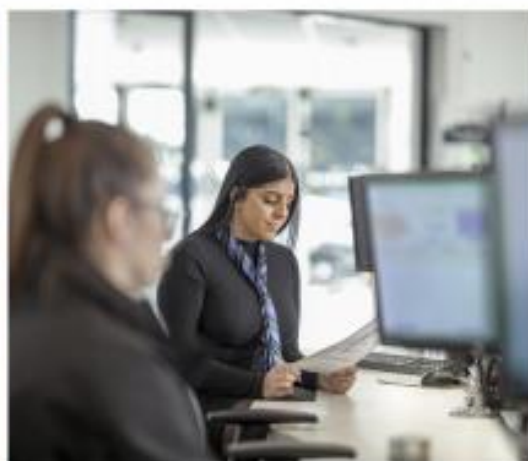
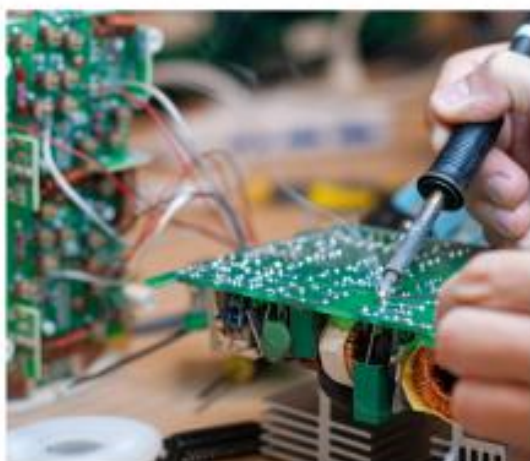




Swindon and Wiltshire Local Skills Report

March 2021



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Additional Resources:

[Swindon and Wiltshire Skills Plan](#)

[Local Skills Report – Annex A](#)

[Local Skills Report – Annex B](#)



Chapter 1. Foreword

The Swindon and Wiltshire [Skills Plan](#) was published in July 2020, just as the full impact from COVID-19 pandemic was beginning to become apparent. To ensure its continued relevance, we have spent a considerable amount of time reviewing our strategic priorities, developed as part of the Local Industrial Strategy.

The review confirmed that our twin strategic priorities within the People Foundation, namely maintaining the balance between the skills supply and demand, and ensuring inclusive growth across all our communities, were as important as ever. However, it was recognised that the lockdown measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic were going to affect all our KPIs (Figure 9 in [Skills Plan](#)) significantly and that we would need to work harder than ever, first to return to the pre-2020 levels and then to achieve the improvements that our Local Industrial Strategy outlined.

It is still too early to see the full impact of our activities, therefore in this report we outline our progress against our skills action plan. I am especially proud to report that, despite the challenging conditions, we have not only continued to deliver as well as before the COVID-19 pandemic but have managed to accelerate our progress in several areas.

Our monthly skills and labour market report, showing local and up-to-date shifts, is being used by

our partners and stakeholders to help with decision-making. SWLEP's Growth Hub mobilised a team of internal and external experts, in the midst of the pandemic, to help businesses cope, whilst setting up the SME Competitiveness Programme to help businesses to get started and to scale up. The team also added a Digital Specialist and a Skills and Enterprise Adviser and became a Gateway organisation for the Kickstart scheme. By early March 2021 we had nearly 300 places on our interest register and over 100 with funding approved. As well as distributing ERDF Recovery Grants and recruiting mentors for Peer Networks, it continued to grow its business community and help local organisations with the EU transition.

Our Careers Hub saw a rapid transition, providing more virtual support to raise aspirations of our school students. Our close collaboration became more intense with numerous organisations, including local businesses, Public Health Officers and Clinical Commissioning Groups, looking into ways to improve the health of our employees and further increase our productivity. Perhaps most importantly, we have been working with our employers to help them preserve jobs and ensure that the relevant skills are available.

As we look ahead, we see much uncertainty and many challenges, but we also feel optimistic. The strength and perseverance exhibited over the last year of unprecedented change give us the confidence in our abilities to mobilise quickly and to work together to tackle these challenges.



A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Amanda Burnside'.

Amanda Burnside, Chair of SWLEP's Skills and Talent Subgroup

Chapter 2. Skills Advisory Panels – Introduction

National context

Skills Advisory Panels (SAPs) bring together employers, skills providers and key local stakeholders to better understand and resolve skills mismatches at a local level. There are 36 SAPs across England as part of Mayoral Combined Authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships.

The Department for Education (DfE) supports SAPs with grant funding primarily to produce high quality analysis of local labour markets and [Local Skills Reports](#). The Reports set out the local strengths and skills needs and how the SAP proposes its area addresses its key priorities. The Reports aim to influence local partners and feed intelligence to central government, including the national level [Skills and Productivity Board](#) (SPB).

In January 2021, DfE published its White Paper “[Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth](#),” which set out a number of reforms aimed at putting employers more firmly at the heart of the skills system. The White Paper outlined plans to test in 2021-22, in a small number of areas, “Local Skills Improvement Plans” created by business representative organisations.

The White Paper committed to build on the work of SAPs to date. SAPs and their Local Skills Reports will continue as the DfE trailblazes “Local Skill Improvement Plans” and until any potential changes are made to a SAP’s remit and responsibilities.

Focussed on delivering strategic priorities outlined in the People Foundation of the Local Industrial Strategy, Swindon and Wiltshire’s Skills and Talent Subgroup has assumed the role of the Skills Advisory Panel. The Subgroup meets bi-monthly and performs a range of functions on behalf of the SWLEP Board, including:

- developing and delivering the Swindon and Wiltshire Skills Strategy and Action Plan, alongside the annual Local Skills Report;
- maintaining oversight over SWLEP-funded skills and talent projects and the delivery of European and other skills projects to inform the SWLEP Board of emerging strengths and weaknesses;
- bringing together local employers and skills providers to pool knowledge on skills and labour market needs, and to work together to understand key local challenges; and
- the Chair, acting as the Board Champion for Equality on the SWLEP Board.

The Skills and Talent Subgroup has operated effectively during the year with active engagement from a wide range of partners and stakeholders. These include representatives from local employers, providers, including local colleges and independent training providers, our two unitary authorities, alongside national bodies such as the Federation of Small Businesses and government departments, including the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), DfE and the Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS). A full list of members can be found in [Local Skills Report – Annex B](#).

Chapter 3. Skills strengths and needs

The Swindon and Wiltshire area has performed well in a range of labour market and economic indicators ([Local Skills Report – Annex A](#)), achieving levels above the national average. These are highlighted in the Skills Strengths section. However, there are several areas where we are behind the national average and where our performance can be improved. These are summarised in the Skills Needs section.



3.1 Skills Strengths

- High Gross Value Added (**GVA**) per hour worked
- High **employment** rate and high proportion of 250+ businesses
- Low **claimant count** rate
- Strong **business survival** rates, as demonstrated by the low business death rates
- Low proportion of neighbourhoods in the most deprived 10% nationally for **Income and Employment**
- Diverse **sectoral mix**, with several large and / or high growth industries

Strengths



Figure 1: Swindon and Wiltshire Skills Strengths

Swindon and Wiltshire's dynamic economy continued to grow, generating £21.4bn Gross Value Added (**GVA**) in 2019¹. GVA per hour worked continues to outperform the UK average, reaching £38.90 in Swindon and Wiltshire in 2018 compared to £35 for England.

Our **employment** rate continues to be consistently above the national average². In 2020, SWLEP's employment rate was at 79% compared to the national average of 77%. The level of self-employment varies across the area, with a higher proportion of the self-employed found in Wiltshire at 18% in 2020 compared to 9% in Swindon and 14% for England.

Although the **Claimant Count**, consisting of people claiming benefits principally for the reason of being unemployed, has been steadily increasing since the beginning of the lockdown in March 2020, the rise in Swindon and Wiltshire has been more gradual

¹ ONS Subregional Productivity, 2004 - 2018 (published 2020)

² Annual Population Survey, 2020 SAP boundaries

than the England average³. In November 2020, the claimant count in Swindon and Wiltshire was 4.6% of residents aged 16-64, compared to 6.4% for England.

The SWLEP area offers a good environment for **business to operate and survive**, which is demonstrated through our low business death rates. Between 2015 and 2018⁴, business death rates in Swindon and Wiltshire have been consistently better than England's.

There is a mixed picture in terms of the **incidence of deprivation**, with three measures considered in this report:

- income – of the 38 LEPs, 32 have a higher proportion of Lower-layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in 10% most deprived nationally than SWLEP;
- employment – of the 38 LEPs, 30 have a higher proportion of LSOAs in 10% most deprived nationally; and
- Education, Skills and Training – of the 38 LEPs, 24 have a higher proportion of LSOAs in 10% most deprived nationally.

