



SWLEP Higher Education Strategy

December 2018

Short Version

Final



I. Introduction

I.1 Background

This strategy builds on the [Direction of Travel](#) agreed by the LEP Board in May 2017. It is driven by the requirement for skills set out in the Strategic Economic Plan¹ (SEP) as well as key national policy and legislation including the [Industrial Strategy](#), the Higher Education (HE) and Research Act and the government vision for apprenticeships. The strategy has been written at a time when numerous local strategies are being developed.

I.2 Context

Swindon and Wiltshire is the only LEP area in the country without a physical university presence. The role of universities in increasing productivity including through research development and innovation are recognised in the Industrial Strategy, and national research highlights the wider socio-economic benefits of having a university in the area. The main providers of higher education within the LEP are the three Further Education (FE) colleges who are working with a number of university partners along with the Open University and private training providers. There are sites in the LEP area where specialist provision is delivered by providers from outside the area. These include the Oxford Brookes Swindon campus, Cranfield University COTEC facility and Bath Spa University at Corsham Court. From the four designated touch points of Salisbury, Swindon, Trowridge and Chippenham, there are universities within 50 miles commutable distance. There are also a number of developments in train, including FE College growth strategies for HE, plans for the University of Wales Trinity St David to deliver Cultural Heritage provision in Swindon and a bid for an Institute of Technology to serve the Swindon, North Wiltshire and South East Gloucestershire area. The SWLEP has supported Local Growth Fund investment to increase HE provision through the FE College sector. Higher Education has long been seen as a priority for Swindon Borough Council and Wiltshire Council. The post-16 area review of education 2017 recommended that local higher education provision in the area should be developed in collaboration with universities

2. Strategy overview

2.1 Strategy Vision

By 2028, Swindon and Wiltshire will meet employer demand for higher level skills through targeted provision and enabling opportunities for all residents to access higher education with clear pathways. The benefits of studying and working in the area will be clearly outlined and a strong university presence will attract students from outside the area and provide wider economic benefits. There will be enough skilled workers to fill job vacancies, making the area attractive to investors, retaining local talent and improving both productivity and social mobility.

¹ The SEP identifies a shortfall in workforce qualified to L4+ and a forecast increase in higher level occupations

2.2 Strategy Aims

The aims of the strategy are to have sufficient and appropriate HE provision that will:

1. Increase productivity:

- the area will have a sufficiently qualified workforce at higher levels
- employers will report fewer skills shortages
- the area will attract and retain talent and investment
- there will be a workforce pipeline at graduate level
- SWLEP will benefit from increased HE provision including a multi campus university and growth through the FE sector.

2. Raise aspirations and increase social mobility:

- residents will be inspired by strong local HE provision to continue their learning journey through to higher level
- higher education will be accessible i.e. flexible, affordable and close by
- residents will be able to relate the benefits of pursuing higher education to labour market opportunities, particularly in relation to Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM)
- the route to higher education will be navigable and seen to be achievable.

2.3 Outcomes

This LEP wide strategy seeks to achieve the outcomes highlighted in the SEP as follows:

- **Ensure an appropriately skilled and competitive workforce to meet the needs of employers (in relation to higher level skills)**
- **Increase the proportion of the workforce qualified to level 4 and above (target of 52%)**
- **Achieve a higher proportion of individuals employed in higher skilled and higher value-added roles (Level 4 and above) in priority sectors**
- **Increase the participation of residents in Higher Education (particularly young people)**
- **Raise aspirations and attainment of young people by age 19**

3. Evidence

3.1 Developing an evidence base

The [evidence base](#) commissioned by the LEP and delivered by Buckman Associates in 2018 includes qualitative and quantitative data and bespoke data purchased from HESA. The final report includes analysis of surveys conducted with students in years 11 to 13, adult learners and local employers. It should be noted that the evidence presents a complex landscape accentuated by the distinct geographic differences. Below is a summary of the key findings from this research. It is recommended that the full strategy version² and evidence base report and appendices are referred to for more detail. A comprehensive presentation of the evidence base was given to stakeholders at events held in April 2018, and to the LEP Skills and Talent Subgroup and LEP board members in February 2018.

