CHESHIRE & WARRINGTON LOCAL SKILLS IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Cheshire & Warrington Local Skills Improvement Plan *2026–2029*

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.

Skills England

The Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority (CWCA), which was inaugurated in April 2026, recognises the work that has gone into the development of the Cheshire and Warrington LSIP, particularly via the joint working between the subregion's employer representative bodies and local authorities (as set out in the statutory guidance).

As noted in the LSIP, as the CWCA develops the Local Growth Plan, Local Skills Plan (ahead of the devolved Adult Skills Programme) and other growth-driven programmes and policies, we will work jointly with the partnership over the next three years. We recognise that there will be ongoing change, and a need to engage fully to support our developing growth ambitions set out by the newly-established Combined Authority and the incoming Mayor in 2027.

Nick Walkley
Interim Chief Executive of the Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority

Cheshire & Warrington Combined Authority

Funded by UK Government

SOUTH CHESHIRE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Commissioned by:
South & North Cheshire Chamber of Commerce, produced by Vicki Ayton & Sarah Stone of BizEd Projects CIC & the LSIP Team

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Executive Summary

This Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) has been developed to fulfil the requirements of the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022 and associated statutory guidance, while also providing a practical local framework for aligning skills provision with employer demand across Cheshire and Warrington.

Demand for Level 3 and above skills is predicted to grow by

16%

by 2035.

It maps a route to ensuring more residents across Cheshire and Warrington can access good work and progress within it, by better matching skills provision to what employers actually need. Built on direct engagement with over 130 employers, a survey of 184 businesses and in-depth interviews across all priority sectors, it identifies a clear set of priorities that create a practical framework for action from training providers, employers, the Combined Authority and local partners over the three years from 2026 to 2029.

Cheshire and Warrington is the most productive economy in the North of England, with major strengths in advanced manufacturing, life sciences, clean energy and business and professional services. The opportunity ahead is to sustain and build on that position while widening access to enable all residents to benefit. Demand for Level 3 and above skills is predicted to grow by 16% by 2035, and the sub-region has the employer base, the education institutions and the civic ambition to meet that demand – provided the skills system works as a coherent whole. The LSIP and the Get Cheshire and Warrington Working Plan together form that joined-up system: one mapping what employers need, the other focused on removing the barriers that prevent people from accessing those opportunities.

Employers across every sector have engaged constructively with this process, and their consistent message points to a clear direction of travel: ensuring learning provision keeps pace with fast-moving industry practice; a levy and funding system that is simpler to engage with, especially SMEs; improving workplace readiness and essential business skills; aligning social value commitments with local progression routes; and ensuring teaching expertise reflects current industry reality through better partnership working. The LSIP's task is to deliver actionable changes through partnership and clear accountability across the sub-region.

The LSIP covers four priority growth sectors: advanced manufacturing, life sciences, clean energy and agri-tech, and two foundational sectors: construction and health and social care, alongside three cross-cutting themes: digital skills, sustainability and the visitor economy as an enabler to economic inclusion. In each sector, the greatest opportunity lies at technician and higher technical level, where stronger provision can unlock growth and widen access to well-paid, skilled employment. The LSIP's response is organised around six workstreams: strengthening employer voice; simplifying navigation, especially for SMEs; scaling technical pathways; embedding digital and sustainability skills; connecting more people to employment; and improving provider quality and teaching capacity, with full activity detail set out in Annex B, our live Activity Plan for the period 2026 to 2029, working with Higher Education, Further Education, the Combined Authority, Local Authorities, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), and other local partners to deliver real change across Cheshire and Warrington.

Cheshire and Warrington is also entering a period of significant opportunity. The Combined Authority held its inaugural meeting in April 2026, and this LSIP is designed to feed directly into its emerging Growth Plan, helping to ensure that skills and workforce development are built into the sub-region's economic ambitions from the start. This is a live plan, updated as evidence and employer needs evolve, and it represents a shared commitment from businesses, colleges, universities and local leaders to build a skills system that works for everyone.

Employer insight + Training provider intelligence + Labour market evidence

This Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) sets out the skills needs of Cheshire and Warrington and the actions required to address them over the next three years. It is intended for employers, training providers, colleges, universities, local authorities and the Combined Authority – and for anyone with a stake in ensuring that the sub-region's workforce can meet the demands of a growing, changing economy.

The LSIP brings together employer insight, labour market evidence and training provider intelligence around a shared agenda: ensuring residents can access good work and progress within it, and that businesses across Cheshire and Warrington can find the skilled people they need to grow. It responds to the Skills England ethos of Better Skills for Better Jobs and is central to the UK's growth mission.

This is the start of a rolling three-year framework updated as evidence and employer needs evolve. It represents a shared commitment from businesses, colleges, universities and local leaders to act on what employers are telling us and strengthen the skills system that connects residents to opportunity.

Strategic & Economic Context

Cheshire and Warrington's economic position

Cheshire and Warrington is one of the UK's most productive economies and the most productive in the North of England. It has high levels of employment in professional, scientific and technical roles, strong anchor institutions in advanced manufacturing, life sciences and clean energy, and a growing base of digital and professional services businesses. The challenge is to sustain growth across these sectors while ensuring that growth is accessible to all residents, not just those already well-qualified.

The skills and employment picture is mixed, as set out by the Get Cheshire and Warrington Working Plan[1] (GCWW). While 49.1% of working-age residents hold qualifications at Level 4 or above – slightly above the UK average of 47.4% – attainment is uneven. Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester perform significantly better than Warrington, where 13.6% of working-age adults hold no formal qualifications, more than double the UK average of 6.8%. Although higher-level apprenticeship achievements have grown, intermediate apprenticeship achievements have declined, weakening the entry-level pipeline. Progression from Level 2 into higher-skilled training remains a persistent weak point in Cheshire and Warrington, with demand predicted to increase by 16% for Level 3+ skills by 2035[2].

Vacancies have begun to recover over the past year, but skills mismatches mean labour supply and employer need require greater alignment, with one employer interviewee indicating an increased favouring of experienced hires over younger apprentices in a challenging cost environment.

The GCWW complements this LSIP: where the LSIP maps what employers need, GCWW focuses on who is being left out and why. The two plans are designed to operate as a joined-up system, and both must be read together if the sub-region is to make meaningful progress on inclusion as well as growth.

More than 800 young people aged 16–17 across Cheshire and Warrington are currently not in education, employment or training (NEET). The LSIP and the GCWW are being delivered in partnership with DWP, to strengthen pathways into employment and address the sub-region's NEET challenge. Joint activity focuses on early engagement, targeted pre-employment support and the development of essential business skills to ensure young people are prepared for work. Priority sectors in this LSIP – including construction, health and social care, and the visitor economy – offer accessible entry-level pathways for young people, provided that pre-employment support, careers guidance and transition provision are in place to connect and sustain them. GCWW identifies poverty, SEND, care leavers and rural isolation as risk factors – pointing to the value of more targeted business social value activity and early careers advice through stronger, local partnership working. This shared approach ensures that pathways are accessible, coordinated and reach those who need them most.

Local and national strategic context

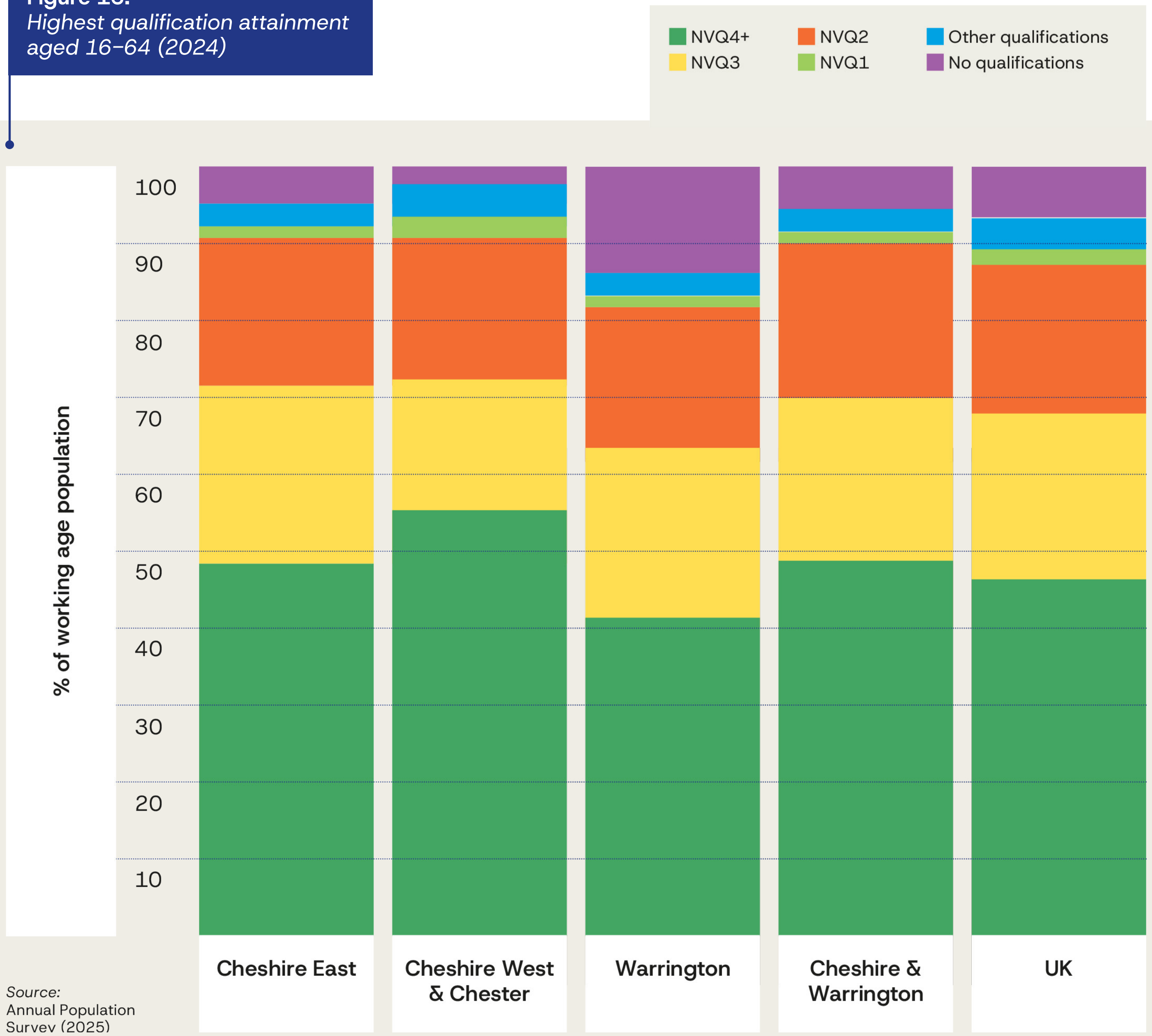
This LSIP supports the ambitions set out in Cheshire and Warrington's Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Strategy (SIES) – the principle growth framework for Cheshire & Warrington while the new Combined Authority develops its authority-wide Growth Plan. The SIES sector priorities reflect both local economic strengths - including advanced manufacturing, life sciences, clean energy, agri-tech, construction, health and social care, business and professional services and the visitor economy - and the national Industrial Strategy 8 sectors where these align with the sub-region's assets and growth potential. This LSIP has therefore been shaped to support the transition between the existing SIES framework and the emerging priorities of the Combined Authority.

A full list of relevant local and national strategies is set out in Annex C, with examples of sector strengths, centres of activity and investment included within Part 1: Local Skills Needs, Priority Sectors

The new Combined Authority

This LSIP has been developed during a period of significant evolution. Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority held its inaugural meeting in April 2026, bringing together Cheshire East Council, Cheshire West and Chester Council and Warrington Borough Council under a single governance framework. One of the first tasks for the new authority will be developing a Growth Plan for the sub-region. We recognise that there will be ongoing change, and a need to engage fully to support the developing growth ambitions set out by the newly-established Combined Authority and the incoming Mayor in 2027.

Figure 16:
Highest qualification attainment aged 16–64 (2024)



Source:
Annual Population Survey (2025)

From April 2027, the transfer of the Adult Skills Fund (ASF) to the Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority will support a more responsive, locally driven skills system. Work to shape this is already underway, with the LSIP bringing the three local authorities and providers together to review the pilot ASF allocation from September 2026. This work will identify the gaps it can address, supported by the Cheshire and Warrington Learning Provider Network (CWLPN), convening providers and the local authorities to share learning from other devolved areas.

Transport connectivity and rural context

Cheshire and Warrington's geography sets it apart from most other Combined Authority areas. Rather than a single urban core with a radial transport network, the sub-region is polycentric – towns, employment sites and industrial parks connected primarily by road infrastructure with limited public transport. Poor cross-boundary connectivity, infrequent services and the cost of running a car can make the difference between being in work and not, and the barrier is compounded for roles requiring mobility through the working day (domiciliary care, construction across small sites).

Rural areas face additional pressures: the Cheshire & Warrington Rural needs assessment[3] identifies chronic recruitment difficulties driven by transport barriers, high housing costs and small labour pools, with young people struggling to reach FE, HE and apprenticeship provision, and rural skills provision thin and urban-centred. Digital exclusion compounds this further – ending broadband and mobile not-spots is an identified priority, alongside digital inclusion programmes and the use of village halls and community hubs as local delivery points for skills and employability support.

National policy context

Two national developments will shape how this LSIP connects to employment and careers support over the coming period. The Department for Work & Pensions–led Youth Guarantee aims to ensure every young person has access to quality work, apprenticeships, T Levels or other high-quality training.

Partnership working continues through rollout of the Youth Guarantee, with DWP, Jobcentre Plus, the LSIP and the CWLPN working together to ensure young people can access high quality work, apprenticeships or training. CWLPN supports this by coordinating provider involvement and aligning funding opportunities so that colleges and training providers can respond quickly to employer-led demand. DWP's integration with careers services will create clearer entry points for NEET young people, while joint outreach, employer engagement and movement to work activity will ensure alignment with the priorities set out in the GCWW.

The LSIP and its employer networks will support delivery of the Guarantee locally – translating national ambition into practical opportunities shaped by employer demand across priority sectors. The closer integration of DWP and the National Careers Service, merging with Jobcentre Plus, is expected to create a more joined-up employment and careers system, with clearer entry points and better-prepared candidates for employers recruiting early-career talent.

The apprenticeship system is also in transition. The defunding of a number of apprenticeship standards – including some Leadership and Management routes – will affect provision across several of the sectors covered in this LSIP, particularly in health and social care and business and professional services where management development pathways are most in demand. The LSIP will monitor the impact of these changes and work with providers and employers to signpost to alternative routes where standards are withdrawn.

Role of the LSIP

The LSIP focuses on the structural conditions underlying needs that must be addressed – identifying the specific, actionable changes to provision, partnership, and accountability that will begin to shift them (detailed in Annex B).

Growth

stimulating future talent and productivity.

Foundation

stabilising forces.

Place-based

key to cultural identity and cohesion.