For our two local authorities, there are more areas of deprivation in Swindon, although we know that deprivation can be easily masked in rural areas like Wiltshire.

The area's **diverse sectoral mix** remains stable. The five largest sectors for employment are: manufacturing; real estate activities; wholesale and retail trade; professional, scientific and technical activities; and financial and insurance activities. Together they generated 55% of GVA in 2018.

The analysis undertaken to develop our Local Industrial Strategy ([LIS](#)) identified a number of sectors which were strong or had the potential to grow locally. These were: advanced manufacturing, digital technology, electronics and connective systems; sustainability and circular economy; life sciences; and digital, defence and security, including cyber resilience. These are also expected to generate a greater proportion of highly skilled occupations, which we require in the local economy.

Whilst the lockdown and the **COVID-19 pandemic** negatively impacted several sectors, several of our **priority sectors improved**, with increased online vacancies. Based on the job postings data in life sciences, for instance, we have seen increased demand for employment in pharmaceutical R&D and manufacturing, as well as testing. Similarly, cyber security has become increasingly important as more people began to work remotely⁵. The circular economy has also been highlighted as an important component of achieving resilient recovery in a post-COVID-19 world⁶.

³ [ONS claimant count & DWP Stat Xplore](#), January 2013 – November 2020

⁴ Note the exception of the data anomaly in 2017.

⁵ [Deloitte: Impact of COVID-19 on Cybersecurity](#), [McKinsey: COVID-19 crisis shifts cybersecurity priorities and budgets ...](#)

⁶ [The circular economy: a transformative COVID-19 recovery strategy](#)

3.2 Skills Needs

- Get more highly skilled, **Level 4+** people, through more **Higher Education** provision, helping also address the **ageing population**
- **Start more businesses** and **help businesses grow**
- Reduce claimant count by increasing **employability of young people**, giving them skills in demand
- Reduce the number of neighbourhoods in most deprived 10% nationally for **Education, Skills and Training**
- Better **intelligence** on labour market shifts, allowing rapid response to Covid-19 and Brexit

Needs



Figure 2: Swindon and Wiltshire Skills Strengths

Compared to England, the Swindon and Wiltshire area has a lower proportion of people qualified to **Level 4 and above**, but also lower proportion of unqualified and a higher proportion of trade apprenticeships. This is partly driven by the demands of the local labour market and as well as the lack of a local university.

Ageing population in Swindon and Wiltshire area is a concern highlighted through the higher proportion of people in the over 50 years of age groups. This is because of Wiltshire, where we have a higher percentage of 50-64 and 65+ groups (27% for both in Wiltshire vs. 24% and 22%, respectively, for England).

It is reassuring to see that headline claimant count rates, before COVID-19 and during the pandemic, have remained below the national average for both Swindon and Wiltshire. However, the

Swindon and Wiltshire area has a **higher proportion of younger claimants**, aged 16-24.

The incidence of deprivation in Swindon and Wiltshire is less acute than in many other areas, with lower proportion of neighbourhoods in the 10% **most deprived nationally**, although Education, Skills and Training lags slightly behind Income and Employment.

Despite the lower business death rates, low business birth rates suggest that there are barriers to **starting new businesses**. This is partly due to the historically buoyant jobs market, especially in Swindon. In addition, the Swindon and Wiltshire area has a **high proportion of micro businesses**, acting as a constraint for apprenticeship growth and making engagement more fragmented and thus harder.

During 2020 we have seen some rapid and unprecedented labour market shifts due to the **COVID-19 pandemic**. A cross-cutting objective for our [Skills Plan](#) is the development of regular, granular intelligence reports to monitor our labour market and employment opportunities to enable us to respond rapidly. Based on the Labour Insights online job postings data, between April and November 2020 year-on-year increases in job postings were recorded only in Caring, Leisure and Other Service Occupations in Swindon and Wiltshire. All other occupations saw fewer jobs advertised between April and November 2020 than during the same period in 2019. The highest decreases were recorded in job postings for Sales and Customer Service Occupations, which during April to November 2019 were the third largest occupation group in terms of job postings, dropping to the 8th largest during April to November 2020.

Chapter 4. Skills strategy

An overarching skills strategy for Swindon and Wiltshire was published in July 2020, charting a way forward towards the strategic goals outlined as part of the People Foundation within the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Industrial Strategy.

The strategic choices in the 2020 [Skills Plan](#) (Figure 3), were founded on a robust evidence base. We monitor the performance throughout the year and review the plan annually.

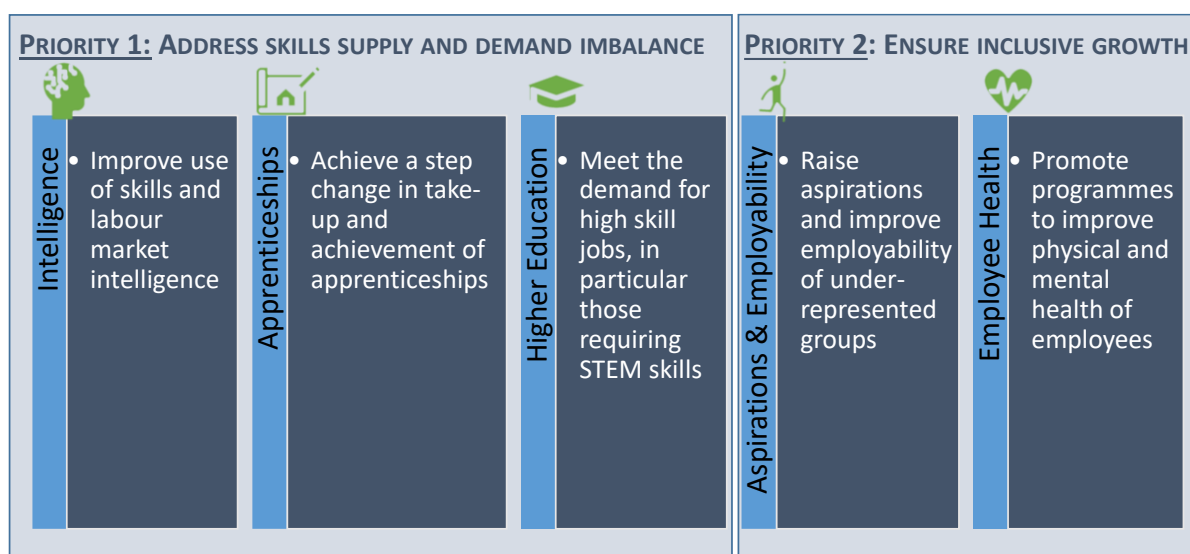


Figure 3: Swindon and Wiltshire Skills Plan Outline

4.1 Addressing the Skills Supply and Demand Imbalance



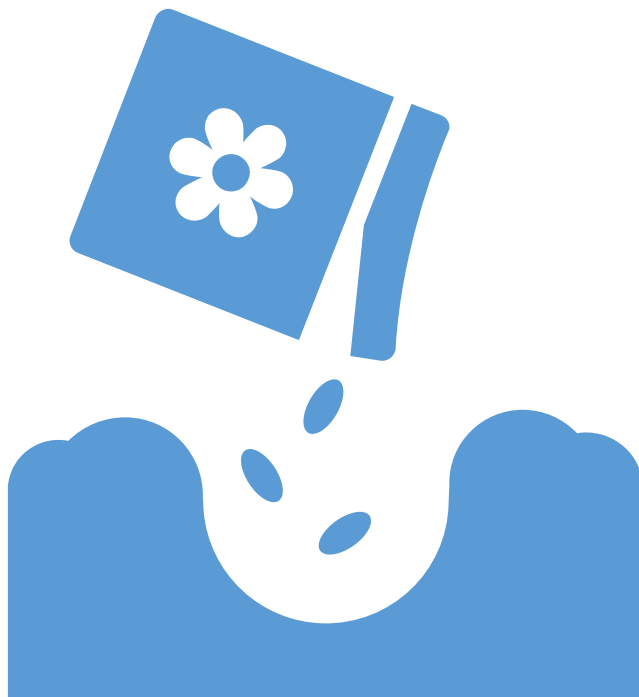
The priority is focused on addressing the imbalance between the skills supply and demand. To understand the local shifts in the labour market and tailor our response to these changes, robust skills and labour market **intelligence** and analysis, based on up-to-date data, with clear and actionable recommendations is paramount. As well as providing an understanding of what is currently in demand, we will provide insight into the future skills needs, such as the current examination of the type and number of “green” jobs likely to become available locally and the skills needed to perform them efficiently. Gathering intelligence from our employers is as

important as sharing our insights with our business community, especially in relation to sector-specific needs.

