	70	0	10	30	0	0	300
Southend-on-Sea	10	0	170	40	40	10	40	140	0	0	60	0	0	510
Tendring	10	0	110	20	20	10	40	180	0	0	40	0	0	430
Thurrock	10	0	200	30	50	30	80	170	0	10	60	0	0	640
Uttlesford	10	0	80	10	10	0	30	80	0	10	20	0	0	250

Apprenticeship Achievements totals by Subject Sector Area and Local Authority (2024/2025)

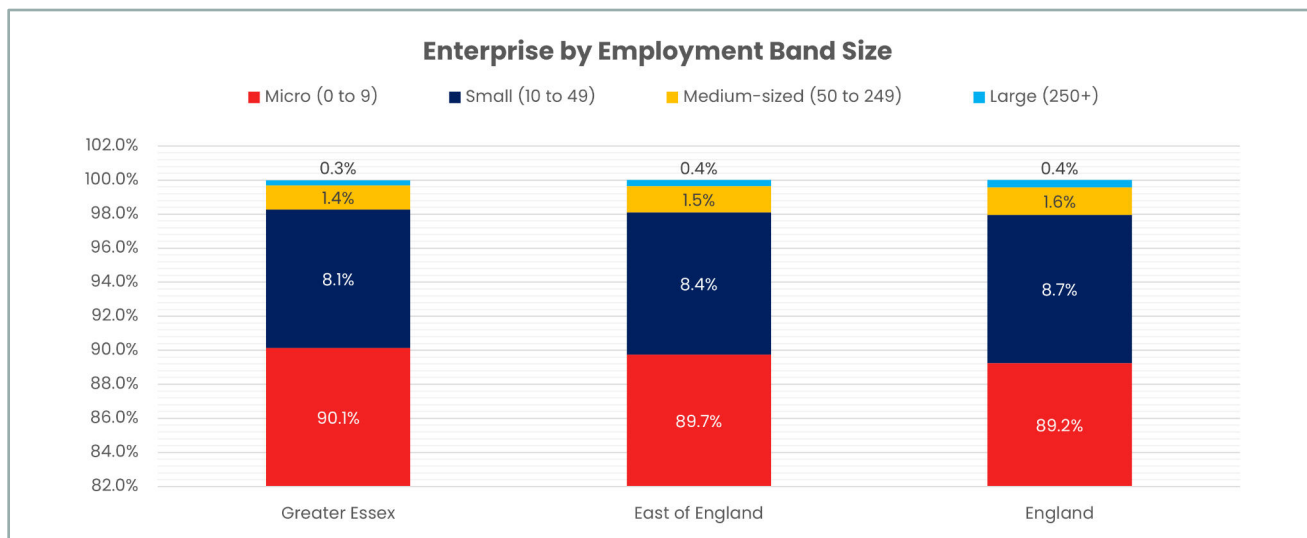
Please note low numbers have been replaced with zero, in line with ONS suppressing/rounding methodology.

For latest achievement rates, see <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/apprenticeships/2025-26> and the [data dashboard](#).

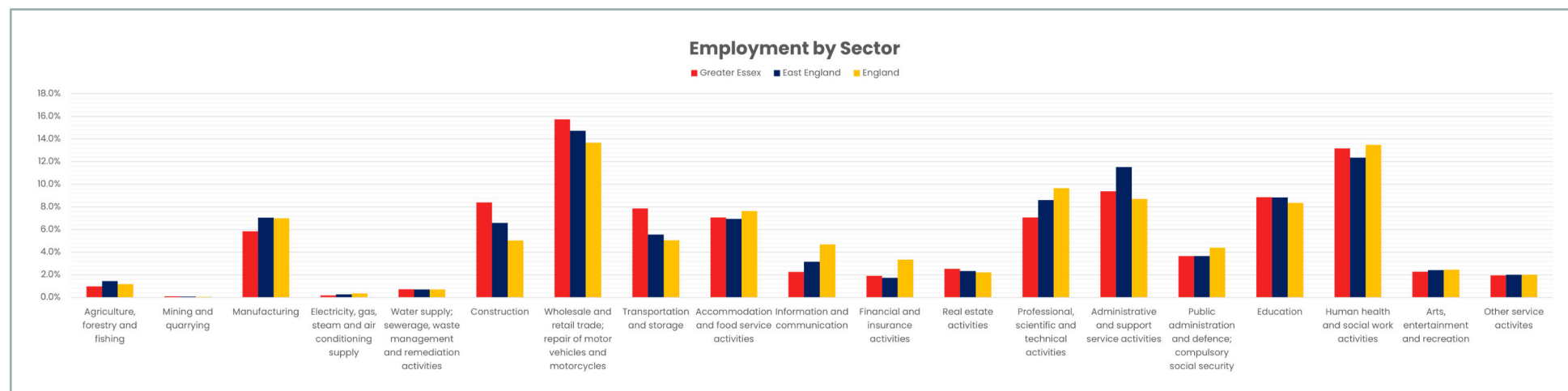
5. Strategic and Economic Context (cont.)

As the graphs here illustrate, apprenticeship numbers aligned to these sectors need to increase and better align with growth sectors.

Supporting information and evidence is provided in Annex C, [the data report](#), and, there is also an online [Power BI data dashboard](#) now available to support the work of the LSIP with the most up to date data and information. This will be a significant asset to the area and will ensure stakeholders can access up to date and accurate data to support delivery against the LSIP.



Enterprise by Employment Band Size — Greater Essex, East England, and England (November 2025) Source: UK Business Counts.



Employment by Sector (January 2026) Source: Business Register and Employment Survey ONS.

5. Strategic and Economic Context (cont.)

Such information, data and evidence have helped to establish and inform the sector focus and projected skills needs for the LSIP. Further information on these is provided below as well as how they align with the government's National Industrial Strategy, 8 growth driving sectors (plus

construction, health and social care) and supporting information such as that from sector bodies. The [Essex LSIP Sector Insight pages](#) have recently been updated to provide latest information and to ensure alignment with the Industrial Strategy. These will be regularly updated and reviewed.