Cross-cutting

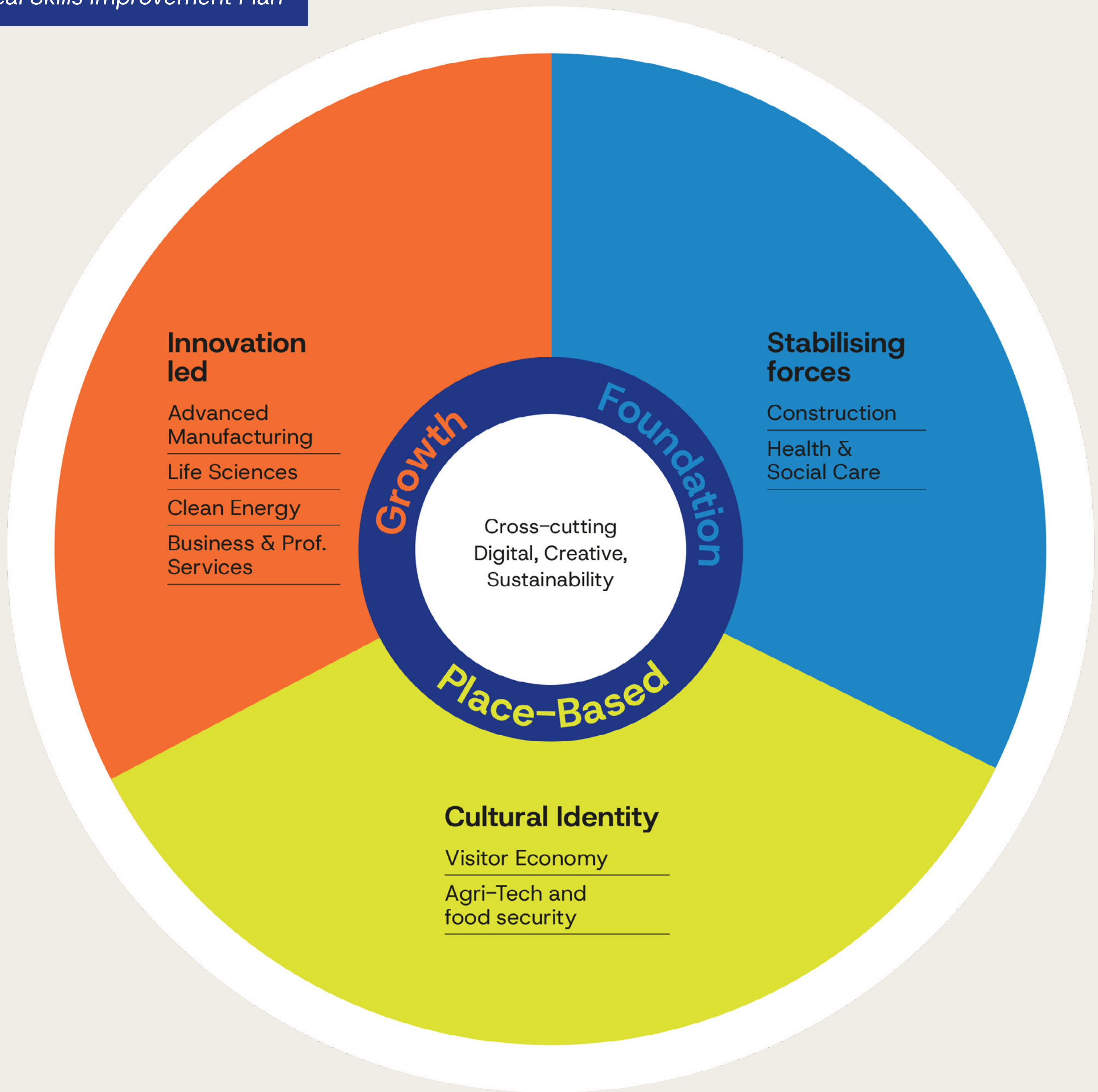
enablers that support productivity, innovation and inclusion across sectors.

Through the LSIP development process outlined in Annex C, we have identified priority growth sectors for Cheshire and Warrington as a region in line with strategic growth plans – advanced manufacturing, life sciences, clean energy and the regionally important agri-tech sector – alongside the foundational sectors of health and social care and construction, and the cross-cutting challenges of digitalisation, embedding sustainable business practices and the skill-building role of jobs in the visitor economy.

This LSIP focuses on technical education and training from entry level through to higher technical qualifications in these sectors – a central priority is progression: ensuring that a Level 2 qualification leads to future progression, and that residents have genuine routes into higher technical and professional roles.

Each priority sector and occupation has been mapped to Standard Occupational Classification (SOC 2020) and Standard Industrial Classification (SIC 2007) codes, with full mapping provided in Annex A.

Figure 01:
Cheshire & Warrington Local Skills Improvement Plan



Part 01: Cheshire & Warrington's Skill Needs.

This LSIP responds to employer demand as well as the specific economic and demographic context and growth strategy for Cheshire and Warrington, alongside national policy direction. It is designed to complement – not duplicate – existing economic, industrial and place-based strategies.

The employer perspective

Labour market data and sector intelligence helps to identify where skills gaps exist. Our employer engagement tells us what those gaps feel like on the ground – and crucially, what gets in the way of addressing them. This section draws on over 130 employer meetings, the LSIP business conference, a survey of 184 businesses across Cheshire and Warrington, and 1:1 in-depth interviews with employers across advanced manufacturing, clean energy, life sciences, construction, health and social care, and business services, and views from four local recruitment agencies collected via an LSIP roundtable event. *Sector-specific trade unions were also invited to contribute; however, no responses were received.* Together they point to a set of recurring structural problems that cut across sectors.

Around two-thirds of recruiting employers experienced recruitment difficulty. Around three-quarters expect their workforce to grow or remain stable over the next three years.

1. Employer voice needs to shape provision more consistently

Employers across sectors describe a skills system that is producing qualifications and programmes which struggle to keep up with the pace and acceleration of new technology within industry. Funding and length of time to develop new qualifications creates a structural disconnect which varies depending on sector: in life sciences, employer voice indicated an increased need for Level 3 laboratory technician provision and facilities, however employer uptake was much lower than expected; in construction, some apprenticeship frameworks still require training on pre-war cable technologies that have not been installed for 40 years; in advanced manufacturing, curriculum content lags behind the pace of technology adoption. Employers most frequently identified technical skills, digital and data capability, and leadership and management as growing in importance – yet these are the areas where misalignment between provision and employer need is most consistently reported.

> "We were 200 jointers a year short. I put a proposal together for an 18-month XLPE cable joining apprenticeship – plastic cables only, which is all we ever use."

Independent Distributor Operator in the Energy sector

2. The skills system is hard for employers – especially SMEs – to navigate

Nearly two-thirds of surveyed employers reported recruitment difficulty, yet many of the same employers described barriers to engaging with the training and apprenticeship system that are largely structural: cost, the complexity of levy arrangements, the time required to manage provider relationships, and uncertainty about which funding routes apply to their situation. This burden falls disproportionately on smaller organisations. Large employers with dedicated early careers or training functions can absorb the administrative overhead, whereas SMEs typically can't. One large local manufacturer holds approximately £400,000 in unspent apprenticeship levy with limited uptake from local supply chain partners – not through a lack of demand but because the mechanism for transferring and using that levy is not simple enough to act on without dedicated support. This has led to the LSIP already offering an Apprenticeship Levy sharing service.

This is backed up by Cogent Skills research[4], showing a 50% decline in apprenticeship starts across SMEs across industries between 2016-21, with a marked decline of 72% for SMEs in the science sector, indicating a diminished interest or capacity to engage with the apprenticeship system.

> "All I am doing is mitigating risk and being that buffer between apprenticeship journey management, company expectations, and what is happening in the industry – and trying to pull everyone speaking different languages together. It doesn't feel cohesive at the moment."

Apprenticeships Manager, Manufacturing

50%

Decline in apprenticeship starts across SMEs across industries between 2016-21

> "They want a job and salary. But you need to allow them to learn soft skills – teamwork, communication, problem-solving. There's no time in an operation at that level to teach those things. They need to run the machine."

Apprenticeships Manager, Manufacturing

3. Employers need essential business skills to be embedded across the system

Across every sector represented in the survey and interviews, employers flagged the same gap: candidates arriving with qualifications but without the workplace behaviours, communication habits, reliability and practical readiness that employment requires. These were highlighted as just as important as English and Maths qualifications, if not more, by some representatives of the business community. Around two-thirds of recruiting employers were experiencing recruitment difficulty – and when asked to characterise it, many pointed not to technical shortfalls but to a lack of essential business skills e.g. interpersonal resilience required for front-line care work with vulnerable young people, understanding what shift-based, safety-critical production environments in manufacturing demand. This is not a new finding, but the consistency with which it appears across sectors from health and social care to advanced engineering suggests it is systemic rather than sector-specific. Advisory Board members also highlighted the gulf between increasingly inclusive school environments, and a business world that has not yet adapted, particularly to rising numbers of neurodiverse candidates.

The foundational apprenticeship is one promising response. But essential business skills development remains inconsistent across training providers and are not yet reliably built into every pre-employment training route. There is emerging work on cross-cutting core skills already in delivery at school level through organisations like Skills Builder; extending this systematically to sector and workforce level is a clear opportunity.

> “We’ve gifted over a third of a million pounds worth of 3D printers to schools, industry and academia. That’s over half a million kids now with access to additive manufacturing technology. But some schools have printers and no one can use them.”

Managing Director, Training Provider and Technical Consultancy

4. Social value commitments need clearer links to skills and progression

Cheshire and Warrington has a strong social value agenda. Several large employers in the sub-region – including those in nuclear, advanced manufacturing, and infrastructure – are signatories to social value commitments that include employment and skills outcomes. But employers and training providers alike report that these commitments do not reliably translate into tangible progression routes and measurable outcomes for local people.

Nuclear and defence employers at Birchwood Park are about to scale recruitment rapidly – 40,000 new people are needed in the sector nationally by 2030[5]– but the local pipeline of job-ready candidates is not yet structured to capture that demand for residents from priority groups or deprived areas. Realising that potential requires more deliberate design: connecting employers’ social value commitments to specific progression pathways, ensuring that pre-employment provision is geographically and demographically targeted, and building the tracking infrastructure to demonstrate what actually happens to people after they engage with a programme.

5. Employers need simpler routes to engage with education

Employer feedback consistently identifies the practical barriers to engagement with schools, colleges, and training providers: finding the right contact, understanding what is possible, navigating GDPR and safeguarding requirements for site visits, and committing time to activities where the return on investment is unclear. Employers broadly want to engage – and where those relationships work well, they are highly valued by both sides. Employers may also face multiple, overlapping requests for engagement – from employer voice for boards and strategies, to placements, mock interviews, industry days, curriculum support and careers engagement – risking overwhelm and disengagement. Reducing that friction and coordinating employer engagement more effectively across the sub-region, would unlock significantly more of the goodwill that already exists. In fast-moving sectors, the value of doing so is particularly high: advanced manufacturing firms adopting robotics, Internet of Things and additive manufacturing need curriculum partners who can move at industry pace.

6. More consistent message and provider collaboration needed to rebuild employer confidence

Employers operating across multiple sites or sectors – and those working with several training providers simultaneously – report an inconsistent experience. Cogent Skills[4] highlight that employers do not feel truly listened to and need more stability in the system. Quality, communication standards, attendance monitoring, and responsiveness vary significantly between training providers and, in some cases, between campuses of the same provider. Employers cited the main barriers to training as cost, staff availability, and time away from operations – but the underlying issue can also be trust lost on poor experiences. Rebuilding that confidence requires not just quality improvement within individual providers but a more coordinated, consistent employer-facing offer across the sub-region.

7. Teaching expertise needs to keep pace with industry

In technical and specialist fields, the pace of change in industry can easily outrun the pace of curriculum refresh. Employers in advanced manufacturing, clean energy, and engineering construction described qualification frameworks that don’t reflect current technology or practices. If teaching staff lack recent industry experience, this gap widens further. Training providers, and in particular colleges, also struggle to recruit teachers with industry experience, faced with a very small pool of suitable candidates and an inability to match industry salaries. Where this gap is addressed – through proactive communication, industry secondments, updated curriculum partnerships, and flexible delivery that accounts for shift patterns and reflects real operational environments – employer confidence in provision is high. The LSIP’s actions include specific measures to support greater industry currency in teaching across the sub-region’s priority sectors.

Cross-Cutting Priorities

Three themes cut across all six priority sectors in Cheshire and Warrington: the embedding of digital skills, the transition to a lower-carbon economy, and the contribution of the visitor economy to inclusive employment. Each shapes the skills landscape in ways that individual sector plans cannot fully address on their own.

1. Digital and Creative

Digital skills are becoming a core competency across every sector in Cheshire and Warrington. The consistent finding from employer research is that digital tools are being embedded into existing roles rather than creating large numbers of new dedicated digital jobs. The 2023 IFATE Digital Route occupational mapping[6] identified approximately 21,000 jobs linked to Digital Route standards locally, concentrated in software development, business analysis and IT operations, and centred around Chester, Crewe, Knutsford and Macclesfield. Nationally, demand for AI and machine learning skills increased by 86% between 2021 and 2024 with the biggest growth in non-tech roles.

Priority 1: AI adoption, training and governance requirements

There is a need for policies and training to keep up with AI as it accelerates to avoid security risks – Microsoft Copilot is often rolled out at scale not as a planned skilled intervention but as a consequence of Microsoft contracts, with staff left to navigate what's permitted, responsible and secure, highlighting the need for governance and digital transformation skills.

> "In the beginning people might be – what's the security risk? Are we able to use this? We've got staff using it uncontrolled. They paused it and then put a security lock on any external international AI companies. Then they rolled it out."

Apprenticeships Manager, Manufacturing

The gap is not in awareness of AI but in understanding how to use it safely, what governance frameworks apply, and how businesses can benefit practically. This applies across sectors – from life sciences to clean energy to professional services. The LSIP survey highlighted the varied rate of adoption of AI across Cheshire & Warrington businesses – in particular higher adoption amongst service industries (creative, social care and business and professional skills) and slower uptake so far from advanced manufacturing and clean energy. The Government's AI Skills for the UK Workforce plan aims to equip 7.5 million workers with AI skills by 2030 and has published an Employer AI Adoption Checklist as a practical tool. Local provision needs to align with and draw on these frameworks.

Priority 2: Embedding digital in sector-specific training

Digital skills need to be woven into sector-specific technical training rather than delivered as standalone interventions. Skills like Python are now standard within engineering apprenticeship frameworks. Application is broadening: AR/VR simulation is used in nuclear and EV maintenance training; IoT sensors are replacing time-based with condition-based maintenance approaches. In life sciences, alongside core scientific expertise, there is growing demand for software developers, AI capability and data modelling skills. Creative roles increasingly require AI-assisted skills – shifting toward creative direction, editorial judgement and audience strategy. The most in-demand specialised skills locally are SQL, Data Analysis, Agile Methodology, C# and Technical Support, alongside communications, management and problem solving, however we note this analysis dates from 2023. Cogent Skills highlight the criticality of digital skills for life sciences, alongside scientific expertise, with demand for software developers, AI, data modelling and digital innovation.

> "Digital skills, they are all added in now. So let's say Python for argument's sake. It's embedded in the apprenticeship."