Apprenticeships are an important route for those who want a job whilst continuing to learn and acquire new skills. Although Wiltshire (at nearly 90%) and Swindon (at 71%) achieved more of their five-year targets than the country overall (at 68%), we are yet to return to the levels recorded before the introduction of the levy in 2017. Through engagement with our businesses, we continue to identify sector-specific issues. For instance, an engineering employer report a persistent shortage of young applicants and a low quality and quantity of apprenticeship candidates.

As the only LEP area without a university, we see an impact on the qualifications and educational aspirations and pathways for our residents. Bringing local **Higher Education** (HE) providers closer together to ensure that their offers are driven by the needs of local businesses is an important step towards addressing these challenges.

4.2 Ensuring Inclusive Growth



The second priority is focused on inclusive growth, providing ample opportunities for all to do well at school and have access to good employment. This includes ensuring opportunities exist for those from disadvantaged backgrounds and underrepresented groups, such as ethnic minorities, those with disabilities and gender imbalance in a range of occupations. To address this, we focus on raising aspirations.

To **raise aspirations**, especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, allowing them to get better jobs and increase their

earning power, our work involves numerous partners and is driven through the Swindon and Wiltshire Careers Hub. We work with cornerstone employers alongside both local Uni Connect programmes, Study Higher, Wessex Inspiration Network (WIN), Apprenticeship Support and Knowledge programme (ASK) and the DWP Schools Advisor.

To encourage influx of young people into key sectors, such as Construction and High-Value Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing, our Careers Hub will ensure that schools and colleges are better informed about the exciting possibilities that these careers offer. We will also continue to work with employers and individuals to ensure that apprenticeships are perceived as an attractive and effective way into the world of work for our young people, as

well as reskilling or upskilling. Many of our businesses also believe that we need to address systemic, national deficiencies, such as the generally poor image of the manufacturing and construction sectors, and vocational training overall.

Our [Local Industrial Strategy](#) evidence base identifies that lower employee absence rates and improved health lead to improved productivity. In response, we are working with the local Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs), our Local Authority Public Health services and HE providers to develop a better understanding of the link between employee health, skills and productivity. We will achieve this by working in collaboration with businesses to deliver a series of programmes to improve employee physical and mental health.

4.3 Aiding COVID-19 Recovery



We will employ our resources in several different ways to understand and address the challenges arising from COVID-19 and the resulting restrictions effectively.

To understand the challenges, we will use monthly **intelligence** reports to evaluate the impact of COVID-19 on the local area, with town, occupation, sector, employer and skills breakdowns. We will also investigate which groups are most adversely affected by COVID-19 to be able to provide additional support to ensure inclusive growth.

To act on this intelligence we will **work collaboratively**, pooling resources and where needed working **virtually or remotely**, using existing resources but also identifying and applying for additional funding made available for recovery. To make sure that the skills supply continues to reflect the skills demand, through the Skills and Talent Subgroup we will work with both businesses and providers. We will act both on the short-term changes and the more permanent, longer-term shifts. We will also collate and promote online training materials for the newly unemployed, combined with insights into local opportunities and occupations for which demand has been increasing, to ease their transition into new posts.

4.3 Skills Priorities Overview by Category

The table overleaf provides an overview of our skills priorities, based on the Skills Plan and the regular Labour Market Intelligence reports, monitored throughout the year:

Category	Priorities and supporting rationale
Cross-cutting skills priorities (far-reaching, cross-sector)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognising the improvements made over the last several years, we still have a considerable demand for digital skills⁷ that affects all sectors • Core STEM subjects, such as Engineering and Technology and Computer Sciences, are still identified as the most popular subjects that local employers across sectors would like to see delivered • Overall, continuing to balance skills supply and demand, through regular intelligence reports, increase in apprenticeship uptake and better matching demand for high-skill jobs • Ensuring inclusive growth, through actions aimed at raising aspirations to improve education and employability of underrepresented groups and better workforce health, allowing more people to work longer
COVID-19 recovery and renewal skills priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing up-to-date intelligence showing the impact of COVID-19 on local business and providers; working with both sides to ensure that skills supply is responding to skills demand • Collating and promoting online training materials for newly unemployed, to ensure low claimant count and unemployment • Accessing funding made available for recovery • Develop targeted action plan with partners to support recovery of most adversely affected by COVID-19 (for example, NEETs and Over 50s)
Sector priorities ⁸ (or occupational priorities)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help attract more young people into Engineering / High-Value Manufacturing and Construction, working through the Careers Hub and with local providers and employers • Understand specifically which “green” jobs will be needed and in which quantities, and therefore which skills need to be developed locally • Ensure that the momentum recently gained continues, with more people interested in Health and Social Care careers • Help farmers utilise technology to increase productivity, protect the environment and make farming safer through AgriTech focus and leveraging Wiltshire College & University Centre Lackham campus investments • Leveraging Business Cyber Centre (£3.7m Getting Building Fund) to help close the Cyber Security skills gap through an academy, employment hub and a cyber response team

Figure 4: Overview of Swindon and Wiltshire Skills Priorities by Category

To achieve our strategic ambitions, we have developed an Action Plan and brought numerous and diverse resources together. Alongside the delivery of our Growth Hub and Careers Hub, we will agree action priorities with the two local authorities, government departments, local colleges, universities and businesses through the Skills Action Plan and Skills and Talent Subgroup.

⁷ Employer Skills Survey, 2019 (published 2020)

⁸ Note: These have been identified after our Skills Plan was published, though our labour market intelligence reports and engagement with local businesses

Chapter 5. Skills action plan

We have developed a comprehensive programme of initiatives to deliver our [Skills Plan](#), with the action plan for the year 2020/21 summarised in the tables below. We are currently analysing labour market intelligence and the progress of the 2020/21 action plan to refresh our action plan for 2021/22.

5.1 Priority 1: Address skills supply and demand imbalance

I. Improve the use of skills and labour market intelligence:

Actions	Lead	Partners	Start	Finish	Target Audience	Success Measures
1.1.1 Establish "real-time" source of labour market intelligence (LMI)	SWLEP CEO	Data providers	Mar-20	Apr-20	All stakeholders	Gained access to data sources, used to inform Covid skills response
1.1.2 Share skills plan and underlying evidence base and promote participation in use of LMI data	SWLEP Skills Lead	Employer /provider reps on Skills and Talent Subgroup	Apr-20	Jul-20	All stakeholders	Partners engaged and aware of skills supply and demand issues and what we are doing to address them
1.1.3 Develop a dashboard on the SWLEP website accessible to everyone	SWLEP Head of PII Implementation	SWLEP Growth Hub Manager	Aug-20	Dec-20	All stakeholders	Website analytics show that the tool is regularly used
1.1.4 Produce monthly LMI update reports	SWLEP Head of PII Implementation	SWLEP Director of Strategy and Policy, Swindon / Wiltshire Intelligence Cells	Apr-20	Mar-21	All stakeholders	Reports produced and presented to the Skills & Talent Subgroup
1.1.5 Produce an annual skills supply and demand and LMI report	SWLEP Head of PII Implementation	SWLEP Director of Strategy and Policy, Swindon / Wiltshire Intelligence Cells	Jan-21	Mar-21	All stakeholders	Annual report provided
1.1.6 Use the SWLEP platforms, including developing new virtual tools, to promote apprenticeship and career opportunities to young people and career changers	SWLEP Marketing Exec	Careers Hub Manager, LA Skills Teams, schools, FE colleges, DWP reps on Skills & Talent Subgroup	Jul-20	Jul-21	All stakeholders	Regular reports produced, SWLEP website hosts information which is linked to SM activity

2. Achieve a step change in take-up and achievement of apprenticeships:

Actions		Lead Person	Partners	Start	Finish	Target Audience	Success Measures
1.2.1	Acquire LMI tool for Careers Hub to promote apprenticeships to school leavers	Career Hub Manager	ASK, SWAAN, FE, GWP Providers , SASH and WASH	Apr-20	Mar-21	School-leavers, other pupils and their parents	YoY increase in school leavers on intermediate and advanced apprenticeships
1.2.2	Use all available resources to promote apprenticeships to SMEs and encourage more SMEs to employ an apprentice	SWLEP Skills and Enterprise Advisor	Growth Hub, SWLEP Marketing Exec, GWP Providers	Apr-20	Mar-21	Local businesses	More SMEs employing an apprentice and the actions need to go to providers who have large teams of employer engagement staff for this purpose
1.2.3	Leverage the use of nationally available resources to promote the benefits of apprenticeships	SWLEP Skills Lead	Head of Skills and Employment, Wiltshire Council, SWLEP Skills Lead, Growth Hub	Jul-20	Jul-21	Local businesses, school leavers and those looking to re/upskill	Clear sign posting to nationally available resources in all of our comms
1.2.4	Work to secure investment to support apprenticeships to counteract the impact of Covid-19	SWLEP Skills Lead	LA Skills teams, GWP Providers	Jul-20	Dec-20		Increase in the number of apprenticeship opportunities and take-up
1.2.5	Run a marketing campaign, targeting parents and students, to increase awareness of apprenticeships as a key career choice; aligned with National Apprenticeship Week (Feb / Mar)	SWLEP Digital Marketing Apprentice	SWLEP Marketing Exec, LA Skills Teams, GWP Providers	Sep-20	Mar-21	School-leavers, other pupils and their parents	Marketing campaign implemented
1.2.6	Support FE colleges to achieve successful implementation of T-levels through high quality business engagement	SWLEP Growth Hub Manager	FE Colleges, SWLEP Growth Hub Business Navigators	Sep-21	Aug-22	FE colleges and local businesses	More work placements