Roundtables have also been held with all sectors locally to inform the LSIP priorities alongside the employer survey and further information is included in Annex C. Further information on skills needs related to these sectors is also provided in section five and Annex A.

Sector	Industrial Strategy	Alignment with local plans	Further information
Advanced manufacturing, aviation, aeronautical engineering & engineering	Advanced manufacturing is one of the 8 growth driving sectors.	Identified as a priority sector in local plans including Greater Essex Growth Strategy.	Advanced Manufacturing Sector Insight
Agri-tech, food tech & horticulture	Agri-tech identified as a vital emerging market in the advanced manufacturing sector.	Advanced manufacturing overall identified as a priority in local plans.	AgriTech & Food Tech Sector Insight
Community & voluntary	Not a growth driving sector but important in delivering against policy such as the Get Britain Working plans and supporting people into work.	Local authorities working closely with the sector and through initiatives such as Your Essex Community .	Community & Voluntary Sector Insight
Construction & the built environment	Industrial Strategy outlines a construction skills package and the ambition to 'modernise the construction sector. Identified as a priority by Skills England.	Identified as a priority sector in local plans.	Construction & the Built Environment Sector Insight
Creative industries	Identified as one of the 8 growth driving sectors in the Industrial Strategy.	Identified as a priority in local plans.	Creative & Cultural Sector Insight
Digitech	Identified as one of the 8 growth driving sectors in the Industrial Strategy.	Identified as a priority in local plans.	Digitech Sector Insights
Health, social care and med-tech	Life Sciences (which contributes to health and medical technology) has been identified in the government's Industrial Strategy as one of the growth sectors and Skills England have also included health and social care as a priority sector. There are also clear links with manufacturing.	Identified as a priority in local plans – including life sciences.	Health, Social Care, and Medical Technology Sector Insight

5. Strategic and Economic Context (cont.)

Sector	Industrial Strategy	Alignment with local plans	Further information
Professional Services	Professional Services and Financial Services identified in the Industrial Strategy as one of the eight growth driving sectors.	Identified as a priority in local plans.	Professional Services Sector Insight
Transport and Logistics	Although not one of the 8 growth driving sectors acknowledged in the industrial strategy which states that 'the freight and logistics sector makes a vital contribution to the UK economy and the competitiveness of the eight growth driving sectors.	Identified as a priority in local plans, particularly Thurrock's.	Transport & Logistics Sector Insight
NEW: Visitor economy (travel & tourism)	Although not one of the 8 growth driving sectors, importance to the UK economy is acknowledged and the Dept for Culture, Media and Sport has set out ambitions to grow visitor numbers to the UK. Linking to the Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) programme.	Identified as a priority in local plans and through the work of Visit Essex identifying skills needs – such as the Destination Management Plan . Essex is an LVEP area.	Sector insight to be produced
NEW: Sport and physical activity – cross cutting	Although not one of the 8 growth driving sectors, importance reflected by bodies such as Sport England and in plans such as the Dept for Health and Social Care's 10 year Health Plan for England – Fit for the Future.	Identified as being important to the economy and supporting sectors such as visitor, leisure, community and voluntary. The sector also plays a role in the well being of the workforce across all sectors and in preventative health-care. Reflected in the work of Active Essex and its Skills Board.	Full sector insight to be added. Some information also at Community & Voluntary Sector Insight



6. Local Skills Needs

A range of information has been taken into account to inform and establish local skills needs. This includes:

- Feedback from employers through sector roundtables held to inform the LSIP
- Feedback from employers through an employer survey
- Local intelligence and information about skills needs through developments such as the Lower Thames Crossing, Stansted Airport and housing growth
- Data sets and information as set out in Annex C
- Information from Sector bodies such as Skills for Care and the Construction and Industry Training Board (CITB)
- Supporting information such as vacancy data to look at key occupations in demand

This has been utilised to determine the current and medium-term skills needs which the LSIP will need to address. Further information on this is provided in Annex C, with information here to illustrate some of the most significant impacts on skills needs now and in the future.

Employer feedback – roundtables & survey

In the months preceding the development of the LSIP, roundtables were held across Essex with all key sectors. Many of these were hosted by colleges or training providers which helped to illustrate to employers the support already available. There was a very high level of engagement which informed the LSIP priorities. There were also cross-cutting issues, such as the importance essential skills, modular training, leadership and management. All roundtables also fed back on the growing importance of Artificial Intelligence and automation. Annex C will provide further information on these and Annex B will explore the agreed actions in more detail.

The survey to inform the LSIP had 411 responses. 20% of respondents fed back challenges in finding industry relevant training and 40% said that skills mismatches were one of the main barriers to recruitment. Nearly 45% were expecting to recruit in the next 6 months, which illustrates the level of opportunity. Over 80% said they were unlikely to recruit a 16–18-year-old apprentice in the next 6–12 months and 71% were unlikely to recruit an apprentice aged 18+.

Skills that employers were anticipating needing more of included cyber security, data analysis, clean growth, AI literacy and soft/essential skills. 30% of respondents were also likely to invest in upskilling or reskilling their current employees in the next 12 months. Work is underway to support respondents with aspects such as recruiting apprentices or sourcing training where this a barrier. Further information and full results are provided in Annex C.

Key messages arising from the roundtables, survey and day-to-day engagement with employers included the following and section 7 explores the priorities arising from these and areas of action:

Employers (particularly SMEs) want a simpler, accessible skills system

- A single, simpler route into skills support
- Clearer employer journeys through the system
- Joined-up, coordinated provider engagement



6. Local Skills Needs (cont.)

Essential and employability skills gaps are a major concern for employers

Across all sectors, employers emphasise that weaknesses in essential skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, professionalism, and readiness for work are one of the biggest barriers to recruitment and retention. Employers report that:

- Technical ability alone is not enough
- New starters often need significant support with workplace behaviours
- Poor essential skills contribute to early attrition

Employers see work experience, apprenticeships and applied learning as crucial

Employers strongly support high-quality work experience, apprenticeships, T Levels and supported internships as the most effective way to build job-ready talent and robust recruitment pipelines. However, many say they need:

- Better preparation and support to offer placements
- Learners who are more work-ready before placement