Independent Distributor Operator, Energy

Priority 3: Responding to AI Disruption and Skills Pipeline Risk

AI is displacing as well as transforming the labour market. Around 32% of employers expect skills requirements to change significantly by 2030 (Lightcast), with information technology, media and creative industries seeing the most disruption. The risk extends into the visitor economy, professional services and public sector locally. AI-driven applicant tracking is also creating new barriers – filtering on keywords rather than capability, working against candidates without traditional qualifications.

Roles said to be facing the least disruption and biggest growth are those which require manual or human interaction and classified as lower skilled or 'front line' occupations. These include farmworkers, delivery drivers, construction workers, salespersons, food processing, care and nursing, social work, counselling and personal care.

> "There is a real risk that, even if we get more people qualified, there might not be a labour market that wants them."

LSIP Advisory Board

32%

Around 32% of employers expect skills requirements to change significantly by 2030 (Lightcast), with information technology, media and creative industries seeing the most disruption.

Increasingly digitalised and automated business support can also mean the loss of a local conduit for skills and workforce conversations; for example, one Advisory Board member outlines "having a business park manager who understands the employment and skills system and can look out for grants and opportunities and match those to the needs of businesses is essential".

Priority 4: Digital access and rural inclusion

The *Cheshire and Warrington Rural Strategy needs assessment* identifies digital access as a persistent barrier for rural communities and businesses. Ending broadband and mobile not-spots which undermine precision farming, remote work, bookings, education and telehealth, delivering last-mile connectivity, and running digital inclusion programmes are identified priorities. Rural SMEs face particular challenges: limited infrastructure constrains adoption of digital tools, and training provision is urban-centred, with transport barriers limiting access to FE and skills programmes. This has direct implications for digital skills provision – with the need for more rurally accessible, modular and where possible locally delivered provision.

2. Sustainability

The Cheshire and Warrington Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Strategy (SIES) sets a clear ambition: to "support all businesses in the sub-region to decarbonise their operations, ensuring that our workforce has the skills they need to do this." That ambition extends well beyond the clean energy sector. Sustainability is becoming a cross-cutting competency requirement, driven by regulation, supply chain expectations, and the real commercial opportunities that sustainability expertise can unlock. (For detail on clean energy workforce demand and the Clean Growth Jobs Plan, see the Clean Energy section.)

Priority 1: Sustainability literacy across professional and technical roles

Sustainability knowledge is being embedded into a growing number of roles – the "mid-green" (Skills England's green occupational mapping framework) roles like procurement officers, electricians, finance analysts – where knowledge, skills and behaviours are required to enable the use of new technologies and approaches. Reporting requirements and incoming supply chain due diligence obligations mean that employees in finance, procurement, operations management and HR increasingly need a working understanding of carbon accounting, scope emissions and sustainability governance. Large anchor employers in the sub-region are requiring suppliers to demonstrate credible decarbonisation plans as a condition of tender – making sustainability competency a commercial prerequisite for SMEs.

For many smaller organisations and those in services sectors, the sustainable transition currently remains a peripheral concern. Employer interviews reveal a recurring pattern: some interest in transition but lacking strong market drivers and other pressing commercial challenges taking priority. This is confirmed by the LSIP survey – where around 50% of business responding on the impact of low carbon said there was "no expected impact" on their business.

Priority 2: Sustainability review of existing technical skills

In technical and engineering roles, the green transition largely requires re-contextualisation rather than wholesale retraining. Electrical occupations are increasingly classified as "mid-green" roles, with sustainability knowledge becoming integral to core trade and technical functions. As the ECITB puts it:

> "There's no such thing as a green welder. Many skills are the same, just recontextualised into a clean energy environment."

Existing technical skills – like welding, pipework, cable jointing, process engineering – are the same whether applied to an oil and gas facility or a wind farm. What changes is the regulatory environment, materials specifications, and systems context. Investment in entirely new green-specific qualifications may be less urgent than ensuring existing technical pathways incorporate sustainability contexts as standard.

Priority 3: Nature-based skills and land management

Cheshire and Warrington's rural economy faces a distinct sustainability skills challenge. Natural capital is a major local asset – but under pressure from poor water quality, soil degradation, flooding and biodiversity loss. There is strong local appetite for catchment-scale projects including wetlands, hedgerow restoration, pond creation and soil restoration, and for Biodiversity Net Gain markets – but the pipelines, skills and upfront funding to deliver them are currently insufficient. Stakeholders want an integrated land use and nature recovery framework delivered at landscape scale, which may require more widely available new competencies: ecological survey, nature-based project management, blended finance literacy and environmental governance. This sits at the intersection of the agri-tech and clean energy sectors and requires provision that does not currently exist at scale locally.

Priority 4: Sustainability as business transformation

Framing sustainability purely as compliance misses the commercial opportunity. Businesses that develop genuine sustainability expertise in energy efficiency, decarbonisation strategy, product redesign and waste reduction gain real advantages: lower operating costs, access to new markets and contracts, stronger investor confidence and improved recruitment and retention. These benefits require skills across functions – engineering, finance, operations, procurement and leadership. This is backed up in the LSIP survey, where businesses cited the required green skills as 'waste management, carbon reporting, renewable energy, sustainable procurement, and energy efficiency'. The skills system can add significant value by developing provision that goes beyond awareness into applied, role-specific training to build these sustainability competencies.

3. Visitor Economy

The visitor economy – hospitality, tourism, leisure, and events – supports 262,000 jobs across the Northwest (6.5% of regional employment) and contributes £15,495 million in GDP (VisitBritain, 2026). In Cheshire and Warrington, it is a significant employer, particularly in Chester, the market towns, and around visitor attractions. The sector faces persistent structural challenges: high turnover, acute chef and management vacancies, a predominantly low-wage profile, and a workforce that has not fully recovered from the pandemic shock of 2020–21.

For this LSIP, the visitor economy is considered primarily as an inclusive employment enabler: a sector that provides accessible entry points for young people, returners, and those moving from inactivity, and whose skills infrastructure should ensure those entry points lead somewhere. It is also a critical tool for attracting and retaining talent to the area, as Cheshire and Warrington competes for skills against similar high growth regions.

Priority 1: Supervisory and management development

Front-line supervisory roles are consistently hard to fill, and employers report that internal progression from operative to team leader level is hampered by the absence of affordable, accessible short management qualifications that do not require extended time out of work.

Priority 2: Culinary and specialist technical skills

Chef shortages remain acute, with limited Level 3 cookery provision in the sub-region relative to demand. Larger employers and hotel groups want work-based apprenticeship pathways that run alongside employment rather than replacing it.

Priority 3: Cross-sector progression

The skills system as a sector is valuable in facilitating movement into adjacent sectors – business administration, facilities management, events management, health and wellbeing – for workers who develop transferable skills in hospitality but seek progression beyond the sector's typical pay ceiling.

Visitor economy and economic inclusion

Hospitality and leisure, key to the visitor economy, are a key route into employment for people furthest from the labour market. The sector's flexible hours, geographic spread and low formal entry requirements make it one of the more accessible employment sectors for people managing health conditions, caring responsibilities, or long gaps in employment history. Supporting quality and progression within the sector is therefore directly aligned with the sub-region's economic inclusion objectives.

This section sets out the scale, strengths and skills needs of each priority sector, alongside the key gaps that this LSIP will need to address to support growth and long-term resilience, informed by employer voice from across Cheshire and Warrington.

Priority Sectors

Advanced Manufacturing

Cheshire and Warrington is one of the UK's leading advanced manufacturing locations, with deep strengths in aerospace, automotive, chemicals and medical science. The sector contributes £8bn in GVA (19.3% of the local economy) and employs around 44,000 people – well above the national average. It is a designated priority growth sector in the UK's Invest 2035 Industrial Strategy and sits at the heart of the Cheshire Science Corridor alongside life sciences and clean energy.

Key regional anchors

Cheshire Science Corridor – a 40-mile enterprise zone clustering major science, technology and innovation sites linking Alderley Park, Jodrell Bank and Daresbury.

Major employers including Bentley Motors, Stellantis (Vauxhall), AstraZeneca, EET Fuels, Tata Chemicals, Bombardier, Siemens and Waters Corporation

A diverse supply chain supporting aerospace manufacturers in North Wales and the North West (Airbus, BAE Systems)

Regional strengths in lightweight materials and control systems, critical to the next generation of electric and autonomous vehicles

Colleges: Warrington & Vale Royal Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering (AMET), Cheshire & Warrington Institute of Technology (IOT) Reaseheath College Centre for Advanced Engineering and Agri-Tech, 3D 360 training, Cheshire College – South and West for robotics, TTE Training

A growing network of specialist SMEs supporting supply chains across the sector

Advanced manufacturing covers production processes that use advanced science and technology (including digital tools, automation and data) rather than traditional mass-production methods. It spans chemicals, materials, machinery, automotive, electronics and robotics, and depends on R&D, innovation and a highly skilled workforce[7].

The skills picture

The sector's workforce spans four broad groups, all of which face recruitment and retention pressure:

→ Degree-level engineers and professionals (e.g. mechanical and electrical engineers)

→ Engineering technicians, typically qualified at Levels 4–5 (e.g. electrical, electronics and process technicians)

→ Skilled trades at Levels 2–3, including machinists, fabricators and vehicle technicians

→ Process and plant operatives, whose roles are increasingly automation-exposed and require higher technical competence

An ageing workforce: around a third of the manufacturing workforce (approximately 18,800 people) is aged 50 or over, compared to just 6% aged 20–24[8]. This points to a significant wave of retirements over the next decade (which also impacts teacher recruitment) and an urgent need to strengthen the pipeline of skilled technicians and engineers. Some of this cohort may also need to significantly upskill to retain a relevant skillset.

"If I'm a traditional engineer with 30 years of experience, I don't understand modern technologies like VR, AR or the Internet of Things."

Advanced manufacturing training provider

A constrained skills pipeline: Apprenticeship starts in engineering and manufacturing are stable across the past two years however general provision at Level 4 and above is thin. There is also evidence of a net outflow of engineering graduates from the North West, adding further pressure on graduate-level supply.

Small businesses dominate: around 89% of enterprises in the sector are micro-businesses (fewer than 10 employees). This limits their capacity to design and deliver in-house training, and increases reliance on colleges, apprenticeship providers and coordinated brokerage support, where a third-party helps connect businesses to appropriate training.

"These are niche specialist skills – you can't easily recruit people with them, especially in smaller organisations."

Advanced manufacturing training provider

6%

Data from the Employer Skills Survey 2024 (North West – Manufacturing) shows sustained pressure across the sector:

→ 15% of sites report at least one vacancy
→ 56% of vacancies are hard to fill
→ 39% are skill-shortage vacancies – where applicants lack the skills employers need
→ 14% of employers report internal skills gaps

Local engagement confirms that the most acute pressures are in:

→ Electrification, electro-technical and EV systems
→ Automation, robotics and mechatronics
→ Industrial digitalisation and data-enabled production
→ Precision machining and advanced process operations
→ Supervisory and production management roles

Employers consistently report difficulty recruiting experienced engineers and technicians, securing apprenticeship placements and upskilling existing workers in digital and automation skills. The high proportion of micro-businesses further limits capacity to address these challenges internally.

"These technologies – robotics, additive manufacturing and automation – aren't plug and play. You can't just pick up a robot and run it."

Advanced manufacturing training provider

An ageing workforce: around a third of the manufacturing workforce (approximately 18,800 people) is aged 50 or over, compared to just 6% aged 20–24.

Existing provision

Training provision for advanced manufacturing in Cheshire and Warrington spans further education, apprenticeships and adult skills. The year 2024/25 saw 739 apprentices enrolled, with Installation and Maintenance Electrician (133 starts) and Motor Vehicle (69) the most popular routes[9]. New apprenticeship courses in Nuclear Science and Technician are included (20 enrolments) as part of the Engineering and Manufacturing framework. T-Level entrants in Engineering and Manufacturing grew by 7.6% in 2025,[10] though 90% of students are male at a time when employers are actively seeking to broaden their recruitment base.

Age 19+ enrolments total 703[11], supported by skills bootcamps covering 3D printing, Industry 4.0, AI and automation and data analytics[12]. Higher Education recruitment for Engineering and Technology Programmes at University of Chester is growing but relatively small, increasing from 165–205 enrolments between 2023/24 and 2024/25.[13] The biggest growth from 20–40 learners is in Biotechnology and other General Engineering from 75–85. Electrical engineering and chemical processing also have relatively modest numbers at 30 and 20 enrolments. Many of the key manufacturing processes have 0 enrolments. See Annex A for further detail and data.

What are the skills needs?

The sector's size, technical complexity and ageing workforce create pressure across multiple qualification levels. The main priorities are:

- → Building the pipeline of technicians and engineers at Levels 4–5, where provision is currently thin, particularly in automation, robotics and industrial digitalisation
- → Supporting the replacement of an ageing skilled trades workforce at Levels 2–3, and addressing the bottleneck between Level 2 and full occupational competence
- → Meet increasing demand for electrical and electro-technical capability to meet electrification, automation and control system needs and upskill current electricians in low-carbon and renewable technologies via the Electrician Plus
- → Embedding digital and automation skills across all levels, including for existing workers, this may facilitate a potential move to hydrogen and also creates progression from entry level (Operatives to Operator) roles
- → Improving graduate retention within Cheshire and Warrington, and strengthening links between higher education, research assets and local employers
- → Improving employer engagement and coordinated brokerage, particularly for micro-businesses that cannot easily access or fund training independently

> "Challenges will intensify as the transition to green technologies accelerates. Meeting future demand for electric vehicles alone could require nearly 100,000 additional roles in battery manufacturing and related industries."
>
> Make UK, Manufacturing a Sustainable Future (2025)

739

Apprentices enrolled in 2024/25

Agri-tech and Food Security

Agriculture is central to Cheshire and Warrington's identity and critical for securing food supply both regionally and nationally. The sub-region has a long and culturally significant farming heritage, a world-class dairy industry and some of the UK's most productive agricultural land. Agri-tech – applied engineering, robotics, digital systems and precision technology to farming and food production – is where this heritage becomes a modern, competitive strength.

Key regional anchors

Reaseheath College – Reaseheath College and University Centre and an associate partner to University of Chester is home to a £9.9m Advanced Engineering and Agri-Tech Centre, a Vertical Farming Centre and a working commercial farm. A nationally significant Food Centre supporting Dairy Technology and drawing students and apprentices from across the UK. A proposed NW Agri-food innovation hub is also in development with Myerscough College.

Cheshire and Warrington Institute of Technology (CWIoT) – led by Cheshire College – South and West, providing higher-level technical training across agriculture, engineering and manufacturing

Agri-Tech West (ATW) – an alliance supported by Reaseheath, connecting Cheshire and Warrington with neighbouring areas to drive innovation in agri-food manufacturing

Food Enterprise Zone (FEZ) – a partnership with Cheshire East Council, supported by Reaseheath, to foster growth in farming and food supply

Strong concentration of dairy farms and food processing businesses across the sub-region

As a sector, agri-tech sits within Advanced Manufacturing in the UK's Invest 2035 Industrial Strategy, reflecting its deep roots in mechatronics, controls systems and digital integration. In Cheshire and Warrington, it also connects directly to the region's Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Strategy (SIES), which sets an ambition to build a world-class dairy industry underpinned by clean energy, environmental technologies and sustainable production systems.