3. Build on the success of the employer input to the Institute of Technology and develop a business-led federation of higher education providers to meet the demand for local jobs, especially those requiring STEM skills:

	Actions	Lead Person	Partners	Start	Finish	Target Audience	Success Measures
1.3.1	Establish a strategic partnership with a group of committed employers and education providers to develop a framework for a successful business-led, multi-campus federation	SWLEP Head of PII Implementation	LIS Manger, SWLEP	Oct-20	Oct-21	Local businesses and HE providers	At least 6 employers and 6 providers + independent business chair signed up to participate in HE Federation and a high-level framework developed
1.3.2	Promote the Institute of Technology in Swindon to achieve success in its first five year charter	SWLEP Marketing Exec	GWP Providers, Schools, Careers Hub, Adviza, DWP	Sep-21	Sep-26	School-leavers, others looking to re/upskill and local businesses	Year on year increase in learners as projected in the bid
1.3.3	Develop a targeted marketing campaign to increase uptake of higher and degree apprenticeships in STEM subjects, in particular females	SWLEP Marketing Exec	GWP Providers, LA Skills Teams, Business Reps on Skills and Talent	Jan-21	Jul-21	School-leavers, others looking to re/upskill, with special focus on women	Marketing campaign delivered - ROI realised
1.3.4	Develop high quality marketing materials about the supply of skills provision to support Inward Investment programmes	SWLEP Skills Lead	SWLEP Marketing Exec, SWLEP & LA Inward Investment Leads	Apr-20	Apr-21	Business within and outside the LEP area	More initiatives on SWLEP website and social media attracting talent to Swindon and Wiltshire
1.4.1	Develop agile digital skills training programmes, responsive to business need	SWLEP Digital Specialist	GWP Providers, Business Reps, ESIF programmes,	Jul-20	Jul-22	Local businesses and current/future employees	A local digital skills offer is developed and promoted

5.2 Priority 2: Ensure inclusive growth

4. Raise aspirations and improve employability of young people through effective support for independent careers education, information, advice and guidance via SWLEP Careers Hub:

	Actions	Lead Person	Partners	Start	Finish	Target Audience	Success Measures
2.1.1	Deliver support for a high quality careers programme in schools and colleges	Careers Hub Manager	Careers Hub Steering Group members	Aug-20	Jul-21	Schools and colleges	All CEC targets achieved
2.1.2	Coordinate ambassadors, role models and skills champions to inspire young people from vulnerable groups	Careers Hub Manager	Careers Hub Steering Group, GWP Providers, LA Skills Teams, schools, DWP	Aug-20	Jul-21	Young people from vulnerable groups	Uni Connect targets achieved

5. Promote programmes to improve physical and mental health of employees:

	Actions	Lead Person	Partners	Start	Finish	Target Audience	Success Measures
2.2.1	Develop understanding of the impact of physical and mental health on employability and productivity and produce a report on findings; explore options for a student project	SWLEP Head of PII Implementation	Universities, West of England and Wessex Academic Health Science Networks, NHS Federation	Aug-20	Mar-21	Local businesses and their staff	Report produced
2.2.2	Promote the report findings with businesses to implement examples of good practice	SWLEP Growth Hub Manager	Skills and Talent subgroup, SWLEP bid manager	Mar-21	Mar-22	Local businesses and their staff	No. of businesses that take up the promoted ideas via survey

Although the full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is not fully known, the Swindon and Wiltshire strategic priorities, as well as the Skills Action Plan, were stress-tested to ensure their relevance in the recovery in the post-COVID-19 world.

6. COVID-19 recovery actions:

	Actions	Lead Person	Partners	Start	Finish	Target Audience	Success Measures
3.1.1	Develop intelligence reports detailing the impact of Covid-19 on local business and providers; work with both sides to ensure that skills supply is responding to skill demand	SWLEP Head of PII Implementation	Data discovery group (SWLEP and LAs), Skills and Talent subgroup	May-20	Aug-21	All stakeholders	Articles published monthly on SWLEP website
3.1.2	Collate and promote online training materials for newly unemployed	SWLEP Digital Marketing Apprentice	SWLEP Skills Lead, LA Skills Teams, ESIF Programmes, DWP, Adviza	Jul-20	Jul-22	All local residents and businesses	Webpage analytics showing a good levels of traffic; survey of businesses advertising for vacancies to see if employee upskilling is needed
3.1.3	Identify and apply for funding made available for recovery	SWLEP Skills Lead	SWLEP Head of PII Implementation	Jul-20	Jul-22	Funding organisations	Amount of funding received and success rate
3.2.2	Understand which groups are most adversely affected by Covid-19 (e.g. NEETs, Over 50s), and develop an action plan with partners to support recovery	SWLEP Skills Lead	Data discovery group (SWLEP and LAs), Skills and Talent subgroup, DWP	Jul-20	Jul-21	NEETs, Over 50s and other sub-groups if and when identified	Action plan delivered

To ensure that the intended outcomes are reached, Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership Board has overseen the implementation of the [Skills Plan](#) through its governance structure (Figure 5). The Board's Skills and Talent Subgroup, which operates as the Swindon and Wiltshire Skills Advisory Panel, has been responsible for the effective implementation of the Plan by monitoring its progress and reporting back to the SWLEP Board on a regular basis, including in-depth, end-of-year reports. In addition, we report our progress to the Department for Education on an annual basis.

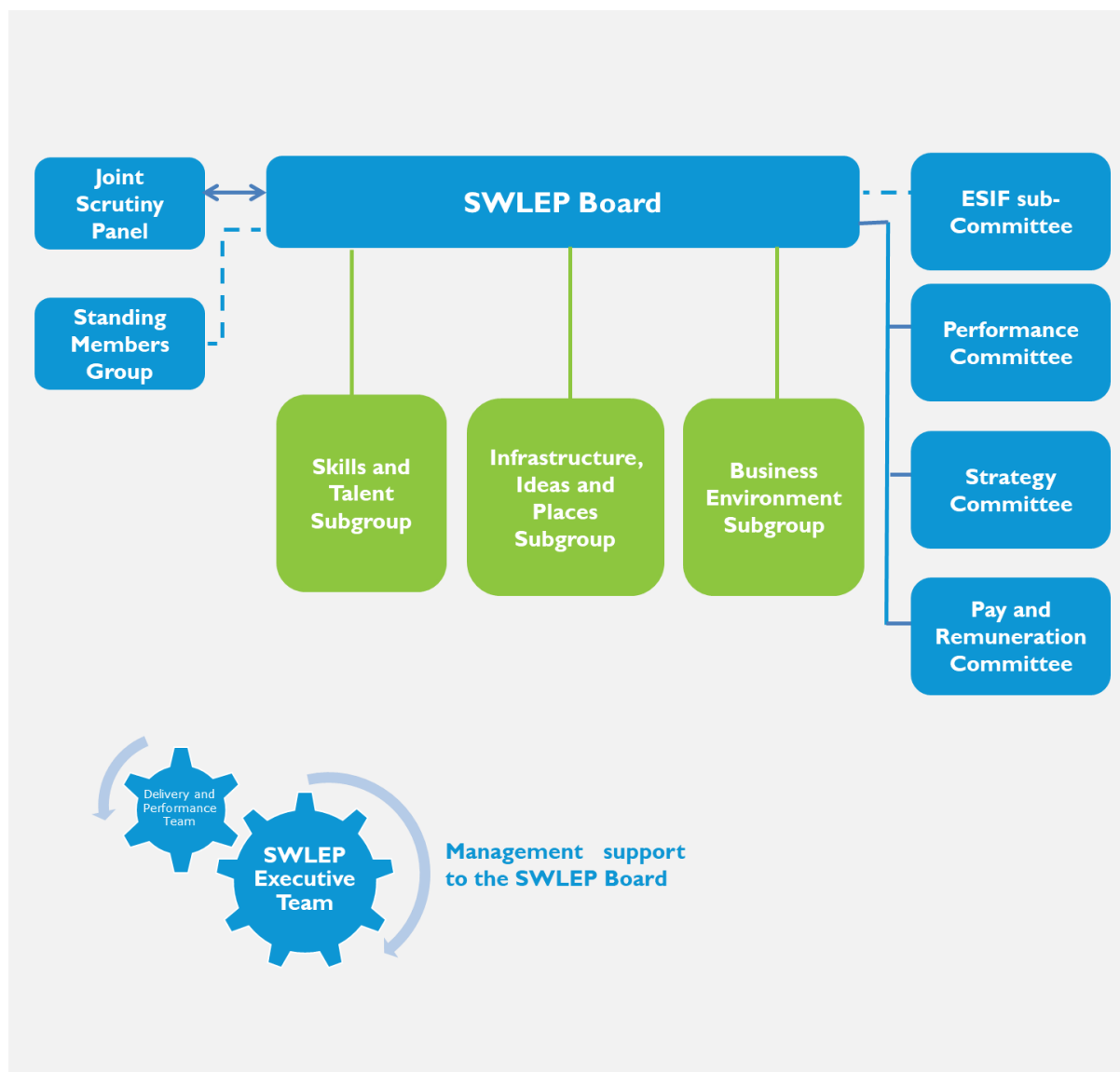


Figure 5: Governance structure for the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership

Chapter 6. Assessment of progress

By the end of December 2020, nearly 90% of the actions set out in the Swindon and Wiltshire Skills Action Plan were mobilised. More detail can be found below.

6.1 Progress to date for Priority 1: Addressing skills supply and demand imbalance

Figure 6 provides an overview of the activities undertaken during 2020-2021 to help address the skills supply and demand imbalance. Further detail is presented in the sections 6.1.1 to 6.1.4.





Intelligence 	Apprenticeships 	HE 	Digital skills 
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 20 LMI reports to date and continuing to produce a minimum of one per month• Developed an automated dashboard for the SWLEP website• Acquired access to “real-time” labour market intelligence through EMSI and Labour Insights• Shared skills plan and underlying evidence base with partners and published on our website	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Local campaign to raise awareness delivered during National Apprenticeship Week• Reviewed 2020 Apprenticeship Strategy, what worked and did not work• Strategy to 2024/25 being developed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 9 ongoing university projects• University of Bath VC joined SWLEP board in 2020• Part of IOT steering group• Working with Institute of Coding through UoB; UWE, via academic health science network; Bath Spa, via GradTalent Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 12 webinars with over 440 attendees• Over 60 businesses / individuals had 1:1 sessions with SWLEP’s Digital Expert

Figure 6: SWLEP Skills Plan Priority 1 Progress Update (Q1 2021)

6.1.1 Improving the use of skills and labour market intelligence

Progress has been made across several of the planned activities to use skills and labour market intelligences better, including:

- establishing a “real-time” source of Labour Market Intelligence (LMI), through licences to use the EMSI Analyst and Burning Glass Labour Insight data;
- sharing the [Skills Plan](#) and underlying evidence base, to promote participation in the use of LMI data, with the Skills and Talent Subgroup, SWLEP Board, Business Intelligence and Networking Group and various other partners, as well as publishing them on the SWLEP website;
- developed a data dashboard, which is published on the SWLEP website and accessible to everyone, building on best practice developed by other SAPs. This draws on internal

and external datasets and employing Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) wherever available (four of the five datasets) to ensure full automation;

- producing monthly LMI update reports, which have enabled us and our partners and stakeholders to understand the latest trends in the local labour market. A series of tailored and more detailed reports have been produced as well, to support decision-making of local organisations. These are also published on the [SWLEP website](#).
- Producing an annual skills supply and demand report to inform the development of 2021/22 Skills Action Plan.

In addition to the analysis of hard data, we also collate intelligence from our local businesses and providers. For instance, this enabled us to uncover a **sector-specific need** in manufacturing relating to difficulties in attracting and/or retaining young people. To address this issue, we have developed a three-pronged approach:

- raising interest: working with local and national bodies to elevate the image of the sector, to increase the number of people considering and choosing engineering as their career choice;
- better matching: through the Careers Hub, ensuring that schools have the relevant and up-to-date information to help them to better match suitable candidates to engineering apprenticeships. We plan to tackle this in two ways: by increasing the number of Enterprise Advisers with engineering background and by engaging engineering experts to produce appealing video content as a teaching resource for schools.
- closer engagement: enabling smaller local businesses to effectively engage with schools (for example, through virtual / physical work placements) and colleges (for example, IOT employer forums).

6.1.2 Realising a step change in take-up and achievement of apprenticeships

In November 2020, the Skill and Talent Subgroup reviewed the Apprenticeship Strategy 2017-2020, to understand its effectiveness. Using these learnings and taking into consideration the current picture of apprenticeships, work is beginning in spring 2021 to develop the Apprenticeship Strategy to 2024/25.

Even though all the government's apprenticeship campaigns were supported and supplemented by additional local activities, our five-year apprenticeship starts targets were not achieved in Wiltshire (reached nearly 90% of the target) or in Swindon (at 71%). Our performance, however, was higher than the national average (at 68%).

Building on successes to date, whilst also remaining mindful of the current COVID-19 context, the Swindon and Wiltshire Skills and Talent Subgroup agreed several principles that will guide its forthcoming Apprenticeship Strategy:

- strategically, apprenticeships have a dual purpose:
 - to bridge the skills gaps, we need to identify where the current and future demand is and to ensure that the supply pipeline is in place; and

- to enable inclusive growth, especially getting the young people on a career ladder, helping them develop the needed skills formally.
- up-to-date intelligence is needed to understand the skills demand and to set our targets, helping:
 - potential apprentices to choose areas with strong employment opportunities;
 - education providers to become more agile, with processes enabling them to review and update their apprenticeship portfolios.
- the role of Skills and Talent Subgroup is multifaceted, including:
 - raising the profile of apprenticeships with local employers and providers;
 - coordinating the development of the apprenticeship strategy and action plan;
 - monitoring progress and reporting to the SWLEP Board and to the Department for Education.

6.1.3 Developing a business-led federation of Higher Education providers

The establishment of the Institute of Technology (IOT) in Swindon is the starting point for this objective. Strong business involvement in IOT is the test case for the wider federation, building on this highly collaborative model.

In April 2019, the government approved the bid to establish a state-of-the-art facility that will offer courses to help address skills shortage in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM). The IOT is led by New College Swindon and includes the University of Gloucestershire, Oxford Brooks University and 11 local anchor businesses. The first cohort of students starts in September 2021.

During the year, SWLEP has strengthened its relationships with neighbouring universities, exploring opportunities for joint work in digital and cyber skills with the Institute of Coding, as well as sustainable technologies and health economics. In addition, in December 2020 the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Bath joined the SWLEP Board as a Director.

We continue to engage with the University of the West of England (UWE) via the Academic Health Science Network and we have strong links with Bath Spa University through the GradTalent Development Agency, which offers a personalised employment service to assist graduates from the South West to secure local graduate opportunities. In addition, we are exploring joint research into the benefits for businesses arising from greater staff diversity.

6.1.4 Developing digital skills

In August 2020, as part of the BEIS COVID-19 Recovery Programme, Swindon and Wiltshire Growth Hub added a Digital Specialist to its ranks. By March 2021, over 60 individuals and businesses had received one-to-one bespoke advice and a detailed action plan to help them improve their digital skills. In addition, by the end of March addition, we will have delivered 16 webinars, with over 500 attendees on a range of subjects, including:

- digital marketing strategies;
- utilising technology to aid recovery;

- practicalities of moving from paper to digital records;
- implementing key software (CRMs, finance, marketing tools etc); and
- utilising systems successfully and busting the myths around digital analytics.

6.2 Progress to date for Priority 2: Ensuring inclusive growth

Figure 7 below provides a summary of the key activities completed to date included in the Swindon and Wiltshire [Skills Plan](#). More detail on these activities can be found in sections 6.2.1 and 6.2.2.



 Raising aspirations	 Workforce health
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 virtual conferences delivered (for employers, for looked after and vulnerable children and for career leaders) • Achieved above-average Gatsby Benchmarks • Developed Career Leader SharePoint site • Created local SEND Community of Practice • Added Careers Explorer to SWLEP website 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 webinars delivered on how to improve mental and physical wellbeing in Dec'20 / Jan'21 • Developed a set of wellbeing tools, developed by local Public Health, shared via redundancy events • Ongoing project with the two CCG Chairs, Swindon and Wiltshire Public Health officers and neighbouring university, to better understand local issues and develop solutions

Figure 7: SWLEP Skills Plan Priority 1 Progress Update (Q1 2021)

6.2.1 Raising aspirations and improve employability of young people

Through the SWLEP Careers Hub we have delivered a high-quality careers programme across a network of 63 schools and colleges. The network has achieved an average of 4.04 Gatsby Benchmarks, above the national average of 3.86. This compares to 2.2 average benchmark score by school / college in September 2018. Whilst nationally only 45% of secondary schools / colleges are part of a Careers Hub, in Swindon and Wiltshire we have reached 100%.