SME leadership and management capability is a productivity lever

Employers (especially SME owners) frequently describe themselves as accidental managers who have had little formal leadership or management training. Employers say they want:

- Practical, modern leadership approaches
- Flexible, modular training that fits around running a business
- Support to manage people, performance and change more effectively

Digital skills and AI are seen as essential, not optional

Employers across sectors describe rapid digital change as both a challenge and a major opportunity. They consistently say that:

- Digital and AI capability is becoming essential in all sectors
- SMEs struggle to access affordable, relevant digital training
- There is strong demand for practical support with adoption, not just theory

Employers want clear, inclusive progression pathways

Employers emphasise the need for clearer progression routes from entry-level roles through to higher-level skills, particularly in growth sectors. They stress:

- The importance of visible Entry Level–L8 pathways
- Better alignment between training and real labour-market needs
- Stronger inclusion of young people, SEND learners and those at risk of becoming NEET

Clean energy is viewed as a major growth opportunity

Employers recognise clean energy as a long-term economic opportunity for Essex, particularly in offshore wind, hydrogen, solar, sustainable fuels and decommissioning. This will be greatly enhanced through the Clean Energy Technical Excellence College (CETEC) for Essex and the East of England, being led by Colchester Institute. Employers need:

- Employer-designed technical pathways
- Skills aligned to real infrastructure projects and supply chains
- Local specialisms that give Essex a competitive advantage

6. Local Skills Needs (cont.)

Major growth – shaping future skills needs

The first LSIP set out the growth across Essex and this continues, with new projects and housing developments being added and some now underway. Some of the biggest are outlined here, to provide context to the future skills needs locally. It is important to note that when projects are initially announced and undergoing planning consents, job roles and numbers may be approximate only or not yet known. However, given their scale it is clearly still important to understand the sorts of skills that will be required. These include solar and wind farms, which means they also align with clean energy ambitions.

There is already collaborative work in place, with a Major Projects Skills Group led by the Construction and Industry Trade Board (CITB) bringing together LSIP leads, local authorities and projects across the South East. Bradwell B Power station was included in the previous LSIP but is currently on hold. However, given the scale of this if it does go ahead (with thousands of jobs projected), this will be kept under review. Although located in Suffolk, Sizewell C also impacts on the skills needs of north Essex with up to 10,000 jobs projected at peak construction. Essex is also home to two Freeports which cross geographical boundaries – Thames Freeport and Freeport East.

Thames Freeport includes the ports of Tilbury and DP World London Gateway, as well as Ford's Dagenham plant. They have initiatives such as a Skills Accelerator to help ensure a pipeline of skilled workers. Freeport East is a partnership between Hutchison Ports, Harwich Haven A and local authorities. It is centred on the Port of Felixstowe and Harwich International Port. Work underway includes a green hydrogen hub.

The Essex Housing Strategy also cites the delivery of 148,000 homes by the mid 2030s, around 9,700 a year. These include new developments such as the Tendring / Colchester Borders Garden Community which is projected to have 5,000 construction jobs by 2033 and Chelmsford Garden Community which will have 6,500 units by 2035. There are also large-scale redevelopments such as the Better Queensway project in Southend and the regeneration of Harlow Town Centre. The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) is also moving its scientific facilities and its corporate headquarters to a new site in Harlow. This covers up to 3,000 staff and current timelines would mean the first staff moving in the mid 2030s.

London Stansted Airport, managed by MAG, is one of the UK's most strategically significant transport and economic infrastructure assets. It serves as the UK's fourth largest airport by

passenger traffic and the East of England's largest single-site employer. Approved expansion plans to 51 million passengers per annum will generate substantial additional workforce demand across aviation, aeronautical engineering, transport & logistics, hospitality, visitor economy and construction sectors. MAG's long-term growth strategy is expected to support around 5,000 additional on-site jobs, alongside significant supply-chain employment across Greater Essex. Existing recruitment pressures already remain high, with between 400 and 600 live vacancies typically advertised across the airport campus. As a result, expanding the pipeline of technically skilled local people is a strategic priority for the Essex economy. Stansted Airport College plays a critical role in this response and Phase 2 expansion plans – including new aviation engineering and CAA 147 training facilities – are intended to significantly increase specialist training capacity aligned directly to employer demand.

Further information provided by MAG is provided in Annex C.



6. Local Skills Needs (cont.)

There are a large number of nationally significant infrastructure projects (NSIPs) which will have a major impact on current and future skills needs locally in sectors including construction, aviation, aeronautical engineering, transport and logistics, manufacturing and clean energy. Alongside NSIPs, the expansion of Stansted Airport and Stansted Airport College represents one of the most significant long-term workforce and skills challenges for Greater Essex. These are set out below to provide context.

Project	Description	Skills needs
<u>Stansted Airport expansion and 20-year growth plan</u>	Includes expansion of the terminal which will provide an additional 5,000 jobs.	Construction, engineering, visitor economy, transport and logistics
<u>Electric Lines: Bramford to Twinstead</u> (2026–2029)	A 29km linear route between the Bramford Substation, Suffolk and 1.5km south of Twinstead Tee, Essex. Construction and operation of a new double circuit electricity transmission network reinforcement of c.29km, consisting of overhead lines, underground cables, a grid supply point substation and associated development.	Engineering, construction, electrical 200 jobs at peak construction
<u>Lower Thames Crossing</u> (2026–2031)	A new tunnel/road connecting Essex, Thurrock (in the north) and Kent (in the south). Approximately 14.5 miles (23km) in length, it will connect to the existing road network from the A2/M2 to the M25 with two tunnels (one southbound and one northbound) running beneath the River Thames. Includes improvements to the M25, A2 and A13, where the scheme connects to the road network, new structures and changes to existing ones (including bridges, buildings, tunnel entrances, viaducts, and utilities such as electricity pylons) along the length of the new road and a free-flow charging system through the tunnel.	Engineering, construction, tunnelling, robotics, project management, electrical Steel fixers: 113, Carpenters: 198, Supervisors: 309, Plant Operatives: 219, Engineers*: 118, General Operative: 380
Essex Data Centre Developments 2026+	While not an inherent major project, the various data centre developments across Essex will have a significant impact on the skills landscape, first in their construction, then their power consumption and finally in their maintenance and management to a lesser degree. Projects confirmed for the county include: Google North Weald Airfield – two centres, offices and substations on 21 acres of council land Nscale Loughton AI Data Centre – aimed at training large language models ChunkyChips Data Centre – Tier 2 disaster recovery data centre Fujitsu UK London East – Grays – Tier 3 Facility with expansive technical areas East Havering/Thurrock proposition – Large scale centre designed for AI growth	Engineering, Construction, Installation, Clean Energy, Data Technicians 100s of jobs over the various projects

*(9 different types of engineer required, but mainly Civil Engineers).