Agri-tech is not a high-volume employment sector – agricultural employment dropped by 5% between 2013 and 2024[3]. Its importance lies in protecting and modernising specialist technical capability within the farming community, supporting the transition to net-zero production, and ensuring that rural Cheshire and Warrington is fully connected to the region's wider innovation ambitions. Its importance for increasing food security concerns following recent global shocks is also noted.

Skills picture

Agriculture employment in Cheshire and Warrington has fallen sharply, from around 6,100 people in 2021 to approximately 3,800 in 2024 (BRES). Of those currently employed, around 70% are aged 50 or over – a significantly ageing workforce at the moment when technology adoption is becoming critical to the sector's future (DEFRA, 2025).

Agri-tech roles are technically intensive. The required skills map to engineering professionals (degree-level), engineering and land-based technicians (Levels 4–5), and skilled trades in precision fabrication and machinery. The core skill areas are mechatronics and automation, robotics and control systems, digital sensing and data analytics, and sustainable design and resource efficiency with specialist robotic and automation skills in areas such as Dairy Technology.

What employers tell us

Local engagement makes clear that the term 'agriculture' understates the scale of change underway. The real opportunity – and skills challenge – lies in agri-tech: applying STEM capability to modernise food production and farming systems.

Technology adoption is accelerating across the sector, for example, robotic milking parlours to improve yields and animal welfare, GPS-guided tractors to transform field operations. But barriers remain, particularly the upfront capital costs of new technology and the shortage of people who can install, maintain and integrate these systems.

Employers highlight the growing importance of young people arriving with skills in GPS and precision tracking, data monitoring and analytics, networking and hardware, and robotics. At present, most of these skills are learnt on the job. That is becoming less sustainable as the pace of technology change increases.

> "There aren't people who are robot trained. If people in agriculture were robot trained it would make a big difference."
>
> **Robotic milking farm owner, Cheshire**

Stakeholders have also raised a consistent concern about rural accessibility. Without adequate public transport, residents in farming communities struggle to reach training provision, and training providers struggle to reach them.

Existing provision

Agriculture training provision is concentrated at Reaseheath College, with broader automation and robotics training available at Cheshire College – South and West. There are currently 332 apprentices enrolled in 2024/25, with Land Based Service Engineering Technician the most popular route; uptake is spread across ages and levels, with newer courses including Dairy Technologist reflecting the sector's modernisation. Age 19+ enrolments total 261, predominantly in agriculture, animal care and horticulture. At University of Chester, enrolments in Agriculture and food sustainability have remained steady, with most in Animal Sciences (150) followed by Agriculture (80) and food sciences (35) in 2024/25.

What are the skills needs?

Agri-tech does not require large-scale workforce expansion. The priority is protecting and deepening specialist technical capability in a sector that is both culturally important and facing rapid technological change. The main needs are:

- → Maintaining accessible engineering and fabrication pathways at Levels 2–3 within rural geographies, and ensuring land-based learners can progress into technical and digital routes
- → Sustaining technician pathways in automation, robotics and mechatronics at Levels 4–5, and supporting modular upskilling for existing workers in control systems and digital integration
- → Supporting engineering design capability at degree level aligned to agricultural robotics and environmental technologies, and strengthening links between advanced manufacturing, digital innovation and land-based research
- → Securing farm capabilities long term through upskilling and pathways at Levels 4–6
- → Embedding transferable STEM and digital skills across land-based provision at all levels, including AI literacy and sustainable food production aligned to environmental technologies and bioenergy
- → Addressing rural transport and connectivity as a structural barrier to accessing training – relevant across all sectors but particularly acute in agri-tech given its rural concentration

Business and Professional Services

Business and Professional Services (BPS) is the largest employment sector in Cheshire and Warrington by some distance, and one of the fastest growing in terms of jobs growth[14]. It spans legal services, accountancy, management consultancy, engineering advisory, digital professional services, HR, compliance and business support functions. Local modelling suggests the sector employs around 144,800 people and generates approximately £6.9 billion in GVA – making it a foundational part of the regional economy.

Key regional anchors

Large and diverse base of professional services firms – including legal, accountancy, consultancy and HR practices across the sub-region, and large banking employers e.g. Bank of America and Barclays in Cheshire West

Strong presence of property, engineering consultancy and technical advisory (Birchwood Park, Warrington and Origin cluster at Ellesmere Port) services supporting advanced manufacturing and clean energy sectors

Digital professional services – a growing cluster of software development, cyber security and IT consulting businesses

Significant shared services and head office functions – around 20,000 people employed in head office and management activities locally – many at Daresbury Park (note this is in a bordering region but employees often live in C&W)

Employment services sector – around 24,000 jobs, playing an important role in connecting residents to work across all sectors, centred around Chester and Crewe

Beyond its own employment numbers, BPS is an enabling sector: it underpins the operation of Advanced Manufacturing, Life Sciences, Clean Energy and other priority sectors by providing the specialist legal, financial, data and advisory services those industries depend on to be productive.

Nationally, BPS is identified as a growth-driving sector in the UK's Invest 2035 Industrial Strategy. Automation, AI and digital transformation are reshaping the sector rapidly – reducing demand for routine administrative roles and increasing demand for analytical, advisory and technically skilled professionals. Keeping pace with the skills shift is challenging and this sector will see many new jobs, reflecting the predicted increasing participation of women.[15]

The skills picture

BPS is the largest and most diverse of the priority sectors in this LSIP. Employment is projected to grow from approximately 144,800 jobs in 2025 to around 158,300 by 2030, a 9.35% increase[16]. Recent data shows strong growth across the sector's main activity areas[17]:

- → Legal and accounting activities: around 37,000 jobs in 2024
- → Employment services: around 24,000 jobs
- → Head office and management activities: around 20,000 jobs
- → Architectural and engineering consultancy: around 14,000 jobs

The workforce is concentrated in higher-skilled occupations – managers and directors, professional roles, and associate professional and technical roles (accountants, consultants, lawyers, business analysts, software developers and marketing specialists).

Administrative and back-office roles remain significant but are increasingly exposed to automation. As AI-enabled workflow tools become standard, demand is shifting toward analytical, advisory and digital roles requiring higher levels of expertise. This transition is already visible in job posting data.

The skills supply pipeline is substantial. In 2024/25 there were 2020 apprenticeship starts in Business, Administration and Law subject areas locally, increasing by 220 from 2023/24. Aged 19+ FE enrolments saw 1,070 in 2024/25. Nationally, around 90,830 graduates complete business-related degrees each year. The challenge is not the volume of the pipeline but whether it is producing the right mix of skills – particularly at higher technical and professional levels where digital and analytical capability is most in demand.

> "The technology that was meant to make recruitment more efficient is creating significant challenges for employers seeking technical expertise."
>
> Engineering recruitment and training business, Warrington

What employers tell us

Employers report sustained demand for analytical, digital and advisory capability across professional services. The roles most in demand are finance and investment analysts, accountants and financial professionals, management consultants and business analysts, software developers and digital specialists, marketing and communications professionals, and legal and compliance specialists.

Demand is particularly strong for roles that combine professional expertise with digital capability – reflecting the growing adoption of automation, AI and data-driven decision-making across all parts of the sector. This is creating a two-speed labour market: strong demand for people who can work with new tools and technologies, and declining demand for those in purely routine roles.

Competition for skilled professionals is high, and attracting and retaining talent within the region is an ongoing challenge, particularly where local wage levels are lower than those available in Manchester or other city centres. Graduate retention is a recurring theme across employer engagement.

The Level 2 Administration Assistant apprenticeship is approved, funded, and scheduled to launch in August 2026, but with a strict under-25 age limit. This will provide a good entry level launchpad into multiple sectors. All major structural elements are now in place, with only assessment documentation and provider readiness left to complete.

Existing provision

Business, administration and law training is widely available across the sub-region. The Business and Administration T-Level is available at Warrington and Vale Royal College, Reaseheath and Macclesfield, with relatively balanced gender participation at 47% male and 43% female. 2024/25 saw 1,781 apprentices enrolled, of whom 1,061 are aged 25 and over, predominantly on the Team Leader and Senior Leader apprenticeship[18] which will be defunded from September 2026; Advanced apprenticeships account for 57% of enrolments and Higher apprenticeships for 37%. Age 19+ enrolments total 1,070, including 220 on the business skills bootcamp, with further provision in project management, digital marketing and sustainability strategy. At the University of Chester[19], student enrolments in Business and Management courses between 2022-2025 has increased from 1,445 to 1,865 with Business Studies, Marketing and Management Studies seeing the most growth. The number of Law students has fluctuated from 225-215 in between 2023/24 and 2024/2025. See Annex A for more detail.

What are the skills needs?

The main workforce challenge in BPS is not entry-level supply but progression: ensuring people can move from business administration and support roles into higher-level professional, analytical and digital positions – and that the sector retains the talent it develops rather than losing it to larger city-centre markets.

- → Ensuring business administration and support pathways at Levels 2–3 provide a genuine foundation for progression into higher-level roles, with digital and data skills embedded from entry level
- → Strengthening higher technical pathways at Levels 4–5 into data technician, compliance specialist, digital business analyst and similar roles, and expanding provision aligned to digital professional services
- → Supporting graduate and professional pathways into accountancy, law, consultancy and digital services, and improving graduate retention within the Cheshire and Warrington labour market
- → Embedding AI and automation capability, data literacy, and regulatory and compliance knowledge across all levels of business services provision – reflecting the pace of change in how professional work is being done
- → Strengthening links between employers, universities and training providers to create clearer pathways from education into professional roles within the region, rather than into city-centre market

At the University of Chester[19], student enrolments in Business and Management courses between 2022-2025 has increased from

1445–1865

Clean Energy

Cheshire and Warrington is uniquely placed to deliver the energy transition and is a key growth region in the national Clean Energy Jobs Plan. The region already hosts some of the most significant clean energy infrastructure in the country – from the HyNet hydrogen and carbon capture project to Urenco's nuclear fuel facility at Capenhurst.

Key regional anchors

HyNet – a major UK industrial decarbonisation project covering low-carbon hydrogen production and carbon capture and storage, forming part of the Origin cluster at Ellesmere Port. HyNet alone is projected to require around 1,000 construction workers at peak delivery.

Urenco Capenhurst (Cheshire West) – will host Europe's first commercial High-Assay Low-Enriched Uranium (HALEU) facility, backed by £196m of UK government investment, producing advanced nuclear fuel by 2031 to support next-generation modular reactors

Birchwood Park, regionally important nuclear cluster in Warrington

Peak Cluster – a further clean energy cluster within the region

Regional Skills Pilot (Cheshire West & Chester) – £1m funding to support access to opportunities in renewable energy, welding, electrical engineering and construction

Energy Skills Passport – delivered by Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington with North West Net Zero Hub and Net Zero North West, Cheshire West and Chester Council, supporting workers to transition into clean energy roles.

Cheshire and Warrington's Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Strategy (SIES) places clean energy and industrial decarbonisation at the centre of its 2045 ambition, committing to reduce carbon emissions by 4.5 million tonnes per year by 2030, deliver 1GW of new clean power generation by 2030, improve all housing stock to EPC C by 2035, and support HyNet as a nationally significant decarbonisation programme. Clean Energy is one of eight priority growth sectors in the UK's Invest 2035 Industrial Strategy. This LSIP covers clean power generation and networks, nuclear, hydrogen, industrial decarbonisation and carbon capture, and low-carbon heat and retrofit.

Once final investment decisions are made, delivering on these commitments will require a substantial expansion of the local energy workforce, creating concentrated demand for engineers, technicians and skilled trades across the LSIP period. The Department for Energy and Net Zero has funded a Regional Skills Pilot to take a systems approach to the Clean Energy Skills Action Plan, and findings from that work inform this section.

The skills picture

Clean energy is currently measured under SIC code D (Electricity, Gas, Steam and Air Conditioning Supply), which recorded £588m GVA in 2023 – 1.53% of total Cheshire and Warrington GVA. However, this significantly understates the true scale of the local clean energy economy. Hydrogen manufacturing, nuclear engineering, heat pump installation and retrofit activity all sit across multiple SIC groupings and are not captured within this single figure.

The North West anticipates increasing clean power infrastructure roles by 2028, potentially reaching up to

35,000

full-time roles

Around 6,100 people are currently employed in the Energy and Water grouping (SIC codes B, D, E). Of these, approximately 36% are aged over 50 – a demographic profile that creates both immediate replacement demand and an urgent need to build the talent pipeline for the decade ahead.[20]

National and regional workforce forecasts point to substantial expansion across every strand of clean energy:

- **Hydrogen:** 28,675 direct jobs forecast nationally by 2030, plus 64,500 indirect roles[21] and 6,000 in the North West through the Hynet project[24]
- **Nuclear:** the UK workforce is projected to grow from 96,000 to 120,000 in the early 2030s – although this covers the wider North West, this predicted growth will pull on other sectors across business and project management[22]
- **Clean power infrastructure:** up to 35,000 full-time roles are anticipated in the North West by 2028[23] (New North West Clean Energy Skills Action Plan: expected Summer 2026)
- **Heat pumps and retrofit:** 3,300 additional skilled trades needed annually, including 6,600–11,000 plumbing engineers and 400 retrofit coordinators (See NW Retrofit Skills Action Plan)

Lack of existing data and emerging provision

Clean energy is a rapidly evolving sector, where we currently lack granular data for our sub-region on employment and provision. Locally, Skills Bootcamps in clean energy have responded to the Enterprise Cheshire & Warrington Northwest Skills Mapping Plan 2025, and are primarily Level 3 and aimed at 19+ year olds. Completion rates for 350 learners in 2025-26 are at 90%, and courses are available in nuclear project management, hydrogen and electrification, and carbon reporting.

Early findings from the NW Net Zero Hub and Regional Skills Pilot commissioned by Department for Energy and Net Zero includes the need for cross-cutting skills and that for most clean energy roles, 90% of skills already exist in the current trade workforce.

What employers tell us

Data from the North West Employer Skills Survey 2024[24] (utilities proxy group) shows sustained pressure across the sector:

→ 13% of sites report at least one vacancy

→ 50% of vacancies are hard to fill

→ 35% are skill-shortage vacancies – where applicants lack the skills employers need

→ 12% of sites report internal skills gaps

Local engagement confirms that demand is concentrated and most urgent at technician and skilled-trade levels, particularly in electrical installation, grid infrastructure and low carbon systems, including related roles such as plumbing and heating linked to low-carbon housing, hydrogen and industrial decarbonisation construction and operations, and nuclear technician and engineering pathways, which are also facing increasing replacement demand for older workers.

Employers consistently raise a mismatch between the pace of technological change and the speed at which training provision catches up. Courses are sometimes updated to include new technology but retain old titles, making it harder for employers to identify what is actually being taught. Industry standards and training modules need to keep pace with modern infrastructure requirements.

50% of vacancies are hard to fill

35% are skill-shortage vacancies – where applicants lack the skills employers need

> "Our networks are new – since 1980 we've only ever put what we class as plastic cables in the ground. But the industry hasn't moved forward and said what we need is plastic cable jointers, rather than a three-year programme that still trains people on historic cables."