The Careers Hub has worked directly with both local authorities on activities which aim to prevent NEET and to support disadvantaged groups of students. Examples include providing two Live Learn virtual employer careers fairs, specifically focussed on looked after children or groups of vulnerable young people. The Careers Hub has a Senior Enterprise Coordinator role which is targeted at working directly with SEND providers and the ensuring there is a joined-up approach with local authority SEND teams.

The key achievements of the Swindon and Wiltshire Careers Hub include:

- recruitment of over sixty Enterprise Adviser (EA) volunteers, covering 91% of mainstream schools/colleges locally, compared to a national average of 81%;
- a programme of virtual events during the lockdown including:
 - Employer Conference, attended by 70+ employers and employees;

- two careers events, via the Learn Live platform, for looked after and vulnerable children groups, which were attended by over 1,000 young people; and
- a Career Leader conference for over 80 delegates that included a keynote address from Ofsted.
- inspired by the Career Enterprise Company's (CEC) national SEND Community of Practice (CoP) group, we developed a local SEND CoP network to encourage Career Leaders to meet regularly, share good practice and support each other to solve problems preventing stable careers programmes;
- coordinated ambassadors, role models and skills champions to inspire young people from vulnerable groups, utilising a wide stakeholder network, including ASK, DWP Schools Advisor, HEI Outreach teams, Education Business Partnerships, Adviza, Virtual Schools teams and SEND teams;
- developed a Career Leader SharePoint site to facilitate ongoing exchange of good practice;
- beginning work to address a gap of 14,000 work experience placements for this academic year by:
 - forming partnerships with Speaker for School, Great Western Hospital NHS Trust, Class of your Own and Education Business Partnership (EBPWB) to develop virtual work experience placements, to overcome challenges imposed by the COVID-19 lockdown and social distancing concerns;
 - developing a menu of options for schools/colleges to access virtual work experience; and
 - collaborating with the three local FE colleges, led by Wiltshire College, to develop a virtual work experience platform which will support local employers to develop and offer a range of experiences from virtual to face-to-face placements.

Whilst it is recognised that progress has been made, there is still work to be done. One area of concern is the lack of qualified Careers Guidance Advisors available in the local area to provide one-to-one, personal guidance interviews. Since the first lockdown, this has partly been helped by moving to virtual sessions, which increased capacity for schools and colleges. Through the WIN Uni Connect programme additional guidance interviews have been made available to schools/colleges, through the qualification to L6 Careers Guidance of the WIN operation team.

6.2.2 Promoting programmes to improve physical and mental health of employees

There are currently four different workstreams outlined below:

- we have run a series of webinars, hosted by Rosie Runciman, the co-founder of The Sound Doctor and TeamDoctor, with over 20 years of experience as a radio presenter. The webinars went beyond the wellbeing aids and focussed on understanding the root causes of stress and anxiety, as well as learning useful and practical ways of removing them. The webinars focussed on both individuals and best management practices and processes, with references to realistic targets, workloads, giving sufficient autonomy, and managing remote workers successfully. More than 70 people attended the sessions, with the recordings continuing to be viewed by more people;

- we are working with the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) chairs and Public Health representatives for Swindon and Wiltshire to:
 - better understand the availability of local data, to analyse the current state and monitor our progress; and
 - understand the complex landscape of the initiatives currently available that can help improve employee health, both physical and mental; as an output, we have compiled a list of initiatives, which has been shared as part of the redundancy events held in October and November 2020.
- an expression of interest has been submitted to the Economies for Healthier Lives programme, promoted by The Health Foundation. If approved, the local pilot will build on DWP's Restart scheme, by deploying expert training providers, health improvement professionals and community organisations to bring focus on lifestyle changes, leading to health improvements alongside the scheme's enhanced employment outcomes. The partners include Public Health and Economic Development Services at Wiltshire Council and Swindon Borough Council, Citizens Advice Bureau Wiltshire, Voluntary Action Swindon, Wiltshire College and University Centre, New Swindon College, DWP, the University of Bath and the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership; and
- we are exploring a potential research / student project with a neighbouring university to review programmes currently available and identify best practice. The project would also select the programmes best suited to addressing challenges faced by the local employers.

6.3 Skills and Talent Subgroup's Role

The role of Swindon and Wiltshire's Skills and Talent Subgroup is multi-faceted:



Leadership role

- Unifying force and a forum bringing together local employers and skills providers to pool knowledge and resources to resolve local issues

Since its creation, the Subgroup has been pivotal in **taking a leadership** role through the development and delivery of the Swindon and Wiltshire [Skills Plan](#) and Annual Skills Report. It acts as a unifying force, bringing together local employers and skills providers to pool knowledge on skills and labour market needs, and to work together to understand and address key local challenges.

The Subgroup maintains oversight over SWLEP funded skills and talent projects and the delivery of European and skills projects funded through other sources to inform the SWLEP Board of emerging strengths and weaknesses. It also leads on equality-related issues, with the Chair of the Skills and Talent Subgroup acting as the Champion for Equality on the SWLEP Board.



Enhancing local knowledge

- Providing access to up-to-date insights, including those derived from online job postings data, to create clear understanding of current and future skills needs

Its focus on **enhancing local knowledge** is a core part of the Subgroup's ethos. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, a clear understanding of the current skills supply and demand needs has been developed and work is underway to understand the future needs. In the short term, the focus is on the current investments, such as government's support for green jobs, and in the medium term we will look to examine the permanent changes in skills demand because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We have invested in EMSI and Labour Insights data subscriptions, which give us access to up-to-date, local online job postings. These act as early indicators of changes in the labour market. Monthly labour market reports are published on our website and are discussed by the Skills and Talent Subgroup, the SWLEP Board and our Business Intelligence and Network Group. We also periodically publish articles⁹ on our website, highlighting important changes and support available to manage these changes.

As well as distributing information, we regularly receive requests from businesses for intelligence support. For example, we have developed bespoke labour market reports for Honda, to help the company better understand which training to offer its staff.

We have developed an automated dashboard to monitor the impact of our actions and progress towards our strategic goals. This is also a tool that offers robust information for the local businesses, helping them and investors make informed decisions regarding local developments. The dashboard is openly available to the public via the SWLEP website.



Impacting local skills provision

- working with colleges and independent providers to shape course portfolios

Through our efforts, we have seen considerable **impact on local skills provision**. Recent examples of close collaboration include working with Wiltshire College to understand the effectiveness of the area's current apprenticeship strategy and to inform future strategy. Through this work we also identified the need to build capability to understand the demand-supply imbalance and be able to respond through new or adjusted provision.

We have been providing updates on which sectors are growing and where there are skills shortages for the Gloucestershire and Wiltshire Partnership (GWP), a membership network of training providers which has Education and Skills Funding Agency, DWP or Local Authority contracts or sub-contracts to deliver 16-19 and adult learning programmes. The intelligence

⁹ Example of an article published in August 2020: [Early signs of job market recovery in Swindon and Wiltshire](#)

is delivered as part of its delivery of ASK Apprenticeship Awareness in Wiltshire schools for pupils from Year 10 through to Year 13.

We have been working closely with DWP representatives, as part of several groups and projects, helping to understand how the local demand is changing and highlighting skills gaps to ensure education provision is in place that can address these.



Supporting Covid-19 recovery and renewal plans

- Through regular intelligence reports, acceleration of development plans and membership of Covid-19 partnership board for the recovery plan for both LAs

In our Skills Plan we stated that we intend to aid COVID-19 recovery through better intelligence and by bringing partners together to make the recovery smoother and swifter. When it comes to intelligence, our progress to date includes:

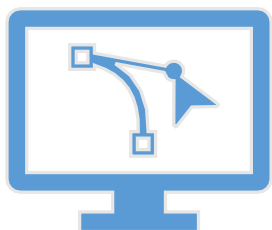
- highlighting that Wiltshire had a ***higher proportion of young claimants***, aged 16-24, than both Swindon and England overall. This led to SWLEP becoming a Kickstart Gateway organisation and a range of other activities to reduce these numbers. As a result, January 2021 claimant count data showed five consecutive months of falling numbers of young people claiming work-related benefits, bringing Wiltshire closer to the national average;
- working with ***colleges and independent providers***, as well as ***schools and pupils*** through Careers Hub, to ensure they have up-to-date local information, including the impact of COVID-19, and likely longer-term demand shortages and surpluses, ensuring that supply can follow demand.