6. Local Skills Needs (cont.)

Project	Description	Skills needs
<u>Tilbury 3</u> (2026–2030)	Expansion of the Port of Tilbury by 143 acres – container operations, vehicle storage and warehousing.	Expansion of the Port of Tilbury by 143 acres – container operations, vehicle storage and warehousing. Warehouse, operations, project management Over 6,600 jobs cited in applications.
<u>Longfield Solar Farm</u> (2027–2031)	Located on land north-east of Chelmsford and north of the A12 between Boreham and Hatfield Peverel. A new solar photovoltaic array generating station, co-located with battery storage, together with grid connection infrastructure. The generating capacity will be up to 500MW.	Clean energy, engineering, installation, construction 380 jobs during construction, 8 permanent
<u>Five Estuaries Wind Farm</u> (2027–2031)	A wind farm, off the Essex Coast near Clacton-on-Sea – to include wind turbine generators and associated foundations and array cables. Application accepted in March 2026.	Engineering, turbine technicians, construction 340 – 390 jobs during construction, with a peak of 540 to 600.
<u>North Falls Wind Farm</u> (2027–2031)	Extension to an existing wind farm 35km off the Tendring coast.	Engineering, turbine technicians, construction 300 during construction, 100 for operation
<u>A1331 Link Road</u> (2027–2031)	Connecting the A120 and A1331 – to support the next phase of this road development and which would support 7,5000 new homes as part of a new garden town between Colchester and Tendring.	Construction, engineering, project management
<u>Tarchon Energy Interconnector</u> (timescales TBC)	A direct power link between Germany and Britain. This will make landfall in Tendring district and will allow 1.4 GW of electricity to move in either direction increasing security and reliability of energy demand.	Engineering, construction, electrical
<u>Rivenhall IWMF and Energy Centre</u>	Located at the former Rivenhall Airfield, off Coggeshall Road (A120), Braintree. Integrated Waste Management Facility (IWMF) and Energy Centre development is for extension to a generating station to enable electrical generating capacity of up to 65MW together with associated development.	Energy, green, engineering, installation, construction Over 500 jobs when operational

6. Local Skills Needs (cont.)

Key occupations and skills needs in sectors

Annex A further explores key occupations in more detail mapped against the priority sectors described in section 4.

Further information such as that from sector bodies has also been added to help illustrate demand. Annex A provides a full list of the occupations which are most in demand. Some of the cross-sector skills needs are as follows:

Top 10 occupations advertised

- Elementary administration and service occupations
- Teaching and other educational professionals
- Business and public service associate professionals
- Sales occupations
- Caring personal service occupations
- Business, media and public service professionals
- Administrative occupations
- Science, research, engineering and technology professionals
- Health professionals
- Transport and mobile machine drivers and operatives

Top 10 job titles

- Support Workers
- Care Assistants
- Learning Support Assistants
- Warehouse Operatives
- Nursery Practitioners
- Health Care Assistants
- Delivery Drivers
- Teaching Assistants
- Kitchen Assistants
- Quantity Surveyors

Top 10 employers advertising

- NHS
- Essex County Council
- Absolute Interpreting and Translations
- Maid2Clean
- Runwood Homes
- Tesco
- Ramsay Health Care
- Mitchells & Butlers
- Care Uk
- David Lloyd Leisure

Top 10 transferable skills

- Communication
- Customer service
- Management
- Detail-oriented
- Sales
- Operations

- Leadership
- Teaching
- Planning
- Organisational skills

Highest earning specialised skills

- Contract management
- Governance
- Stakeholder management
- Sub-contracting
- Project delivery
- Cost control
- Project management
- Risk management
- Procurement
- Automation

Top 10 specialised skills

- Auditing
- Warehousing
- Finance
- Key performance indicators
- Project management
- Continuous improvement process
- Invoicing
- Marketing
- Risk analysis
- Personal care

The information as outlined here and in previous sections has enabled the development of a list of priorities which will be the focus for the next three years.

These underpin the key sectors as set out in sections two and three. These are:

Priority 1: Employer Participation in Skills Activities and Workforce Solutions

Priority 2: Essential Skills and Behaviours

Priority 3: Modern Leadership and Management

Priority 4: Building Inclusive, Future Ready Skills Pathways from Entry Level – L8

Priority 5: Digital Skills, Digitech & Artificial Intelligence

Priority 6: Greater Essex Skills Planning System

Priority 7: Clean Energy

Further information on how these will be addressed is provided in section seven.

7. Priorities and Actions

Section three sets out the agreed priorities to deliver against the LSIP and skills needs identified. This section will provide further context to these priorities as well as areas of focus. Annex B contains a full Action Plan, with information on who will deliver against the various aspects.

Priority 1: Employer Participation in Skills Activities and Workforce Solutions

Essex's economy is powered by a vibrant and entrepreneurial business base, with over 81,000 SMEs operating across the county, representing 99% of all Essex businesses.

This rich diversity of small and medium-sized firms provides a strong foundation for innovation, job creation, and local prosperity. However, this landscape also presents a unique opportunity: to strengthen employer participation in skills activities and workforce development in ways that can unlock significant economic value locally.

SMEs often face resource constraints that limit their ability to engage consistently with training providers, curriculum development, or structured workforce programmes. Many operate without dedicated HR or talent-development capacity, meaning that skills planning competes with day-to-day operational priorities.

At the same time, employers across Essex report ongoing challenges in sourcing candidates with essential skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and professional behaviours. These constraints highlight a clear opportunity for a more targeted, accessible, and SME-friendly approach to skills engagement.