Local employer engagement

Employers also highlighted that hydrogen and other emerging technologies are not yet embedded in training curricula, with a lack of visibility as a skills pathway leading to limited uptake; a point echoed in the Advanced Manufacturing section and relevant across multiple priority sectors.

> "Because hydrogen isn't widely stored or transported currently, I don't believe it's on the curricula."

Local employer engagement

A further concern raised by employers, alongside uncertainty in workforce demand, is the risk of major infrastructure projects – particularly HyNet and clean power programmes – competing simultaneously for the same limited pool of skilled workers. Workforce planning across projects will be important to anticipate and plan for bottlenecks at peak delivery.

What are the skills needs?

The scale of Cheshire and Warrington's clean energy commitments – particularly HyNet delivery, clean power generation targets and housing retrofit standards – creates concentrated workforce pressure across the LSIP period. The most immediate need is at technician and skilled-trade levels: the people who will physically build, install and maintain the infrastructure underpinning this transition. The main priorities are:

→ Strengthening pipelines into electrical, plumbing, heating and construction trades linked to clean power and building upon new technical skills, funded pathways for retrofit, addressing progression bottlenecks from Level 2 into full occupational competencies and managing replacement demand from an ageing workforce.

→ Future skills needed include expanding utilities, instrumentation, control and digital technician pathways at Levels 4–5, aligned with hydrogen, nuclear and industrial decarbonisation requirements, and supporting progression into supervisory and operational leadership roles which will become more important as sites come closer to operation. Note the need to work with employers to recognise pathways into these roles, rather than defaulting to degree requirements.

→ Supporting advanced engineering capability at degree level, strengthening industry/provider links in nuclear and hydrogen specialisms, and enabling progression into design, systems integration and project management.

→ Embedding digital and automation competence, sustainability and regulatory knowledge, and health and safety standards (particularly around new technology e.g. hydrogen and CCUS) across all operational roles.

→ Improving the visibility of apprenticeship and adult skills data for clean energy-relevant pathways (see example of Cogent Skill's Hydrogen and Carbon Capture industry-led masterclass for T Level students at Crewe UTC), so that supply can be tracked against growing demand more accurately, with the skills overlap between sectors considered.

→ Share signals from clean energy employers to training providers about anticipated recruitment timelines, so that provision can be planned in advance of infrastructure delivery, using sources such as the PIP (Planning Infrastructure Pipeline) or Opergy's workforce demand analysis for the power sector, commissioned by The Office for Clean Energy Jobs.

Life Sciences

Life Sciences is one of Cheshire and Warrington's most distinctive economic strengths. The region is home to a nationally significant cluster anchored by Alderley Park, the UK's largest bioscience campus and a strong base of pharmaceutical manufacturing, diagnostics, medical technology and biotechnology businesses. The sector generates around £2.1 billion in GVA, employs over 7,000 people across approximately 235 businesses, and is forecast to grow by around 7.3% between 2023 and 2028 (SIES, 2025).

Key regional anchors

Alderley Park – the UK's largest bioscience campus, hosting the Medicines Discovery Catapult and Centre for Antimicrobial Resistance, and home to major employers including AstraZeneca, Thermo Fisher Scientific and Waters Corporation

Dechra Pharmaceuticals – an international veterinary pharmaceuticals business based in Northwich

Animal life sciences cluster – an emerging cluster in the west of the sub-region

Research-intensive cluster including Cogent Skills, Aviagen and IMT Matcher

Strong university connectivity – the region is home to the University of Chester and within reach of Manchester, Liverpool, Sheffield and Keele universities, supporting graduate supply and research collaboration

Its importance lies not just in employment numbers but in the concentration of high-skill, high-productivity roles and the depth of innovation capability it brings to the regional economy. Life sciences activity spans research and development, pharmaceutical and medical technology manufacturing, clinical and regulatory innovation, and fast-growing areas such as AI-enabled diagnostics, genomics and health data. Much of this research innovation is currently driven by academia rather than industry and securing funding for non-academic spin-outs can be difficult.

Despite regional strengths, access to the sector is not as open as it could be. Recruitment has historically been graduate-focused, leaving technical and apprenticeship pathways less visible and less understood by students and educators, despite a shift towards more general scientific and transferable skills (Life Sciences 2035).

Businesses have tended not to engage with schools and colleges in the way that other sectors do – and this gap is increasingly a constraint on the sector's ability to grow the local talent pipeline it needs.

What the data tells us

Life sciences is one of the UK's most productive sectors nationally, generating around £104,000 GVA per worker, more than double the UK average. Cogent Skills is the Sector Skills Council that leads on the development of workforce training and standards. Locally, recent employment data shows strong growth across the sector's main activity areas between 2022 and 2024:

- **Pharmaceuticals:** 4,500 jobs in 2022 rising to 6,000 in 2024 (+33%)
- **Electronics and instrumentation:** 3,000 rising to 4,000 (+33%)
- **Medical equipment:** 1,175 rising to 1,750 (+49%)
- **Biotechnology R&D:** 1,500 rising to 1,750 (+14%), with earlier data showing biotech R&D jobs growing from around 400 in 2021 to approximately 700 in 2024, driven by expansion at the Alderley Park cluster

The workforce is strongly concentrated in higher-skilled roles. Around 70% of life sciences workers hold a degree or equivalent qualification, compared with around 41% across the UK.

Life Sciences employs 10% of this scientific workforce[25] and only 4% of employees are aged under 25.

The sector's occupational structure falls into three broad groups:

- **Professional and scientific roles** – biological scientists, biomedical researchers, bioinformaticians, pharmaceutical R&D specialists and health data analysts, typically requiring degree-level or postgraduate qualifications and driving discovery and innovation.
- **Technical roles** – laboratory technicians, clinical trial coordinators, quality assurance and quality control specialists, and pharmaceutical manufacturing technicians. These are productivity-critical roles for scaling clinical trials, laboratory research and advanced manufacturing and critical for emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, data modelling and digital innovation.
- **Operational roles** – manufacturing production operatives supporting pharmaceutical and medical device production, software development, quality assurance and compliance.

While the graduate pipeline is relatively healthy, the region sits between several strong universities – the evidence points to a structural gap at Level 4–5, where technician pathways supporting laboratory and clinical manufacturing roles are underdeveloped. This is the pipeline most in need of attention.[26]

Life sciences is one of the UK's most productive sectors nationally, generating around

£104,000

GVA per worker

What employers tell us

Workforce pressure is concentrated in professional and technical roles, particularly where scientific capability intersects with digital and data-driven innovation. Employers report increasing demand for biomedical scientists and clinical researchers, bioinformaticians and data specialists, regulatory and quality assurance professionals, and laboratory and manufacturing technicians.

The sector is seeing growing convergence between life sciences and digital technology. Around 13% of sector job postings nationally are for IT and computer science capability, reflecting the growing importance of genomics and health data, AI-enabled diagnostics, digital clinical trials, and bioinformatics and advanced data analysis. Around 2% of jobs ask for AI skills compared to the UK average of 1%, with it rising to 3% within BioPharma (Life Sciences, 2035). In Digital Health, there has been a 59% increase in jobs, driven by mobile health technologies (Cogent Skills).

> "One of the advantages of this area is it's pretty healthy for the sort of skills we're looking for. We're sandwiched between Manchester University, Liverpool University, Sheffield and Keele."

Local employer

However, employers and training providers consistently highlight a gap between stated need and actual engagement. Colleges have invested in laboratory skills facilities for Level 3 provision, offering 'Lab Skills' skills bootcamps in response to employer demand – but employer participation in filling those places, engaging with students, or attending careers events has been limited. This is a sector-wide engagement issue, not a provision gap.

> "We have launched Lab Tech Level 3 apprenticeships. We have launched skills boot camps in laboratory areas… But business will not engage. We had a cohort of around six on the boot camp. Couldn't get anybody to interview those… they tell you they want this and this but they don't really because they're not interested in engaging with [students]."

FE Engagement Lead, Warrington

The practical implication is that raising awareness of life sciences as a career pathway – and strengthening the technical pipeline from Level 3 upwards – requires a change in how sector employers engage with the education system, not just changes to what colleges offer.

Existing provision

Provision for life sciences is concentrated at Level 3, with 350 16–19 FE starts in science and mathematics. The Science T-Level, offering laboratory and health pathways, is available locally. There are currently four apprentices enrolled in the Technician Scientist pathway – a route employer have identified as underdeveloped relative to the sector's need for laboratory, quality assurance and manufacturing technicians at Levels 4–5. Age 19+ enrolments total 394, with the majority in GCSE Maths and numeracy rather than sector-specific upskilling. Skills bootcamps in Science and Life Sciences are available including a two week LabSkills programme. University of Chester learner enrolments in Allied Medicines has remained steady for the past two years at 1,565. The most subsector growth is seen in regulation – Environment and Public Health (165–210 between 2022–2025) and Biomedical Sciences (115–170 between 2022–25). Within biological sciences, Genetics also has a small increase in learner enrolments from 15–30 between 2024–2025. Computer skills have also increased in enrolments, in particular in software development from 65–100 learners 2022–2025. See Annex A for further detail and data.

Strengthening collaboration between employers, universities and training providers

What are the skills needs?

Life Sciences presents a different kind of skills challenge compared with other priority sectors. The issue is not primarily workforce volume or replacement demand, but ensuring the availability of highly specialised scientific, technical and digital capability – and making sure local residents can access the sector, not just graduates recruited nationally or internationally.

- → Strengthening laboratory and technical pathways at Levels 3–5, with a particular focus on expanding Level 4–5 technician routes for laboratory science, quality assurance and pharmaceutical manufacturing – the pipeline most in need of development.
- → Improving awareness of technical and scientific career pathways among students and educators, so that non-graduate routes into life sciences are visible and understood from an early age. Currently the region attracts many international graduate students into this sector, with 25% born outside the UK compared to 19% in other sectors[27]
- → Supporting graduate and postgraduate progression in bioscience, data science and health technologies, and improving graduate retention within the regional cluster. Consideration of PhD level funded courses at Level 8.
- → Embedding digital, data and AI skills within life sciences training routes at all levels, alongside regulatory and compliance knowledge required for pharmaceutical and clinical environments.
- → Strengthening collaboration between employers, universities and training providers – including through more consistent employer engagement with schools, colleges and careers events through schemes such as Not Just Lab Coats.

Foundational Sectors

Construction and the Built Environment

Construction underpins almost every major ambition in Cheshire and Warrington's growth strategy. Housing delivery, town centre regeneration, retrofit and low-carbon heat, industrial decarbonisation and infrastructure upgrades all depend on a skilled and available construction workforce. Without it, the region's commitments in Clean Energy, Advanced Manufacturing and place-based growth cannot be delivered.

Key regional context

- 26,000 people employed in construction across Cheshire and Warrington (BRES 2024)
- Specialised construction activities (SIC 43) is the largest sub-sector at 14,000 jobs – and growing
- Construction of buildings (SIC 41) has declined from 9,000 to 7,000 jobs (2022–2024), suggesting fragility in core building capacity at a time of rising delivery expectations
- Heritage buildings and conservation-grade retrofit add complexity to skill requirements across the sub-region – including bespoke maintenance skills for important cultural assets e.g. stonemasonry
- Construction remains heavily male-dominated: over 95% of apprenticeship starts are male, with female participation in trade skills still very low, though growing slowly through professional and management routes
- High levels of self-employment and limited funding for adult upskilling

The sector currently employs around 26,000 people locally[28]. Demand over the LSIP period is shaped by three overlapping pressures: housing growth and regeneration, retrofit and low-carbon heat rollout, and net-zero enabling infrastructure works. Each requires different skills, but all draw from the same core trades pipeline with long term skills shortage vacancies in subsectors. Engineering and building services account for 40–60% of construction project value and 30–50% of whole life project cost with over 50% of vacancies hard to fill[29]. This rate and volume of demand is too fast for conventional skills pathways to keep up. Organisations such as the Construction Skills Mission Board are attempting to close this gap of 100,000 new workers by the end of this government.

What the data tells us

The core trades under pressure are those directly linked to housing and retrofit delivery: bricklaying, roofing, joinery and carpentry, plastering, plumbing and heating. These are the roles where an ageing workforce, modest apprenticeship completions and rising demand are colliding. There is also a growing sentiment recognising the need to regard construction as part of a 'shared workforce' in the clean energy ecosystem of infrastructure development, in particular site readiness, safety-critical work and engineering standards.

The pattern is consistent: significant activity entering the pipeline, but insufficient conversion into qualified, job-ready workers. Apprenticeship completions run at around 49%. Level 4+ Apprenticeship provision is very thin – just 35 enrolments in 2024/25 locally, around 10% of total FE construction enrolments – constraining the pipeline for supervision, retrofit coordination and quality assurance roles. The UK's investment programme doesn't account for workforce and skills shortages.

What employers tell us

The employer picture is less about a single shortage and more about where the system is leaking from training into achievement, from achievement into site-ready competence, and from traditional trade skills into the higher-quality delivery that retrofit and low-carbon work demands.

ECITB data indicates craft and technician roles account for

60–70%

of workforce demand across engineering construction projects.

Four mismatches are consistently raised by local employers and stakeholders:

→ Delivery ambition versus trade capacity – housing and retrofit programmes rely on a steady supply of core trades. Apprenticeship starts are reasonable, but completions are low, and stakeholders highlight that the pipeline is not consistently converting training into the site-ready workers that projects need. ECITB data indicates craft and technician roles account for 60–70% of workforce demand across engineering construction projects.

→ Retrofit requirements versus current competence – low-carbon and retrofit delivery requires trades to go beyond traditional skills: whole-house thinking, installation quality and rigorous quality assurance. Poor-quality retrofit is costly and reputationally damaging. Employers stress that competence standards matter as much as workforce numbers. Heritage buildings add further complexity, local authorities have consistently flagged the importance of conservation skills alongside modern retrofit capability, and this needs to be reflected in provision.

→ Electrical occupations are increasingly central to retrofit delivery, particularly in the installation of low-carbon technologies such as heat pumps, solar PV and smart energy systems. However, training provision and workforce supply are not yet keeping pace with emerging demand, reflecting wider constraints in retrofit skills delivery and progression into employment[30]

→ Training participation versus progression into jobs – FE volumes are significant, but achievements are low and stakeholders highlight a persistent gap between completing a course and entering sustained construction employment. Clearer 'next step' routes and stronger employer engagement in work placements are needed to close this gap.

There are currently

368

apprentices enrolled across a range of trades, including Carpentry and Joinery (60), Maintenance and Operations (58) and Plumbing and Heating (44), with the majority of learners aged 16–18.

Existing provision

Construction training is delivered across a range of providers including Warrington and Vale Royal College, Cheshire College – South and West, Macclesfield College, Reaseheath and TradeSkills4U. The Construction T-Level in Design, Surveying and Planning is available at three local colleges, with 17.5% female and 82.5% male students. There are currently 368 apprentices enrolled across a range of trades, including Carpentry and Joinery (60), Maintenance and Operations (58) and Plumbing and Heating (44), with the majority of learners aged 16–18. Electrical pathways form a significant component of the apprenticeship pipeline, with Installation and Maintenance Electrician accounting for over 130 starts locally, alongside wider engineering and electro-technical routes. However, participation remains concentrated at Level 3 and below, with limited progression into higher-level technical pathways and a strong skew toward younger age groups, indicating a constrained pipeline for upskilling and career transition[31].