Working collaboratively, we have made several changes, including:

- shifting much of our ***support to virtual delivery***. For example, our four Careers Hub events and our highly popular series of Growth Hub webinars, currently averaging at 10 webinars per month, which are attracting hundreds of people and proving to be an excellent way to provide information, advice and guidance to business leaders, to boost business survival, help employee well-being and offer redundancy support;
- acting as a ***Kickstart Gateway*** organisation, creating cohorts of 30 or more placements from a range of small businesses, paving way for more local employment opportunities for young people. The scheme provides funding to employers to create new six-month job placements for people aged 16 to 24 that are currently on Universal Credit and at risk of long-term unemployment. There has been a good take up across Swindon and Wiltshire, with roles varying from administration, marketing and retail and sales to childcare and engineering. Many of the employers hope to offer jobs to the young people at the end of their placements, helping them enter and contribute to the local economy. By March 2021, we had received interest for nearly 300 places from our businesses, with funding approved for more than a third of these and with our first Kickstarters beginning their placements. We continue to create and submit new applications for 30+ places and will maintain our support for Kickstarters through opportunities for training and engaging them in networks for the remainder of the Kickstart programme, which is due to finish in December 2021.

Chapter 7. Case studies and positive impact stories

7.1 Honda



THIS CASE STUDY DEMONSTRATES HOW THE SKILLS AND TALENT SUBGROUP:

- enhanced local knowledge, allowing Honda to focus on developing reskilling / upskilling programmes for their redundant staff, aligned to skills with high local demand,
- brought partners and funding together to provide tailored support for Honda staff wishing to start businesses,
- leveraged learnings from Honda's large-scale redundancy programme to aid led COVID-19 recovery.

7.1.1 Background

Honda UK will close its Swindon manufacturing plant by July 2021, releasing approximately 3,500 members of staff. The closure is also expected to affect several thousand people in Honda's supply chain nationally. We anticipate that this will provide the needed influx of skills to grow the existing high value manufacturing businesses, attract new investment into the area and encourage Honda's supply chain to diversify to support the emerging engineering sectors.

To aid the transition, in October 2020, SWLEP made £250,000 available for two studies:

- an initial highways study to help unlock the 152-hectare site and remove barriers to finding new tenants; and
- a study into the potential energy requirement for the site, looking at options for supply from renewable sources and from the possibility of on-site generation of energy.

It is hoped that with intensified development, the site could support up to 8,000 jobs, which is twice as many jobs as employed by Honda at its peak.

7.1.2 Impact

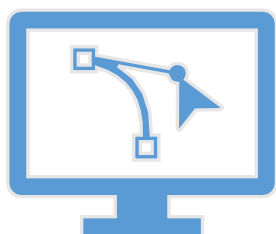
Through the Honda Task Force, established in the wake of the closure announcement and chaired by the Secretary of State, with the leader of Swindon Borough Council and the Chair of the SWLEP acting as co-chairs, the Skills and Talent Subgroup has been supplying **analysis and insight** into the current and future skills needs to help Honda understand which sectors, occupations and jobs its employees are best qualified to move into, where the key skills gaps might be and which training might be required.

It is anticipated that around a quarter of the released staff will consider starting up companies. As part of the three-year, ERDF-funded SME Competitiveness programme of work (as outlined above in Chapter 3), the SWLEP Growth Hub is offering support for individuals being made redundant from Honda that wish to **start a business**. This will build on the half-day

enterprise workshops, commissioned by Honda and available to all its employees, that will outline the key skills, knowledge and understanding, including cultural shifts, required for business success.

Whilst offering support to Honda's employees, we have enhanced our experience of using large-scale redundancies to deliver positive change. This capability enabled us to mobilise quickly and effectively to support businesses and individuals being made redundant due to **COVID-19**. We have done this directly through themed redundancy events, which included sharing insights into compatible occupations in demand and the skills required for them, as well as indirectly, such as helping identify sector-based work academy programmes.

7.2 Swindon and Wiltshire Institute of Technology



THIS CASE STUDY EXAMINES SKILLS AND TALENT SUBGROUP'S:

- impact on local skills provision, ensuring that it is demand-led
- ability to enhance skills and labour market intelligence, with methodical analysis of the wants and needs of local businesses
- leadership role in tackling several skills needs, including lower L4+ qualifications and ageing population

7.2.1 Background

The Government-backed Institute of Technology (IoT) was approved in 2018 and is due to open to students in 2021. It is operated by the merged Swindon College / New College, alongside the University of Gloucester and Oxford Brookes University. Several business anchor-partners have been supporting the project since the beginning and the IoT will remain business-led to ensure alignment between the courses on offer and the local skills needed. As such, the Institute will concentrate on developing high-level technical training and progression opportunities, offering a focussed approach to providing a skilled workforce for employers in the area.

7.2.2 Impact

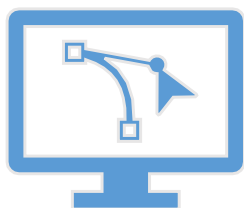
Through the Principal of the New College Swindon, who is responsible for the IoT and is a member of the Swindon and Wiltshire Skills and Talent Subgroup and is a SWLEP Board Director, and the other SWLEP members, we have been helping shape the future of the IoT, from the idea stage, over bidding through to the inception and selection of the initial course offering.

Supplementing and building on the input from local business, we have been helping the IoT Steering Group **understand the local skills supply and demand**, how they have changed

over time and the likely future shifts. These insights have been used to develop the course offering to bridge the gaps in supply and ensure that the local skills demands are met, with the initial portfolio including:

- Engineering, Manufacturing and Associated Professions, supporting the growth of the Swindon and Wiltshire Advanced Manufacturing priority sector;
- Science and Health Related Professions, helping meet the increasing demand for Health and Care sector, as well as the Swindon and Wiltshire Life Sciences priority sector;
- Creative and Media Professions, building on the rise in regional demand;
- Digital and Computer Science Professions, assisting the expansion of the Swindon and Wiltshire Cyber Security priority sector and the wider Cyber Valley, covering GFirst, Swindon and Wiltshire, Worcestershire, and The Marches LEP areas; and
- Business and Management Courses, supporting the regional needs.

7.3 Higher Futures



THIS CASE STUDY SHOWS SKILLS AND TALENT SUBGROUP'S ABILITY TO:

- engage and address diverse needs of the local micro and small businesses through innovative services
- bring smaller businesses and providers closer together to better tailor local skills provision

7.3.1 Background

With an above-average proportion of smaller businesses and their diverse skills needs, our Higher Futures programme was initially developed on the back of a £1.4m City Deal grant received in 2014. Harnessing the LEP's and Growth Hub's existing infrastructure and expertise, whilst adding value through more skills engagement and brokerage, the programme offered a "one-stop-shop" for all skills-related issues, with tailored support for businesses of any size, from a recent micro start-up through to a multi-national business. The free and impartial skills service provided advice and support as well as training and learning analysis for employers.

Recognising that "one-fits-all" approach was not going to address our skills need, the service was tailored to meet the needs of the business, regardless of size or complexity of challenge. The team typically started by working with a business to understand its existing and future workforce challenges. Once the business need was understood, we advised on the most relevant local options in terms of free or funded training, work placements, apprenticeships,

training programmes, resourcing support, through to developing an organisational development plan.

7.3.2 Impact

To date, we have worked with over 700 different businesses, helping them understand and respond to their skills needs. Below we highlight several examples:

- Porton Biopharma is a bio-pharmaceutical development and manufacturing company, focused on life-saving products, specifically biologics, vaccines and enzymes. Higher Futures' work with Porton started with an in-depth management training needs analysis. This involved a skills scan of current supervisory skills and qualifications in order that the training offered to each person was relevant and at the appropriate level. With the needs clearly mapped, Higher Futures reached out to three most suited training providers to bid to deliver a bespoke training package for Porton. After a successful tendering process, the University of South Wales was awarded the work to deliver a bespoke supervisory / team leader training course. Currently on its fourth cohort of trainees, the programme continues to run effectively and add value to the organisation, helping it deliver its ambitious business plan.
- Alabaré Christian Care and Support is a cross-sector charity providing support to people including young people, veterans and the homeless; equipping and empowering them to live independently. It provides support to around 400 service users across the South West and Wales and employs around 300 people. As our first step, we helped Alabaré sit back and look at its staff training and its objectives, which identified gaps in its training provision. We then put the company in touch with a wide network of providers to develop the solutions they needed.
- Appsbroker is a Swindon-based software company and the largest Google Cloud Agile Systems Integrator in EMEA and the Google Cloud Application Development Specialisation Partner of the Year. Higher Futures enabled Appsbroker to better understand the Degree Apprenticeship landscape and helped it to develop a relationship with the Open University to deliver Digital Technology Degree Apprenticeships, which kick started Appsbroker's apprenticeship programme.
- Wavin, a business based out of Chippenham, is a leading supplier of plastic pipe systems and solutions. Higher Futures worked with Wavin to create links to the Careers Enterprise Company and broker engineering apprenticeship provision with Swindon College. This included support during the transition to make the whole process seamless.
- Haine & Smith Opticians is an independent family firm, providing a personal eyecare service in Wiltshire, Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire. Higher Futures helped with posting vacancy advertisements, as well as shortlisting, to ensure it attracted the right talent quickly and efficiently.