² Available on the SWLEP website from 18 May 2018

3.2 Key findings and considerations from the research

HE Provision

- Below average percentage of workforce qualified to L4+ in some of the LEP area
- Current local provision not sufficiently meeting employer and student needs
- Low percentage of students progressing to STEM HE courses (despite average participation in STEM courses at level 3)
- Few STEM courses offered locally
- Lack of part-time provision in neighbouring Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)
- Few local foundation level courses
- Net loss of graduates
- Very low numbers of students both LEP registered and taught by a university (unlike comparator LEPs)
- Young people prefer to study at a university
- Only LEP in country without a university
- Strong employer appetite for involvement in developing provision
- Student choice not matching employer need
- Challenges of rurality, accessibility and cohort viability
- Role of universities in increasing productivity

Awareness of current HE offer

- A high proportion of survey respondents were unaware of higher level provision already on offer within the SWLEP

Swindon and Wiltshire as a place

- The employer survey revealed that employers have difficulty recruiting to the area, and they are not confident of being able to recruit in the future
- The survey of young people indicated that people want to leave area
- Graduate flows remain an issue in this area in that a higher than average proportion of learners leave the area and do not return. Graduates are attracted to the area from elsewhere, but overall the LEP currently experiences a net loss of graduate talent.

Attainment

- Attainment is below average, particularly in Swindon. Attainment at aged 16 is strongly correlated with progression to HE and closely related to productivity

HE Progression

- Below average progression to HE, low participation in HE in certain areas for some groups

The current workforce

- Employers are reporting skills gaps and recruitment challenges and not confident about recruiting to higher skilled occupations
- Forecast skills shortages as identified in the SEP
- The adult survey indicates appetite to learn with support from employer

Work and learn options

- A high percentage of learners prefer work options
- There is a low percentage of employers participating in apprenticeships
- 72% of employers felt that any new provision should involve employers in its development

4. Focus of the strategy

4.1 High level actions to meet the strategic aims of increasing productivity and raising aspirations and social mobility

1. Grow and promote local HE Provision:
 - Work with current providers to develop their provision to meet the needs of residents and employers and raise awareness of their current offer
 - Commission a feasibility study to develop a multi campus university in the SWLEP which will : supplement and complement FE provision; meet the needs of residents; be employer led, strengthen STEM provision and align with the principles of Institutes of Technology; and attract people from outside the LEP.
 - Work with employers on a sector basis to develop provision to meet their needs
 - Ensure a strong focus on the growth of higher and degree apprenticeships
 - Ensure there is access to HEIs to meet the needs of employers in the area eg for those with niche requirements building on the work of Higher Futures
2. Ensure the strategy links to the emerging local industrial strategy and future research and investment opportunities
 - Evidence from this strategy will feed into the wider LEP local industrial strategy work and the LEP-wide task group
3. Improve educational attainment and progression to higher education:
 - Continue focussed work through Swindon Challenge
 - Through the LEP strengthen the work of the Enterprise Adviser Network to improve employer engagement in Careers Education Information and Guidance (CEIAG), including the importance of STEM and maths and local labour market information
 - Ensure a comprehensive programme of activity is in place to raise aspirations, working with key stakeholders including addressing barriers for all residents and for specific groups
 - Further understand and address barriers to progression
 - Develop pathways to HE taking into account learner starting point and including flexible and part-time options
4. Promoting SWLEP as a great place to live, work and study
 - Identify and promote key strengths of the area
 - Target campaigns to promote the key strengths of the area
 - Develop a wider student offer
 - Address the negative perceptions of place evidenced by some groups
5. Developing our approach to an employer-led skills infrastructure, reflecting the national and local industrial strategies

- Take a sector and targeted approach to higher apprenticeships
- Employers and universities providers to work together in a more systemic way to develop provision and ensure innovation in design/delivery
- Work with SMEs and narrow the gap between learner choice and employer demand
- Support employers to harness research and innovation opportunities with universities
- Proactively engage employers in any new design or delivery so that provision is employer-led

5 Next Steps

5.1 Implementation Plan

The implementation plan will be used for the delivery of activity to support this strategy. The Skills and Talent subgroup will oversee the progress.