Currently, the fragmented nature of the skills system contributes to fragmented employer engagement, with multiple programmes, funding streams, and points of contact creating complexity for businesses. For many SMEs, this creates uncertainty about where to begin or how to engage effectively. Addressing this fragmentation represents a significant strategic opportunity: by simplifying access, coordinating outreach, and aligning employer-facing services, Essex can greatly increase participation and strengthen the employer voice in shaping training provision.

Given the scale of the employer base, with tens of thousands of SMEs spread across diverse sectors and geographies, a more coordinated and solutions-focused approach would allow providers to generate stronger labour-market intelligence, create more agile training responses, and build more effective pathways into work for residents.

Importantly, increasing employer participation in skills activities offers a major economic benefit for Essex. More engaged employers contribute to:

- Better-aligned training provision
- Stronger local talent pipelines & visibility of opportunity
- Improved productivity and innovation
- Reduced recruitment costs
- Enhanced workforce retention

By embracing these opportunities and developing a streamlined, collaborative, and SME-responsive approach, Essex can harness the full potential of its business community. This will support a more adaptable workforce, sustain economic growth, and ensure the county continues to thrive in a rapidly changing labour market.

The actions that will be taken over the three year course of this LSIP by relevant stakeholders are as follows:

- ✓ Simplify SME Access to Skills Support
- ✓ Increase SME Awareness and Understanding of the Skills System
- ✓ Intensify Outreach Across All Essex Districts

7. Priorities and Actions (cont.)

- ✓ Strengthen Provider Connectivity to Improve the Employer Experience
- ✓ Make the Employer Journey Clear, Consistent, and Easy
- ✓ Clarify the Skills Landscape and Show How Each Partner Adds Value
- ✓ Create and Scale Employer-Led Partnership Approaches
- ✓ Use Strong Labour Market Intelligence to Drive Decisions
- ✓ Embed “Inclusive by Design” into all programme planning and delivery supporting inclusive organisational development, employer readiness and continuous improvement across the skills system.
- ✓ Increase employer participation by providing employers with better, confidence building support to say “yes”
- ✓ Increase employer participation by changing Section 106

This will be monitored directly through measurement of biannual review and RAG assessment by the Essex Skills Board, an Annual Employer Survey, an Annual Provider Survey, quarterly review by Inclusive Stakeholder Alliance or Annual Major Infrastructure project data capture, depending on the most appropriate reference point.

Priority 2: Essential & Enterprise Skills

Recent changes in learning experiences, shifting expectations of work and increasing numbers of young people at risk of becoming NEET have widened the essential skills gap.

However, this also presents a key moment for Essex to strengthen its approach to real-world learning and ensure that young people have earlier and more meaningful exposure to workplace environments.

With employers increasingly seeking candidates who are prepared and confident, improving essential skills offers a clear route to increasing opportunity and boosting productivity.

Our research shows that essential skills now influence not only recruitment but also learner retention and progression. The ability to learn in real time, adapt to workplace expectations and engage fully in training is becoming increasingly important. Strengthening foundational skills will help more learners sustain progress, achieve long-term outcomes and contribute positively to the local economy. This creates a valuable opportunity to align employer needs with resident ambitions and build a more resilient workforce.

Employers across Essex consistently highlight that those essential skills, such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving and professional behaviours are fundamental to workplace success. These skills not only support productivity but also help individuals feel confident, prepared and adaptable in fast-changing environments. While many new entrants to the labour market require further development in these areas, this challenge presents a significant opportunity.

By strengthening essential skills, Essex can enhance employability, accelerate onboarding, and improve organisational performance across the county.

Employers also emphasise the importance of strong Maths and English skills, as these underpin effective communication, problem-solving and productivity. For individuals whose first language is not English, developing good spoken English is especially important, as it directly affects teamwork, customer service and overall job performance. Enhancing these skills improves employability and supports individuals to progress confidently in their chosen careers.



7. Priorities and Actions (cont.)

The growing emphasis on high-quality work experience, apprenticeships and T Level placements provides an important platform for young people to develop practical, industry-relevant skills.

Alongside core employability skills, enterprise capabilities, such as innovation, entrepreneurial thinking and commercial awareness, are becoming increasingly important, particularly in Essex, where the economy is dominated by small and micro-businesses.

Strengthening these capabilities will help residents respond to new opportunities, support business growth and drive innovation across the county.

By investing in essential, enterprise and employability skills, Greater Essex can build a more prepared, capable and future-focused workforce, one that benefits residents, supports employers and strengthens the long-term economic prosperity of the region.

Alongside core employability skills, enterprise capabilities, such as innovation, entrepreneurial thinking and commercial awareness, are becoming increasingly important, particularly in Essex, where the economy is dominated by small and micro-businesses.

Strengthening these capabilities will help residents respond to new opportunities, support business growth and drive innovation across the county.

By investing in essential, enterprise and employability skills, Greater Essex can build a more prepared, capable and future-focused workforce, one that benefits residents, supports employers and strengthens the long-term economic prosperity of the region.

The actions that will be taken over the three-year course of this LSIP by relevant stakeholders are as follows:

- ✓ Build a County-Wide Essential Skills Framework
- ✓ Strengthen Maths, English and Spoken English Foundations
- ✓ Expand High Quality Work Experience, V&T Levels, Apprenticeships and Supported Internships
- ✓ Improve Onboarding and Workplace Readiness
- ✓ Embed Enterprise and Innovation Skills Across Essex
- ✓ Increase Employer Involvement in Curriculum Design
- ✓ Strengthen Support for Young People at Risk of Becoming NEET

✓ Upskill Educators to Deliver Essential and Enterprise Skills

This will be monitored directly through measurement of biannual review and RAG assessment by the Essex Skills Board, an Annual review of ILR data, an Annual Employer Survey, an Annual Provider Survey or Quarterly NEET Data Monitoring, depending on the most appropriate reference point.

7. Priorities and Actions (cont.)

Priority 3: Modern Leadership and Management

Essex's business landscape is powered by a dynamic community of SMEs and micro-businesses, giving the county a strong platform for innovation, agility and long-term economic growth.