- Swindon Borough Council, with Higher Futures brokering the relationship with the University West of England, developed a Level 5 Certificate or Diploma in Leadership and Management for aspiring leaders, a skills gap that the council identified.

During 2020, our Growth Hub expanded to include a Skills and Enterprise Adviser to build on the Higher Futures achievements by utilising our broader business support activities. As part of our service, we now offer a range of support, from tailored, free, one-to-one HR advice clinics to our network of consultants, training providers and recruiters, as well as short courses and masterclasses. The programme has proven to be so successful, with increasing number of businesses accessing our service, that we are currently considering augmenting our support team to ensure that more of our provision is demand-led and that our businesses have access to skills that enable them to survive and thrive through the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

Chapter 8. Looking forward

Despite the challenging circumstances and the unprecedented changes in our local and national labour markets since the spread of COVID-19 and the implementation of the initial lockdown in March 2020, our activities not only met expectations, but exceeded them in several areas.

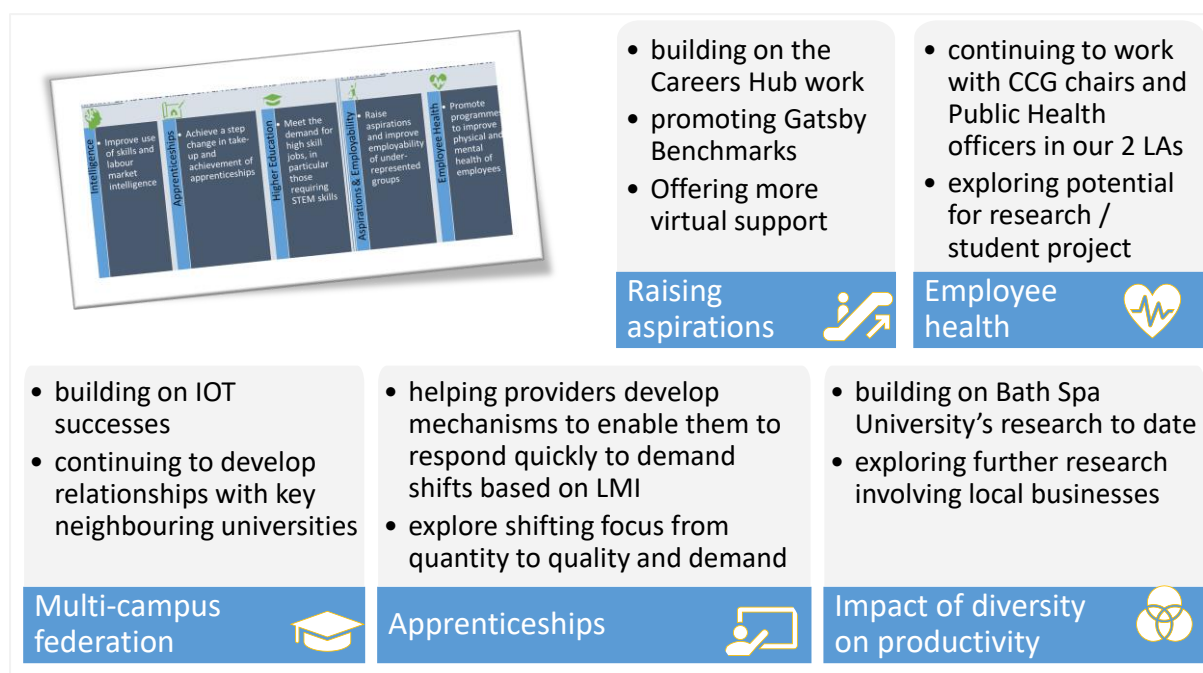


Figure 8: Swindon and Wiltshire Skills Plan Next Steps

As outlined in Figure 7, looking forward, our two strategic priorities and the five underpinning objectives will continue to guide our actions, with a strong focus on aiding COVID-19 recovery through:

- Higher Education:** building on IOT successes and continuing to develop relationships with the key neighbouring universities, laying foundations for the multi-campus federation, bringing us closer to having a local university. This innovative approach will allow us to develop an HE offer in line with local skills demand. To succeed, we will need strong support from our local colleges and neighbouring universities, as well as continued input from the anchor businesses to help shape both course portfolios and curriculum;
- Apprenticeships:** taking into considerations the wider labour market changes, in particular the longer duration of apprenticeships, greater proportion of off-the-job training, government's greater focus on quality over quantity and the more recent shifts due to COVID-19, we will reflect on our strategic objective to increase the number of apprentices and achieve a step change in take-up. We will have clear

objectives that are demand-led, in terms of numbers, levels and subjects, which will be regularly reviewed. We will work with our providers, Careers Hub and our business community, continuing to promote apprenticeships as an important route to skills. We will learn from our experience in delivering the 2020 Apprenticeship Plan to develop a robust set of actions and ensure effective delivery, including:

- although the profile of apprenticeships has been raised over the last few years, we need to continue to raise awareness of this pathway to new skills, upskilling and reskilling;
 - to ensure inclusive growth, it is important to have a range of options, from entry level through to higher apprenticeships across the area, providing pathways for all residents to progress to/in their chosen, in-demand careers;
 - there are signs of improved engagement from our SME and levy payers; we need to enable all businesses, and in particular SMEs, to access the expertise and resources to navigate the apprenticeship landscape;
 - SWLEP-sponsored Supply Train marketing campaign has taught us a lot, which we can use in future local campaigns to increase awareness of the benefits of apprenticeships to both employers and the wider community; and
 - we have a number of resources available across the Local Authorities, SWLEP, providers and businesses which we can bring to work closer together to ensure that the local range and quality of provision meets employer demand.
- Raising aspirations: among the young people, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, building on the Careers Hub work to date. This will include providing each school/college with a virtual encounter with an employer, developing a range of virtual work experience activities in partnership with stakeholders and working on providing an area-wide, virtual 'meet the training provider' events to promote positive transitions and improve destinations and a range of virtual careers events.
 - Employee health: continuing to work with CCG chairs and Public Health officers within our two local authorities to compile and promote available initiatives that can deliver needed improvements. We will investigate potential for a research / student project into best practice for improving workforce health, finding elements that can be employed locally. We will also explore a research project with Bath Spa University, examining the impact of staff diversity on productivity.
 - COVID-19 recovery: Continuing to support government's Plan for Jobs, including Kickstart as a Gateway organisation as well as the new £2.9bn Restart scheme that will give Universal Credit claimants who have been out of work for at least 12 months enhanced support to find jobs in their local area. We will help bring the providers and employers together with local government and other partners to deliver tailored support for individuals. We will also continue to support local initiatives, such as webinars offering practical advice to businesses, redundancy events and virtual careers and employer events.
 - Digital Bootcamps: Responding to above-average proportion of people with technical / practical skills gaps in 2019 ESS for Computer literacy / basic IT skills and Advanced or specialist IT skills, we will continue to explore opportunities with the Institute of

Coding. This will include seeking funding for digital training, as part of DfE's Skills Bootcamps for adults, which aim to provide wider access to opportunities to retrain, update or formalise skills or acquire specialist skills. The proposed Digital Bootcamp would focus not only on Swindon and Wiltshire, but South West region and would include short skills programmes of 16 weeks, with a guaranteed job interview on completion of the course. The bootcamps would be expected to deliver advanced introductions to: programming and software engineering; web development / creative digital media; games development and animation; cyber security and digital forensics; artificial intelligence; data science and data analytics; and agritech. With funding approved, we expect the Bootcamps to have substantial impact on the local skills needs, as demonstrated by the Institute of Coding successful tech-focussed pilots, such as the award winning TechUP for Women (Institute of Coding led by Bath, with UWE and Exeter as partners).

In order to continue to report progress in line with our [Skills Plan](#), we will maintain our close working relationships with our two local authorities and government departments, to coordinate efforts and ensure positive outcomes. We will also continue to work with our local colleges, independent providers and universities to ensure that they are aware of the current and likely future changes in the local skills and labour markets and that they have the agility to respond to these changes. Our engagement with businesses, directly or through the Skills and Talent Subgroup or Business Intelligence and Network Group (BING) will also continue, to supplement our intelligence and ensure that our actions are having the intended impact.