Age 19+ enrolments total 1,690, with a broad range of skills bootcamps available covering retrofit, site management, CAD and green construction. There is no specific construction provision available at University of Chester reducing the availability of higher skilled pathways.

What are the skills needs?

The construction skills challenge in Cheshire and Warrington is less about volume and more about conversion and quality. The system needs to get more people from training into competent, site-ready employment, while simultaneously building the higher technical capacity the sector's transition demands. The main priorities are:

- → Improving starts-to-completions conversion in core trade apprenticeships and FE programmes, and strengthening the transition from qualification into sustained employment, including through better employer engagement in placements and work-based learning
- → Scaling plumbing, heating and electrical pathways in line with low-carbon housing, electrification and retrofit demand, and embedding retrofit-quality practice – whole-house thinking, installation standards and quality assurance – into mainstream trade training
- → Understand wider demand for heritage craft training (e.g. stonemasonry, stained-glass window repair, thatched roofs), working with Chester Cathedral and their Works Department
- → Developing modern retrofit capability, responding to a consistent priority raised by local authorities across the sub-region
- → Building supervisory, retrofit coordination and quality assurance capacity at Levels 4–5, where local provision is currently very limited and where the gap between demand and supply is most acute
- → Supporting SMEs (who make up the large majority of construction businesses) to participate in training and apprenticeships, recognising the practical constraints of project-based delivery and the lack of funding for adult skills
- → Recruiting the teaching staff required to scale up provision and meet anticipated demand (across Construction and Clean Energy)
- → Improving gender diversity, particularly in trade routes, through targeted outreach and by making construction more visible as a career for women from early in education.

Health and Social Care

Health and Social Care is one of Cheshire and Warrington's largest employers and one of its most important foundational sectors. Its strategic importance is not measured only in GVA growth (£1.4 billion) but in what it enables: a workforce that can participate in the economy, a population that can be supported as it ages, and communities that remain stable and resilient.[32]

Key workforce figures

7% vacancy rate in Cheshire and Warrington

18% of NW sites report at least one vacancy, 35% are hard to fill; 27% are skill-shortage vacancies

1,790 FE enrolments in health and care subjects locally (2025/26), but only 550 achievements – a completion rate of around 31%

220 apprenticeship achievements in Health, Public Services and Care (2023/24) – around 28% of all local apprenticeship achievements

Apprenticeship completion rate of approximately 50% across the sector

19% of direct care workers have a Level 2 relevant social care qualification

Only 110 FE enrolments at Level 4+ meaning a thin pipeline for supervisory, advanced practitioner and leadership roles

Unlike other priority sectors, Health and Social Care is not defined by infrastructure expansion or innovation-led transformation alone. Its central challenge is sustaining a sufficiently skilled, stable and motivated workforce in the face of persistent vacancy pressures and demand that is set to keep growing – driven by an ageing population, increasing complexity of need and rising expectations around quality and compliance.

What the data tells us

The training pipeline for Health and Social Care is substantial in volume. Locally, there are 1,790 FE enrolments and around 220 apprenticeship achievements annually in the sector. The majority of learners enter at Level 2 (1,080 enrolments) and Level 3 (450), with very few progressing to Level 4 and above (Skills for Care, 2025/26).

The pattern mirrors what we see in Construction: high intake, low conversion. Apprenticeship completions run at around 50%; FE achievements are well below enrolments. This means the sector is doing significant work to attract people into training that is not consistently translating into a stable, qualified workforce.

Demand pressures over the LSIP period are clear: an ageing population requiring more complex care, loss of experienced staff through turnover, rising requirements for digital competence and safeguarding knowledge, and growing need for supervisory and leadership capacity. The Skills for Care Workforce Pathway sets out a national framework for progression in this sector; local provision and priorities should align with this.

Skills for Care workforce projections make the scale of this demand concrete. If the adult social care workforce in the North West grows proportionally to the projected number of people aged 65 and over, the total number of posts will increase by 22% (from 236,000 to 290,000) between 2024/25 and 2040. This is not a distant horizon: the pipeline that will need to supply that workforce is being built now.

Skills for Care Data

Workforce demand is expected to increase from 34,000 to 39,000 in Cheshire and Warrington by 2030. There is an existing vacancy rate of 7.2% and 19% of the direct care workforce are qualified at Level 2.

What employers tell us

Employer engagement consistently identifies workforce stability – not just recruitment – as the central issue. Three mismatches recur across the evidence:

- **High training volume, low retention:** Health and Social Care has some of the highest FE and apprenticeship enrolment volumes locally, but completion and retention into long-term employment are inconsistent. Frontline care roles face direct competition from other sectors on pay and conditions, and without stronger workplace support and clearer career pathways, early-career staff are leaving before they become experienced.
- **Limited Level 4+ progression, growing supervisory need:** employers identify a growing gap at supervisory and leadership level: care supervisors, team leaders, nursing associates, registered managers and advanced practitioners. With only 110 Level 4+ enrolments locally, the pipeline is thin. The registered manager shortage is particularly acute – training providers report that this small pool of people is creating unsustainable wage competition and recruitment costs.
- **Graduate supply present, but specific shortages persist:** graduate volumes are reasonable and regional retention is relatively stable. But skill shortages in specific roles and settings continue, pointing to a misalignment between qualification routes and local service demand, as well as competition between training providers for the same limited pool of regulated professionals.
- **Lack of public transport, driving test centres and cost of own transport is causing barriers to employment** and retention. Many areas of Cheshire and Warrington rely on a car to access them, both urban and rural.

> "One of the most difficult areas that we struggle to recruit for is when we're opening up another home – we struggle to recruit registered managers… there is a very small pool of them and 99% of the time they're already employed. Our agency fee was £16,000 just to get one person."

Residential Care Home, Cheshire

Health and social care has the largest training volume of any priority sector in Cheshire and Warrington.

1,790

16–19 FE starts total

Existing provision

Health and social care has the largest training volume of any priority sector in Cheshire and Warrington. 16–19 FE starts total 1,790, with 1,080 at Level 2 and 110 at Level 4; the Health T-Level is available at four local colleges, with 92% female and 8% male students. There are currently 1,661 apprentices enrolled, of whom 1,052 are aged 25 and over; the most popular routes are Early Years Educator (350 starts), Lead Adult Care Worker (250) and Children and Young People Practitioner (210)[33]. Age 19+ enrolments total 1,883, predominantly in safeguarding training and counselling therapies, with skills bootcamps available in health and care, early years and lab skills. The high volume of provision at Level 2 reflects the sector's large entry-level workforce, set against employer-reported demand for supervisory, nursing associate and advanced practitioner capability at Levels 4–5. University of Chester enrolments in Nursing and Adult Nursing have the strongest and most consistent intake at 335 and 310 respectively in 2025[34].

What are the skills needs?

Health and Social Care presents a different kind of skills challenge from the sector's public profile might suggest. The problem is not a lack of training activity, but learning not consistently converting into a stable, progressing workforce. The priorities are:

→ Improving apprenticeship completion rates and reducing early attrition, including through stronger workplace mentoring, supervision and pastoral support for learners in frontline roles

→ Strengthening progression from Level 2 into Level 3, and creating clearer, more visible career ladders from care assistant through to senior and regulated roles, so that frontline work is understood as a starting point, not a ceiling

→ Expanding Level 4–5 pathways for nursing associates, care supervisors, team leaders and advanced practitioners – the pipeline most urgently needed and currently most underdeveloped

→ Addressing specific shortages in regulated professions and leadership roles, particularly registered managers, where the local pool is too small and recruitment costs are becoming unsustainable

→ Embedding digital competence, safeguarding knowledge and leadership skills across all levels of provision, reflecting the changing nature of care delivery

→ Supporting employer-led retention initiatives, recognising that workforce stability depends not just on training but on working conditions, career development and workplace culture

Part 02: Agreed changes and actions.

The actions in this section respond directly to the skills needs and employer evidence set out in Section 1.

Each programme has been designed to address either a sector-specific skills gap, a cross-cutting capability need, or a system barrier identified through employer engagement, provider intelligence and labour market analysis.

They are organised around six overarching priorities, each comprising named workstreams with full activity detail, lead organisations, timescales and success measures set out in Annex B – a live document and subject to change.

In some cases, consistent baseline data was not readily available at the point of development. As implementation progresses, baseline measures will be established through the activity plan, enabling success metrics – including percentage increases and outcome targets – to be refined and agreed with partners.

1. Employer voice, governance and intelligence – ensuring employer insight drives the system

Programme: Employer Voice and Governance

The ERB will maintain active representation across regional steering boards, advisory groups and Combined Authority structures, ensuring a consistent employer voice on skills is embedded in strategic decision-making. Provider employer boards at colleges and universities will be strengthened so that business input leads to evidenced curriculum changes. A new LSIP Business Voice Board, made up of LSIP team, college and University reps and some independent training providers, will be established from October 2026 by the ERB with the providers, with quarterly meetings drawing together intelligence from all priority sectors and feeding into wider regional structures including the Business Advisory Board, local authorities, the Combined Authority and DWP. An active employer CRM will ensure businesses that engaged with the LSIP remain a live intelligence source throughout the three-year period.

Success measures include: consistent employer input evidenced in board decisions; curriculum changes traceable to employer voice; LSIP Business Voice Board meeting quarterly with all priority sectors represented; employer CRM active and updated.

Programme: Single Source of Truth – website, regional offer and intelligence

The ERB website will be developed as the single recognised source of skills and training information for businesses across the sub-region. A Regional Training Offer will be maintained and kept current. Accurate investment pipeline knowledge will be shared across local authority economic growth teams, and cross-border opportunities with North Wales identified and promoted to maximise labour market reach.

Success measures include: website traffic and return visit rate increasing year on year; Regional Training Offer current and regularly accessed; investment pipeline knowledge shared across all three local authority areas.

2. Skills system navigation – supporting SMEs to connect with the right provision efficiently

Programme: Funding, Levy and Brokerage

A dedicated apprenticeship and Growth and Skills Levy advice and transfer service will support businesses – particularly SMEs and microbusinesses – to access funding they are currently leaving unused. Providers will be supported to share remaining levy, leading by example. A full funding map will be maintained for inward investment and economic growth teams across the three local authority areas. Coordinated brokerage will be offered to all businesses, with enhanced support for microbusinesses that lack the internal capacity to engage with the system independently.

Success measures include: levy transfer utilisation increasing year on year; more SMEs accessing brokerage support; funding map maintained and used by LA growth teams; microbusiness engagement tracked annually.

3. Strengthening technical pathways and progression – building the supply of qualified people at the right levels

Programme: Pathways and Progression

Level 3–5 technician and skilled-trade routes will be scaled across clean power, hydrogen, retrofit, applied digital and engineering. Higher technical qualifications in automation, mechatronics and industrial digitalisation will be strengthened, and Level 4–5 engineering capacity protected. Electrotechnical skills gaps will continue to be addressed through the Cheshire and Warrington Electrotechnical Training and Careers Alliance (ETCA). Technician pathways at Level 4–5 will be developed in laboratory and manufacturing roles for life sciences, and supervisory and advanced practitioner routes expanded in health and social care. Progression from FE into higher technical and degree-level routes will be improved, and apprenticeship starts-to-completions conversion strengthened across core trades. Professional apprenticeships in accountancy, HR, compliance and data analysis will be expanded to support talent retention in the region.

The LSIP maintains engagement with the developing national infrastructure of Technical Excellence Colleges (TECs) and is in ongoing dialogue with TECs in neighbouring areas to share intelligence, support alignment and strengthen cross-boundary working where labour markets and learner flows overlap.

Success measures include: increased enrolments on Level 4–5 technical routes in priority sectors; improved apprenticeship starts-to-completions ratios; new or expanded higher technical provision evidenced in at least three priority sectors.

Programme: Graduate, Early-Career and Data Insight

The University of Chester will lead work on graduate and postgraduate progression in bioscience, data science and health technologies, and on improving graduate retention into professional roles within the regional labour market. A study on underemployment – including A Level and HE destinations and Level 4 to 5 progression – will inform future interventions. Visibility of apprenticeship and adult skills data will be improved to better quantify supply against demand. Collaborative apprenticeship recruitment and training models will be developed. NextGen in-work progression activities, led by our Chambers of Commerce, will be supported across the sub-region.

Success measures include: underemployment study published and findings acted on; graduate retention data tracked annually; apprenticeship and adult skills supply-demand dashboard live.

4. Cross-cutting skills: digital, sustainability and retrofit

Programme: Cross-cutting Skills Uplift

This priority is a cross-cutting response to evidence from Advanced Manufacturing, Agri-tech, Business and Professional Services, Clean Energy, Life Sciences, Construction and Health and Social Care. Across these sectors, employers consistently highlighted the need for stronger digital capability, AI literacy, data skills, sustainability knowledge and, in construction-related pathways, retrofit competence. It reflects repeated evidence that these capabilities are no longer specialist add-ons but core workforce requirements across the Cheshire and Warrington economy.

Employers will have access to digital literacy provision for their workforce – covering MS Office, AI tools, digital content creation, online services, cybersecurity and data analytics – with existing provision promoted for the 2026/27 academic year and new courses developed for 2027/28. Sustainability principles will be embedded across sector training programmes, with retrofit competence and quality assurance built into mainstream construction pathways. STEM and digital capability will be embedded within land-based education pathways. Digital and leadership capability will be woven into mainstream training across health and social care, and digital capability embedded across vocational and technical programmes more broadly. The combination of creative and technical skills underpinning digital innovation will be supported alongside sustainability knowledge across all sectors.

Success measures include: learner numbers on digital literacy provision increasing year on year; pre and post confidence scores improving; sustainability content embedded in training programmes across at least four sectors; retrofit competence integrated into mainstream construction pathways.

5. Connecting people to employment – building supply and widening access

Programme: Employability and Essential Skills Frameworks

A single essential business skills framework will be introduced across schools, colleges and employers in Cheshire and Warrington, establishing a common language for the competencies businesses need from new entrants. A Bridge-to-Industry model will be adopted by FE and HE providers to help businesses better understand the calibre of applicants and ease application processes, whilst focusing learners on what employers are looking for.

Success measures include: essential business skills framework adopted across FE and HE providers; Bridge-to-Industry model in use at all participating providers; employer-reported improvement in applicant calibre.

Programme: Careers Inspiration and Role Models

Work with existing Ambassador networks (Northwest Apprenticeship Ambassador Network and the SDN Mesma-led Northwest T Level Ambassador Network) and ensure these cover all priority sectors with an annual refresh, and a regional databank of role models developed to provide careers talks and mentoring at all levels – with particular attention to "someone like me" gaps that discourage young people from underrepresented backgrounds from entering priority sectors. Careers IAG resources will be promoted by industry sector experts. Young Chamber employer-led careers activities will be extended across secondary and post-16 education.