As employers navigate rapid economic, technological and workforce change, many recognise this as an opportunity to modernise leadership approaches, strengthen management capability and build more resilient, productive organisations.

Engagement with SMEs across the county shows a growing appetite for leadership models that support collaboration, adaptability and empowered teams. Many business owners acknowledge that traditional, hierarchical leadership styles no longer meet the needs of fast-moving, resource-constrained environments. This creates a significant opportunity for Essex to champion modern leadership practices that drive innovation, boost productivity and support a more motivated workforce.

Local SME feedback also highlights the potential for improvement in areas such as productivity, digital adoption and data-driven decision-making.

While many smaller businesses currently find it challenging to implement scalable systems or integrate new technologies, they also express a strong desire to build these capabilities. With the right support, leaders can strengthen their digital confidence, embrace new tools and unlock efficiencies that enhance competitiveness across the county's economy.

Talent planning and workforce development also represent major areas of opportunity. Many leaders describe themselves as "accidental managers", having stepped into leadership roles without formal preparation. This also impacts the retention and job satisfaction of managers and employees. By providing accessible, flexible and modular leadership and management training tailored to small-business realities, Essex can help these leaders develop the confidence and capability to support their teams effectively, plan for future skills needs and create healthy, high-performing workplaces.

SMEs consistently tell us that accessing affordable training is a challenge, but they are eager for solutions that fit around the realities of running a small business. Developing employer-responsive programmes, delivered in short modules, online or in hybrid formats, will allow more businesses to participate and benefit.

Strengthening leadership and management capability will also help SMEs respond more effectively to financial pressures, regulatory change and fast-moving technologies.

As skills shortages and changing employee expectations continue to evolve, supporting leaders to adapt their people management approaches is essential. Modern leadership capability helps businesses attract and retain talent, build positive workplace cultures and maintain stability during times of change.

With SMEs and micro-businesses forming the backbone of Essex's economy, investing in leadership and management development is not just beneficial, it is a catalyst for future growth and sustainability. By equipping leaders with the skills, confidence and tools they need, Essex can unlock higher productivity, stronger innovation, better workforce retention and long-term economic resilience across the county. Strengthening leadership today will ensure Essex's businesses are ready to seize the opportunities of tomorrow.

The actions that will be taken over the three-year course of this LSIP by relevant stakeholders are as follows:

✓ **Modern, Inclusive Leadership Practices Adopted Across Essex SMEs**



7. Priorities and Actions (cont.)

- ✓ Strengthened Management Capability in SMEs and Micro Businesses
- ✓ Increased Digital Confidence and Technology Adoption
- ✓ Stronger Workforce Planning and Talent Development in SMEs

This will be monitored directly through measurement of biannual review and RAG assessment by the Essex Skills Board, an Annual Employer Survey or an Annual Provider Survey, depending on the most appropriate reference point.

Priority 4: Building Inclusive, Future Ready Skills Pathways from Entry Level – L8

Greater Essex is entering a period of profound opportunity and responsibility. National reforms to technical education, funding systems and employer-aligned training are accelerating rapidly, and the county must respond with bold, future-focused action to ensure that all residents benefit from this transformation.

Government reform is reshaping the learning landscape. The introduction of V Levels at Level 3 and new Level 2 occupational and further-study pathways marks a fundamental shift towards a streamlined, employer-responsive education system.

At the same time, the ambition for two-thirds of young people to progress into Level 4+ learning requires the region to strengthen progression routes from entry level through Level 8. These reforms are not simply structural; they demand coordinated local action to ensure that learners and providers can grow with them.

Changes to national funding reinforce the need for strategic redesign. The move towards the Growth and Skills Levy, devolved adult education arrangements, and the expansion of the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) signal a future in which individuals expect flexible, modular and lifelong access to skills development. Greater Essex must anticipate these shifts now, creating a system where funding, employer demand and learning pathways are tightly integrated and easy to navigate.

In this future landscape, young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) must be at the centre of local planning. National policy highlights the need for a joined-up system supporting young people which is inclusive and locally relevant. With changes to automatic enrolment and support mechanisms for NEETs, Greater Essex must design pathways that capture and re-engage these learners early, ensuring that they are not left behind in a rapidly evolving skills economy.

At the same time, employer-driven short-course models such as Skills Bootcamps and Sector-Based Work Academies (SWAPs) are becoming essential tools enabling adults a fast-track entry into high-demand industries.

When embedded into wider Entry Level – level 8 pathways, Bootcamps and SWAPs can become crucial stepping-stones, enabling residents to quickly access opportunity while still progressing toward higher-level qualifications and long-term career growth.

The urgency is clear, Greater Essex already faces pressures in construction, digital, health, engineering and green sectors, with employers calling for a stronger and more adaptable talent pipeline.

To remain competitive, inclusive and economically resilient, Greater Essex must now design a future-ready skills system that integrates national reforms, local priorities, emerging funding models and comprehensive pathways for all learners, including NEETs. By doing so, the region can unlock opportunity, strengthen its workforce and secure long-term prosperity for communities and businesses alike.

7. Priorities and Actions (cont.)

The actions that will be taken over the three-year course of this LSIP by relevant stakeholders for all sectors are as follows:

- ✓ Design end-to-end pathways (Entry Level – L8) aligned to employer demand and national reforms.
- ✓ Work in collaboration to establish an Industry 4.0 Skills Hub, utilising current infrastructure focused on robotics, mechatronics, and digital manufacturing.
- ✓ Design and implement a Manufacturing Operator & Technician Conversion Pathway.
- ✓ Establish a Shared Manufacturing Apprenticeship Model.

This will be monitored directly through measurement of biannual review and RAG assessment by the Essex Skills Board, an Annual Employer Survey, an Annual Essex Manufacturing Alliance survey or an Annual Provider Survey, depending on the most appropriate reference point.

Priority 5: Digital Skills, Digitech & Artificial Intelligence

Employers across Essex have told us they are navigating a period of rapid technological change, and many now view this as a significant opportunity to enhance productivity, strengthen competitiveness and drive future growth.