Success measures include: ambassador networks active across all priority sectors; regional databank live and growing; school and community engagement numbers tracked annually; demographic coverage of role models monitored.

Programme: Industry Placements and Work Experience

Use best-practice industry placement models, adapting the SDN Mesma (funded by DfE) T-Level Employer Engagement Provider Support for use locally FE and HE placement opportunities, to ensuring employers are adequately supported. The University of Chester placement pipeline will be actively promoted to businesses across the sub-region.

Success measures include: placement numbers increasing year on year; new employer sign-ups tracked; learner and employer satisfaction scores monitored; repeat employer engagement rate improving.

Programme: Inclusion, Accessibility and Social Value

A sustained programme of inclusion and accessibility activity will ensure the plan reaches residents currently furthest from the labour market. This spans SEND outreach and IAG, Youth Guarantee employer engagement, EDI and mental health upskilling for businesses, inclusive recruitment practice, and DWP cohort support for over-50s, veterans, ex-offenders and those needing flexible working. Local authority partners will support accessibility in rural communities. Employers will be supported to engage with health and wellbeing activities to better support existing employees with health concerns.

Success measures include: SEND learner placement and progression numbers tracked; employer participation in Youth Guarantee and DWP cohort activities monitored; rural participation rates from target postcodes improving; inclusive recruitment pledges recorded.

6. Provider quality and teaching capacity

Programme: Provider Collaboration and One-Message System

The Cheshire and Warrington Learning Provider Network (CWLPN) will be developed as the authoritative hub for provider engagement, with consistent messaging across colleges and independent training providers, quarterly newsletters and a minimum of three in-person events per year. Collaboration between providers on joint projects – including with DWP – will be actively brokered. Employer-provider collaboration will be strengthened to ensure training reflects evolving technology needs, with regular updates to businesses on the education and provider landscape.

Success measures include: provider engagement levels increasing; quarterly newsletter reach tracked; three in-person events delivered annually; joint projects between providers and colleges evidenced each year.

Programme: Provider Workforce and Teaching Capacity

Employer and provider engagement identified industry currency in teaching as a cross-cutting delivery issue, particularly in technical sectors where technology and working practices are changing rapidly. The actions on industry-to-teaching pathways and provider CPD are therefore retained as enabling actions to support delivery of the technical priorities identified in Section 1.

Routes from industry into teaching will be reconsidered and promoted, drawing on the outcomes of the Gatsby Industry Pilot and COYO BEST programme. Teaching vacancies across the region will be mapped annually, with current teaching students matched to live vacancies through the University of Chester. The CWLPN will act as a central liaison point, enabling providers to access up to date insight on industry developments and emerging skills needs. This intelligence will support colleges and independent training providers to shape their own staff development and CPD activity in line with sector change.

Success measures include: number of industry recruits into teaching and support roles tracked annually; vacancy fill rate improving; teaching student placements into regional vacancies monitored; CPD participation rates across CWLPN members shared.

The workstreams above address system-wide challenges that apply across all sectors. The following sets out the specific actions agreed for each of Cheshire and Warrington's priority sectors, which connect directly to the needs identified in Section 1 and the activities detailed in Annex B which is a live document.

Sector Specific Actions

Advanced Manufacturing

- → Showcase local employers recruiting early career talent, especially SMEs who may not advertise widely.
- → Scale Level 3–5 engineering and technician pathways to meet growing demand
- → Continue to close electrotechnical skills gaps through the Cheshire and Warrington Electrotechnical Training and Careers Alliance (ETCA)
- → Strengthen higher technical qualifications in automation, mechatronics and industrial digitalisation
- → Improve progression routes from further education into higher technical and degree-level study
- → Enhance employer engagement and brokerage support, particularly for smaller businesses

Success measures include: increased enrolments on Level 3–5 engineering and technician routes; ETCA electrotechnical skills gap tracked and reducing; higher technical qualification starts in automation and mechatronics growing year on year; apprenticeship progression into higher technical routes improving.

Agri-tech and Food Security

- → Facilitate employer panels to explain seasonal, permanent, and technician level opportunities for new entrants.
- → Promote digital first entry routes (e.g. data capture, drone support, environmental monitoring) to widen appeal of Agri-tech
- → Protect and strengthen Level 4–5 technical engineering capacity aligned to agri-tech
- → Embed STEM and digital capability within land-based education pathways from entry level upwards
- → Support clearer progression routes between agri-tech, life sciences, manufacturing, digital and scientific skills routes
- → Maintain strong institutional anchors – particularly Reaseheath College, which serves students nationally and is a critical asset for the whole region

Success measures include: Level 4–5 agri-tech provision maintained and enrolments tracked; STEM and digital content embedded in land-based programmes at participating providers; cross-route progression pathways mapped and in use.

Business and Professional Services

- → Strengthen higher technical and professional pathways in digital, finance and business services, with Level 4–5 provision aligned to the roles employers are actually recruiting for
- → Expand professional apprenticeships in accountancy, HR, compliance and data analysis
- → Support employer-led upskilling in AI, automation, cyber security and data capability
- → Improve graduate retention and progression into professional roles within the regional labour market

Success measures include: Level 4–5 professional pathway enrolments increasing; professional apprenticeship starts in target occupations tracked annually; employer-reported upskilling activity in AI and data capability; graduate retention into regional professional roles monitored.

Clean Energy

- → Coordinate site tours of clean energy projects to demystify the sector for new entrants
- → Share simple technology explainers (hydrogen basics, retrofit principles, nuclear safety culture) to build confidence for career starters
- → Support providers to understand real entry requirements, especially where employers over specify graduate level qualifications.
- → Scale Level 3–5 technician and skilled-trade routes aligned to clean power, hydrogen and retrofit, supported through a regional Clean Energy training centre responding to sector demand
- → Strengthen educator capability and specialist facilities in regulated and high-specification energy environments
- → Improve visibility of apprenticeship and adult skills data to better quantify supply against demand
- → Coordinate workforce planning across major infrastructure projects to reduce simultaneous competition for the same skilled workers
- → Ensure training content keeps pace with technology – particularly in hydrogen, nuclear and grid modernisation – through closer employer-provider curriculum collaboration, building on existing cluster partnerships including Hydrogen, CCUS, and Onshore and Offshore Wind
- → Review application and recruitment processes where graduate-level qualifications are being demanded for roles that are actually at Level 4–5

Success measures include: Level 3–5 clean energy route enrolments scaled; specialist educator capability and facilities investment tracked; apprenticeship and adult skills supply-demand data visible and regularly updated; workforce planning coordination evidenced across major infrastructure projects.

Life Sciences

- → Highlight real examples of rapid progression (e.g. Level 2 starter → Level 3 apprentice → technician) to demystify the pathway.
- → Strengthen technician pathways at Levels 4–5 supporting laboratory, quality assurance and manufacturing roles
- → Increase employer engagement with schools, colleges and careers activity so that life sciences is understood as a viable career pathway before university
- → Support graduate and postgraduate progression up to and including Level 8 in bioscience, data science and health technologies, and strengthen links between universities, research institutions and local employers to improve retention
- → Integrate digital, data and AI capability into life sciences provision at all levels

Success measures include: Level 4–5 life sciences technician pathway enrolments tracked; employer engagement with schools and colleges in the sector monitored; graduate retention into local life sciences roles improving; digital and AI content integrated into provision at participating providers.

Construction and the Built Environment

- → Promote electrotechnical career tasters through ETCA partners, focusing on what early entrants can do immediately (e.g. mate roles, installation support).
- → Improve conversion from training starts to completions and into employment, particularly in core trades and apprenticeship programmes
- → Embed retrofit competence and quality assurance – including heritage skills – into mainstream pathways
- → Increase higher technical capacity for supervision, assessment, retrofit coordination and construction management
- → Support SME engagement in training and apprenticeships so that the majority of construction employers can access and contribute to the pipeline
- → Work with the Construction Technical Excellence College (CTEC – Wigan & Leigh College) to strengthen employer partnerships and support wider provider collaboration throughout Cheshire and Warrington, where Wigan & Leigh College is the hub and Cheshire and Warrington providers are the delivery spokes

Success measures include: starts-to-completions conversion rate improving year on year; retrofit competence embedded in mainstream construction pathways at participating providers; higher technical construction enrolments increasing; SME participation in apprenticeships and training tracked.

Health and Social Care

- → Improve apprenticeship completion and learner support, reducing the gap between starts and sustained employment
- → Expand Level 4–5 supervisory, nursing associate and advanced practitioner pathways
- → Strengthen progression routes from frontline care roles into regulated professions, with clear career ladders visible from the point of entry
- → Embed digital, safeguarding and leadership capability within mainstream training at all levels
- → Support employer-led retention and workforce wellbeing, recognising that training alone cannot solve a stability problem rooted in working conditions and career prospects

Success measures include: apprenticeship completion rates improving; Level 4–5 health and social care enrolments tracked; progression from care roles into regulated professions monitored; digital and leadership content embedded at participating providers; employer-reported retention and wellbeing activity tracked.

Delivering the Plan

The priorities and workstreams in this section are the basis for a three-year programme of coordinated action across Cheshire and Warrington's skills system. The ERB and its partners will draw on all available resources including funding, networks, employer relationships and provider capacity to deliver against these priorities in alignment with this plan. The action plan is set out in detail in Annex B below, outlining lead organisations, timescales, milestone and success measures. Progress against each workstream will be tracked and reported throughout the LSIP period.

Annex A

LSIP Occupational Mapping Table (SOC–SIC Alignment using CASCOT)

Table A3.1:
LSIP Occupation Mapping Table to SOC–SIC Mapping (Advanced Manufacturing and Agri-Tech)

Annex A provides supporting occupational and industrial mapping for the skills needs identified in Section 1. The SOC and SIC tables are not intended to describe each sector in full; rather, they identify the key occupations, sector links and classification limitations associated with the priority skills shortages and progression needs highlighted through the LSIP research. The tables should therefore be read alongside the sector evidence and priorities in Section 1 and the agreed actions in Section 2 and Annex B.

Occupational coding has been undertaken using SOC 2020 classifications, supported by the CASCOT coding tool to ensure consistency with national standards. Within each priority sector, SOC codes are used to identify key occupations and track labour market trends, while the SIC codes define industrial structure and sectoral employment.

Mapping between occupations and industries reflects IFATE occupational pathways, NOMIS employment structures and Lightcast demand data at a Cheshire and Warrington level. It is recognised that many occupations span multiple SIC codes and some roles (e.g. engineers, electricians) are cross-sectoral and that this SIC–SOC alignment is indicative rather than exclusive.

LSIP Occupation Name	Definition	Relevant SOC Code(s)	LSIP Sector	Relevant SIC Code(s)	Mapping Limitations / Notes.
Mechanical Engineers.	Design and develop mechanical systems and manufacturing processes.	2122	Advanced Manufacturing.	2811, 2899	Core regional strength supporting automotive, aerospace supply chain and industrial machinery; critical to EV transition and advanced vehicle systems.
Electrical Engineers.	Design and maintain electrical and control systems.	2123	Advanced Manufacturing.	2712, 2611	Core enabling capability across automotive electrification, control systems and industrial automation; overlaps with clean energy sector.
Engineering Technicians.	Support implementation, maintenance and optimisation of systems.	3113	Advanced Manufacturing.	2811, 2822	Critical workforce layer across all subsectors, particularly in automotive, chemicals and advanced production; key pressure point in local labour market.
Process Engineers (Chemical).	Design and optimise industrial chemical and process systems.	2121, 2129	Advanced Manufacturing.	2011, 2059	Core regional strength linked to major chemical and process industry cluster (e.g. Ellesmere Port / Runcorn); overlaps with life sciences and energy.
Metal Working Fitters.	Fabricate and assemble metal components.	5223	Advanced Manufacturing.	2511, 2599	Core supply chain occupation supporting automotive, aerospace and fabrication; high replacement demand due to ageing workforce.

Table A3.1:
Continued...

LSIP Occupation Name	Definition	Relevant SOC Code(s)	LSIP Sector	Relevant SIC Code(s)	Mapping Limitations / Notes.
Vehicle Technicians.	Maintain and repair transport equipment.	5231	Advanced Manufacturing.	2910, 2920	Core automotive capability linked to major OEM presence (Bentley, Stellantis) and wider supply chain; transitioning toward EV maintenance and diagnostics.
Electricians & Electrical Fitters.	Install and maintain electrical systems.	5241	Advanced Manufacturing.	2712, 4321	Cross-sector occupation critical to manufacturing, electrification and industrial systems; increasing importance due to net zero transition.
Process Operatives.	Operate industrial plant and machinery.	8114	Advanced Manufacturing.	2011, 1089	Significant employment base in food processing and chemicals; roles increasingly automation-exposed and requiring upskilling.
Robotics & Automation Engineers.	Design and maintain robotic and automated systems.	2122, 2129	Advanced Manufacturing.	2811, 2822	Emerging capability within local firms, embedded across automotive, machinery and production systems; not a discrete SIC category but increasingly central to Industry 4.0 adoption. Noted within Agri-tech for dairy and food security.
Agri-tech & Food Process Technicians.	Apply engineering and digital technologies to food production and farming systems.	3111, 3113	Advanced Manufacturing.	1011, 1089	Strategic place-based niche, rooted in strong dairy and food production base and Reaseheath-led innovation; low employment volume but high importance for rural economy, sustainability and modernisation.

Table A3.2:
LSIP Occupation Mapping Table to SOC–SIC Mapping (Clean Energy)

Clean energy employment is not captured as a discrete sector within SIC 2007 and is therefore represented through a combination of construction, energy and manufacturing activities, with occupational demand concentrated in skilled trades and technician roles.

LSIP Occupation Name	Definition (LSIP context)	Relevant SOC Code(s)	LSIP Sector	Relevant SIC Code(s)	Mapping Limitations / Further Information.
Electricians and Electrical Installation Trades.	Installation and maintenance of electrical systems supporting low–carbon energy technologies (e.g. solar PV, EV infrastructure, battery storage).	5241	Clean Energy / Construction.	43.21	Core delivery occupation for electrification. Demand is increasing but workforce supply is constrained by training capacity and progression into retrofit and low–carbon specialisms. Not all activity is distinguishable from general electrical work in datasets.
Plumbers and Heating Engineers.	Installation and maintenance of heating systems, including low–carbon technologies such as heat pumps.	5314	Clean Energy / Construction.	43.22	Critical occupation for heat decarbonisation, but transition to low–carbon systems requires additional skills not fully reflected in standard occupational coding.
Engineering Technicians (Energy / Building Services).	Support installation, maintenance and optimisation of energy systems and infrastructure.	3112	Clean Energy / Advanced Manufacturing.	35.11, 43.21	Technician–critical layer, supporting both installation and system integration. Local provision at Levels 4–5 is limited, constraining progression pathways.
Electrical Engineers (Energy Systems).	Design and development of electrical infrastructure, grid systems and low–carbon technologies.	2123	Clean Energy / Advanced Manufacturing.	35.11, 27.11	Specialist occupation, supporting system design and infrastructure. Workforce relatively small compared to trade–level demand.
Energy and Process Engineers.	Design and optimisation of energy systems, including industrial decarbonisation processes.	2121, 2129	Clean Energy / Advanced Manufacturing.	35.11, 20.11	Cross–sector role spanning manufacturing and energy. Not always clearly attributable to clean energy within SIC classifications.