Businesses increasingly recognise the value of developing stronger Digital, Digitech and AI capabilities to meet evolving customer expectations, adapt to changing supply-chain requirements and take advantage of sector-specific innovation.

National priorities also align with these ambitions. The UK's Industrial Strategy identifies digital technologies, AI, advanced telecommunications, quantum and other critical technologies as major drivers of future economic growth. These developments are transforming working practices across all sectors, and employment in related roles is expected to rise substantially over the next decade. This shift signals a long-term opportunity for Essex to equip its workforce with the skills needed to thrive in an increasingly digital economy.

For Essex employers, these trends are highly relevant. Evidence gathered through the LSIP shows that organisations of all sizes, particularly those in advanced manufacturing, engineering, construction, health and social care, creative industries and professional services, now see Digital Skills and Digitech capability as essential for future success.

These sectors are experiencing rapid digitalisation and are well-positioned to benefit from the priorities outlined in the Industrial Strategy.

At the same time, Essex's business landscape is dominated by SMEs and micro-businesses, many of which have limited capacity or resources to engage in digital upskilling. Employers frequently say that although they understand the importance of digital and AI adoption, they find it challenging to access suitable training, recruit digital talent or keep pace with fast-moving technological change. Addressing these issues offers a powerful opportunity to ensure smaller businesses are not left behind and can fully participate in the county's digital transformation.

Local labour-market evidence shows sustained demand for programmers, IT managers, systems designers, cybersecurity specialists and digital technicians. These occupations underpin effective digital adoption across all sectors. However, many employers, particularly smaller firms, report difficulties in securing the required expertise, often competing with larger organisations for specialist skills. Supporting SMEs to access this talent represents a major opportunity to boost innovation, productivity and resilience.

7. Priorities and Actions (cont.)

The increasing use of Artificial Intelligence makes this need even greater. AI is reshaping tasks across many occupations, including roles that do not require advanced technical expertise. Employers who adopt AI-aware practices often report a boost in productivity, customer service and decision-making. Encouraging wider adoption across Essex therefore presents a significant opportunity to enhance performance and create new pathways for growth.

By strengthening digital and AI capability across the county, and by supporting SMEs and micro-businesses to access flexible, targeted and affordable skills solutions, Essex can unlock major economic benefits. With the right support, employers will be better positioned to embrace innovation, improve productivity and build long-term resilience, ensuring the county is fully prepared to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the UK's Industrial Strategy.

The actions that will be taken over the three-year course of this LSIP by relevant stakeholders are as follows:

- ✓ Strategic Coordination & Local Leadership
- ✓ Improve Access to Digital and AI Training
- ✓ Boost Employer Capability in Digital Adoption & AI Integration

✓ Build Provider Capacity and Curriculum Innovation

This will be monitored directly through measurement of biannual review and RAG assessment by the Essex Skills Board, an Annual Employer Survey or an Annual Provider Survey, depending on the most appropriate reference point.

Priority 6: Skills Planning System

Essex has a major opportunity to strengthen and modernise its skills system, creating a more resilient, inclusive, and future-ready offer that fully meets the needs of learners, employers, communities, and the wider economy.

As the labour market evolves rapidly and new industries and technologies emerge, Essex is well placed to respond with a coordinated, forward-looking approach that supports residents to access high-quality training and progression pathways.

Strengthening careers advice and guidance across the system is essential to this ambition. High-quality, impartial careers support, grounded in real-time labour market intelligence, will be critical in helping young people and adults navigate changing opportunities, understand emerging sectors, and make informed choices that lead to sustainable employment.

The rural landscape creates significant challenges for many residents. In some areas, travel to work and education is highly demanding, with some young people spending up to three hours a day travelling to access FE courses.

This level of travel is a substantial barrier to participation, progression, and equal opportunity, particularly for those without access to private transport.

While digital access and flexible learning are not yet consistent across all communities, expanding these opportunities provides a clear route to widening participation, particularly for adults, rural learners, and those currently underrepresented. Improving the use of real-time labour market insight in careers guidance also offers a powerful chance to help residents make informed decisions, understand emerging sectors, and build the skills needed for future employment.

Tutor shortages in key sectors highlight the need, and the opportunity, to invest in workforce development. By strengthening recruitment pipelines, enhancing CPD, and supporting providers to deliver new and emerging skills, Essex can build a highly capable teaching workforce that meets employer demand and supports local growth.

7. Priorities and Actions (cont.)

Residents continue to face a range of structural, financial, and personal barriers to learning and employment. However, tackling these barriers opens the door to fairer access, improved social mobility, and a more inclusive economy.

With consistent mechanisms for inclusive recruitment and tailored learner support, providers and employers can create pathways that work for all communities.

The current fragmentation in skills planning signals an opportunity for stronger collaboration across providers, employers, and local authorities. A more coordinated, aligned system would reduce duplication, improve efficiency, and ensure that provision reflects real labour market needs.

Local government reform and the arrival of devolution in Essex bring significant change, but also the potential for greater local influence and more responsive decision-making. With a clear long-term strategy, Essex can navigate structural changes confidently and make full use of new devolved powers.

Although funding structures and national policy can shift frequently, developing a coherent long-term approach will help providers and partners plan more effectively, build stability, and maintain momentum.

By embracing these opportunities with a stable, data-driven, and collaborative strategy, Essex can create a thriving, inclusive, and future-focused skills ecosystem that benefits every resident and employer.

The actions that will be taken over the three-year course of this LSIP by relevant stakeholders are as follows:

- ✓ Strengthen Careers Advice & Labour Market Alignment
- ✓ Improve Access for Rural Residents & Reduce Travel Barriers
- ✓ Increase Flexible & Blended Learning Options
- ✓ Improve Travel Support Schemes
- ✓ Strengthen the Teaching Workforce & Address Tutor Shortages
- ✓ Enhance CPD & Upskilling Opportunities
- ✓ Support Provider Collaboration
- ✓ Remove Barriers to Participation & Improve Social Mobility
- ✓ Improve Collaboration & System Coordination
- ✓ Maximise Opportunities from Devolution & Local Government Reform
- ✓ Create a Stable, Data-Driven, Long-Term Skills Ecosystem

This will be monitored directly through measurement of biannual review and RAG assessment by the Essex Skills Board, an Annual Employer Survey or an Annual Provider Survey, depending on the most appropriate reference point.

Priority 7: Clean Energy

Essex is home to more than 81,000 businesses, of which 90% are micro-businesses and 8% are small businesses.

This diverse and entrepreneurial base gives the county a strong foundation for growth. Many employers tell us they recognise the current period of rapid technological and environmental change as an opportunity to improve productivity, strengthen resilience and enhance their long-term competitiveness. Businesses across Essex increasingly see the value in building stronger Digital, Digitech and AI capabilities while adapting to new environmental standards and expectations.

The Industrial Strategy places clean, secure and affordable energy at the heart of future economic growth. Its focus on strengthening clean energy infrastructure and supporting long-term resilience aligns closely with the opportunities Essex employers are identifying.



7. Priorities and Actions (cont.)

By connecting national priorities with local ambition, Essex is well-positioned to lead in the transition to a cleaner, more sustainable economy.

Essex already has important strengths in this space. The county is emerging as a significant contributor to the clean energy sector, with developments in offshore wind, hydrogen innovation, solar technology and sustainable aviation fuel. These advances create exciting opportunities for businesses to innovate, for residents to access high-quality careers and for the county to contribute meaningfully to national and global climate goals.

Employers also highlight the potential for growth in clean energy decommissioning, particularly as offshore assets and industrial infrastructure reach the end of their operational life. This creates demand for specialist roles in environmental compliance, safe dismantling, waste handling, marine engineering, project management and site remediation. Meeting this demand offers a major opportunity to develop a unique skills specialism for the region.

To seize these opportunities, Essex requires a coordinated post-16 skills pathway across Further Education and Higher Education.

This includes technical routes from entry-level green skills to advanced training in clean energy engineering, environmental technology, data analytics, energy systems management and decommissioning. By designing this provision in close partnership with employers, Essex can ensure that programmes reflect real-world technologies, local sector needs and emerging clean energy supply chains.

Local initiatives such as Essex County Council's clean energy programmes and community-based energy models demonstrate the county's potential to drive innovation while improving energy resilience and affordability. To support this, employers will need access to a workforce capable of designing, implementing, maintaining and responsibly decommissioning future-focused energy solutions.

Clean energy must remain a strategic priority for Essex. By investing in the right skills pipeline, co-designed with industry and aligned with the county's strengths, Essex can unlock significant economic growth, enhance business resilience and ensure that local employers and residents are fully equipped to thrive in the transition to a low-carbon future.

The actions that will be taken over the three-year course of this LSIP by relevant stakeholders are as follows:

- ✓ Strengthen Clean Energy Skills Pathways Across FE and HE
- ✓ Build Employer-Led Clean Energy Learning Hubs
- ✓ Build a Local Specialism in Clean Energy Decommissioning
- ✓ Accelerate Local Clean Energy Innovation and R&D
- ✓ Promote Inclusive Access to Clean Energy Careers
- ✓ Destination Renewables Programme

This will be monitored directly through measurement of biannual review and RAG assessment by the Essex Skills Board, an Annual Employer Survey or an Annual Provider Survey, depending on the most appropriate reference point.

8. Conclusions and Next Steps

As is set out through this report, this second Local Skills Improvement Plan is explicitly employer-led and business-driven.

Work leading up to the development of the LSIP and supporting annexes has involved extensive engagement with local businesses as well as utilising data, intelligence and information from key stakeholders. Engagement has included roundtables, events and a business survey and with a strong emphasis on turning evidence into practical action. This report will build on the first LSIP rather than replacing it and will continue to deliver against agreed priorities and new economic and skills challenges.

The LSIP is positioned to facilitate co-ordination and collaboration, aligning with national policy (including the Industrial Strategy, local authority plans and forthcoming LGR and devolution arrangements).

Some of the key takeaways which have informed the priorities set out in sections six and seven include:

- The report highlights the growing challenge of young people becoming NEET, alongside changing expectations of work reinforcing the need for earlier and more meaningful exposure to real workplaces through work experience, apprenticeships and T Levels.
- A strong focus on 'essential' and foundational skills, with employers consistently reporting gaps in essential and employability skills including communication, teamwork, problem solving and professional behaviours.
- Enterprise and entrepreneurial skills are seen as especially important, due to the SME dominated economy in Essex.
- Digital skills, DigiTech and AI are seen as a major growth opportunity and area of need across all sectors, not just tech-specific industries. Employers see these as critical for productivity, competitiveness and resilience.
- A key local challenge is that SMEs and microbusinesses often lack capacity to engage in digital upskilling or recruit specialist talent, which illustrates the need for flexible, targeted and affordable training solutions.
- Clean energy is a strong area of opportunity for Essex, in line with national ambitions. Essex has strengths emerging in areas such as offshore wind, hydrogen, solar, sustainable aviation fuel and clean energy decommissioning. Clean energy skills are also linked to wider goals around resilience, productivity and the transition to a low-carbon economy.
- Modern leadership and management are also identified as critical productivity levers, particularly for SMEs and microbusinesses. Many leaders are described as 'accidental managers' who require modern, flexible training models, digital confidence and modular training to fit around small business realities. This is linked to talent retention, workplace culture and long-term economic resilience.
- The report highlights fragmentation in skills planning and employer engagement as a barrier, but also as a major opportunity for better coordination between providers, employers, and local authorities. Devolution will enable a more locally responsive, long-term skills strategy.
- Employer participation in skill activity – especially among SMEs – will be essential to improving alignment between training and labour market needs.

The Action Plan (Annex B) sets out how delivery against the LSIP will be taken forward and who will lead.

The next phase of the LSIP will therefore focus on delivery. This includes translating priorities into practical actions through the LSIP Action Plan, strengthening collaboration across employers, providers, local authorities and partners, and ensuring that progress is monitored and reviewed regularly. The LSIP will remain a live and evolving framework, informed by ongoing employer insight and labour market evidence.

By working collectively and maintaining a strong focus on action, Essex can build a more skilled, adaptable and confident workforce—one that supports business growth, improves productivity and ensures that residents are well equipped to thrive in a changing economy.



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