Table A3.2:
Continued...

LSIP Occupation Name	Definition (LSIP context)	Relevant SOC Code(s)	LSIP Sector	Relevant SIC Code(s)	Mapping Limitations / Further Information.
Construction Project Managers (Energy / Retrofit).	Planning and coordination of energy infrastructure and retrofit projects.	2436	Clean Energy / Construction.	41.2	Delivery-critical role, particularly for scaling retrofit and infrastructure projects. Demand linked to programme funding and policy stability.
Energy Operatives and Technicians.	Operational roles in energy generation, distribution and maintenance.	8149, 8114	Clean Energy.	35.11, 35.13	Broad occupational grouping; specific low-carbon roles (e.g. renewables technicians) are not always separately identifiable in SOC data.
Low-Carbon and Retrofit Specialists (emerging).	Installation and integration of low-carbon systems (heat pumps, solar PV, insulation, smart controls).	Not fully captured in SOC.	Clean Energy / Construction.	43.21–43.22	Emerging cross-cutting role, not fully captured in SOC 2020. Evidence highlights fragmented training provision, low workforce participation and system-level constraints in retrofit delivery and skills supply.

Table A3.3:
LSIP Occupation Mapping Table to SOC–SIC Mapping (Business and Professional Services)

Business & Professional Services spans financial, legal, professional and administrative activities (SIC Sections K, M and N). Employment is distributed across the economy and supports activity in all sectors rather than forming a discrete industrial cluster. Many occupations are cross–sectoral and are therefore indicative rather than exclusive to a single SIC classification.

LSIP Occupation Name	Definition (LSIP context)	Relevant SOC Code(s)	LSIP Sector	Relevant SIC Code(s)	Mapping Limitations / Further Information.
Chartered Accountants and Auditors.	Provision of accounting, audit and financial reporting services to businesses.	2421	Business & Professional Services.	69.2	Core occupation within professional services, supporting business operations across sectors. Activity is embedded within the wider economy rather than a discrete cluster.
Financial and Investment Professionals.	Financial analysis, investment advice and corporate finance functions.	3538, 2421	Business & Professional Services.	64.99, 66.19	Financial services activity is included within the sector definition but is not treated as a standalone sector locally. Roles support business growth and investment across the economy.
Management Consultants and Business Analysts.	Advisory roles supporting business strategy, operations and performance improvement.	2423, 3545	Business & Professional Services.	70.22	Cross–sector function supporting productivity and transformation. Demand linked to business growth and restructuring activity.
Legal Professionals.	Provision of legal advice and services to individuals and businesses.	2413	Business & Professional Services.	69.1	Core professional service supporting commercial, corporate and property activity. Employment is distributed across the region rather than clustered.
HR Professionals.	Workforce planning, recruitment and organisational development.	2424	Business & Professional Services.	70.10, 78.10	Cross–sector role supporting labour market functioning. Demand reflects wider recruitment and retention pressures across sectors.

Table A3.3:
Continued...

LSIP Occupation Name	Definition (LSIP context)	Relevant SOC Code(s)	LSIP Sector	Relevant SIC Code(s)	Mapping Limitations / Further Information.
Marketing and Sales Professionals.	Promotion of products and services and management of customer engagement.	3543, 1132	Business & Professional Services.	73.11, 73.20	Embedded across sectors, particularly SMEs. Increasingly digital-led but not confined to digital industries.
Administrative and Business Support Occupations.	Clerical, administrative and operational support to business functions.	4112, 4215	Business & Professional Services.	82.11, 82.99	Large employment base supporting all sectors. Roles are subject to automation and changing skill requirements.
Customer Service Occupations.	Delivery of customer-facing services including contact centre activity.	7211	Business & Professional Services.	82.2	High-volume roles supporting service delivery. Increasingly affected by digitalisation and automation.
Digital Business and IT Professionals.	Development and maintenance of digital systems supporting business operations.	2136, 2139	Business & Professional Services / Digital.	62.01, 62.02	Digital capability embedded within business services. Roles overlap with the Digital sector and are not confined to a single SIC classification.
Property and Real Estate Professionals.	Management, valuation and development of property assets.	2431, 3552	Business & Professional Services.	68.10, 68.20	Supports commercial and residential development across the region. Linked to wider economic and infrastructure growth.
Recruitment and Employment Services Professionals.	Provision of recruitment and workforce supply services.	3562	Business & Professional Services.	78.10, 78.20	Supports labour market functioning across all sectors. Demand reflects wider workforce pressures rather than sector-specific growth.

Table A3.4:
LSIP Occupation Mapping Table to SOC–SIC Mapping (Life Sciences)

Life Sciences spans R&D (72), pharmaceutical manufacturing (21), medtech and elements of health (86), meaning SIC–SOC alignment is indicative. Many roles are cross-sectoral, particularly with Digital and Advanced Manufacturing, and are noted accordingly.

LSIP Occupation Name	Definition	Relevant SOC Code(s)	LSIP Sector	Relevant SIC Code(s)	Mapping Limitations / Notes.
Biological Scientists / Biomedical Researchers.	Scientific professionals undertaking biological, biomedical and pharmaceutical research.	2112	Life Sciences.	72.11, 72.19, 21.10, 21.20	Core regional strength linked to Alderley Park, Medicines Discovery Catapult, AstraZeneca and the wider bioscience cluster. Covers R&D and pharmaceutical activity; may overlap with higher education and clinical research settings.
Laboratory Technicians.	Technical staff supporting laboratory testing, analysis, sample preparation and quality processes.	3111	Life Sciences.	72.11, 72.19, 21.20, 86.90	Critical Level 3–5 pipeline role. The report identifies technician pathways as underdeveloped despite local Level 3 and bootcamp provision. Key to widening access beyond graduate-only recruitment routes.
Pharmaceutical Manufacturing Technicians.	Technicians supporting production, process control and compliance in pharmaceutical manufacturing.	3111, 8132	Life Sciences.	21.10, 21.20	Core regional strength linked to pharmaceutical employment growth from 4,500 to 6,000 jobs between 2022 and 2024. Overlaps with Advanced Manufacturing where activity is production-based.
Quality Assurance / Quality Control Specialists.	Staff ensuring products, processes and laboratory outputs meet regulated quality standards.	3119, 3567	Life Sciences.	21.20, 72.11, 72.19	Technician-critical and regulation-critical role group. Important for pharmaceutical manufacturing, laboratory science and medical technology. SOC mapping is indicative because QA/QC roles may sit under science, compliance or production occupations depending on job content.

Table A3.4:
Continued...

LSIP Occupation Name	Definition	Relevant SOC Code(s)	LSIP Sector	Relevant SIC Code(s)	Mapping Limitations / Notes.
Bioinformaticians / Health Data Analysts.	Specialists applying data science, AI, genomics and digital tools to life sciences and health innovation.	2135, 2136, 2425	Life Sciences.	72.11, 72.19, 62.01, 62.02	Emerging capability within the local cluster, reflecting AI-enabled diagnostics, genomics and health data. Cross-sector with Digital; not fully captured by a single life sciences SIC code.
Clinical Trial Coordinators.	Staff coordinating clinical studies, participant pathways, documentation and regulatory processes.	3219, 3567	Life Sciences.	72.19, 86.90	Cluster-supporting occupation linked to clinical and regulatory innovation. Mapping is broad because clinical trial roles may be coded as health associate professionals, research support or administrative/regulatory roles.
Medical Device / MedTech Technicians.	Technical staff supporting development, testing, production or maintenance of medical technologies.	3111, 3113	Life Sciences.	26.60, 32.50, 72.19	Growth subsector: medical equipment employment rises from 1,175 to 1,750 jobs in the report. Overlaps with electronics, instrumentation and Advanced Manufacturing.
Pharmaceutical / Medical Device Operatives.	Operational roles supporting manufacturing, packaging and production in regulated life sciences settings.	8132, 8114	Life Sciences.	21.20, 32.50	Operational layer supporting pharmaceutical and medical device production. These roles are important for access routes but may be automation-exposed and require regulated manufacturing knowledge.
Regulatory Affairs / Compliance Professionals.	Professionals managing regulatory submissions, documentation and compliance across medicines, diagnostics and medtech.	2429, 3567	Life Sciences.	21.20, 72.19, 86.90	Specialist enabling capability for a regulated sector. Mapping is approximate because regulatory roles are not always separately identifiable in SOC and may sit within science, legal, compliance or management occupations.
Animal Life Sciences / Veterinary Pharmaceutical Specialists.	Scientific and technical roles linked to animal health, veterinary pharmaceuticals and related R&D.	2112, 2216, 3111	Life Sciences.	21.20, 72.11, 75.00	Place-based niche linked to Dechra Pharmaceuticals and the animal life sciences cluster in the west of the sub-region. Crosses life sciences, veterinary and pharmaceutical manufacturing classifications.

Table A3.5:
LSIP Occupation Mapping Table to SOC–SIC Mapping (Construction & Built Environment & Electrical)

Construction occupations are mapped across SIC codes relating to building construction and specialised trades. Emerging retrofit roles are not fully captured within existing classifications and are therefore described within mapping limitations.

LSIP Occupation Name	Definition	SOC Code(s)	Sector	SIC	Notes.
Electricians and Electrical Installation Trades.	Install and maintain electrical systems including low-carbon technologies.	5241	Construction / Clean Energy.	43.21	Core trade and critical constraint in retrofit delivery, with rising demand linked to electrification.
Plumbers and Heating Engineers.	Install and maintain water, heating and low-carbon systems (incl. heat pumps).	5314	Construction / Clean Energy.	43.22	Core trade in retrofit and decarbonisation, particularly for heat pump deployment.
Carpenters and Joiners.	Structural and finishing woodwork in construction and retrofit.	5315	Construction.	41.2	Core trade with high replacement demand, critical for housing delivery and retrofit works.
Bricklayers and Masons.	Construction of structural walls and building fabric.	5312	Construction.	41.2	High-demand trade, with persistent recruitment challenges nationally.
Construction Project Managers.	Planning and oversight of construction and retrofit projects.	2436	Construction.	41.2	Coordination role, critical for delivery capacity and scaling retrofit programmes.
Engineering Technicians (Electrical/Building Services).	Support installation and optimisation of systems.	3112	Construction / Manufacturing.	43.21	Technician layer supporting multiple trades, with limited Level 4–5 provision locally.
Construction Operatives.	General site-based roles supporting construction activity.	8149	Construction & Built Environment.	41.2	Entry-level workforce, important for access pathways but increasingly affected by automation and productivity changes.
Low-Carbon Retrofit Specialists (emerging).	Integration of retrofit systems across buildings.	Not fully captured.	Construction / Clean Energy.	43.21–43.22	Cross-cutting role not fully captured in SOC; reflects system-wide skills gap.

Table A3.6:
LSIP Occupation Mapping Table to SOC–SIC Mapping (Health and Social Care)

Health and social care employment spans multiple SIC classifications, with workforce demand concentrated in care and support roles, and structural challenges driven primarily by retention, progression and service demand rather than entry-level supply.

LSIP Occupation Name	Definition (LSIP context)	Relevant SOC Code(s)	LSIP Sector	Relevant SIC Code(s)	Mapping Limitations / Further Information.
Nurses (Adult, Mental Health, Community).	Provision of clinical care across hospital, community and primary care settings.	2231	Health & Social Care.	86.10, 86.90	Core clinical workforce, with sustained demand linked to demographic pressures and service demand. Workforce shortages driven by retention and workload pressures rather than entry-level supply alone.
Care Workers, Senior Care Workers and Home Carers.	Provision of personal care and support in residential and domiciliary settings.	6136, 6145	Health & Social Care.	87.30, 88.10	Largest occupational group, critical to system functioning. High turnover and recruitment challenges; roles often undervalued and not fully aligned to progression pathways.
Allied Health Professionals (AHPs).	Therapeutic and diagnostic roles including physiotherapists, radiographers and occupational therapists.	2221–2229	Health & Social Care.	86.10, 86.90	Specialist clinical roles supporting rehabilitation and diagnostics. Workforce supply constrained by training capacity and clinical placement availability.
Health Associate Professionals (Healthcare Assistants).	Support delivery of clinical care under supervision.	3211, 3212	Health & Social Care.	86.10, 86.90	Critical support workforce, forming entry and progression routes into clinical roles. Demand increasing due to service pressures.
Social Workers.	Assessment and support of individuals and families in need of care and safeguarding.	2442	Health & Social Care.	88.1	High-responsibility role, with recruitment and retention challenges linked to workload and case complexity.

Table A3.6:
Continued...

LSIP Occupation Name	Definition (LSIP context)	Relevant SOC Code(s)	LSIP Sector	Relevant SIC Code(s)	Mapping Limitations / Further Information.
Health Services Managers/Directors, Residential, Day and Domiciliary Care Managers and Proprietors.	Strategic and operational management of health and care services.	1171, 1232	Health & Social Care.	86.10, 87.10	System-critical leadership roles, particularly in service transformation and integration. Workforce relatively small but essential for delivery reform. Critical recruitment shortages preventing growth of services such as Registered Managers.
Public Health and Community Health Roles.	Delivery of preventative health services and community-based interventions.	2461, 3221	Health & Social Care.	84.12, 86.90	Cross-sector roles spanning health services and local authority functions; not always fully captured within health SIC classifications.
Digital Health and Data Roles (emerging).	Application of digital systems, data analytics and health technologies in service delivery.	2136, 2139	Health / Digital.	62.01, 86.10	Emerging capability, reflecting increasing digitalisation of health services. Not fully captured within traditional health occupational structures.
Integrated Care and Support Roles (emerging).	Coordination of care across health, social care and community services.	Not fully captured in SOC.	Health & Social Care.	86.10, 88.10	Emerging cross-system roles, reflecting integrated care models. Boundaries between occupations are blurred and not fully represented in SOC classifications.

Table A3.7:
LSIP Occupation Mapping Table to SOC-SIC Mapping (Cross-cutting Digital)

Digital employment is embedded across all sectors and is therefore not fully captured within discrete SIC classifications, with demand driven by economy-wide digitalisation.

LSIP Occupation Name	Definition (LSIP context)	Relevant SOC Code(s)	LSIP Sector	Relevant SIC Code(s)	Mapping Limitations / Further Information.
Software Developers and Programmers.	Design and development of software applications and systems across sectors.	2136	Digital.	62.01	Core digital occupation, with demand driven by digitalisation across all sectors. Employment spans multiple industries and is not confined to digital firms.
IT Business Analysts, Architects and Systems Designers.	Analysis and design of digital systems and business processes.	2135	Digital.	62.02	Cross-sector enabling role, supporting digital transformation in manufacturing, health and business services.
IT User Support Technicians.	Support and maintenance of IT systems and infrastructure.	3131	Digital.	62.02	High-volume occupation, critical for business operations. Often entry-level but with progression challenges into higher-skilled roles.
Cyber Security Professionals.	Protection of digital systems, networks and data.	2139	Digital.	62.02	Emerging high-demand role, not always clearly identifiable within SOC. Demand increasing due to data security and regulatory requirements.
Data Analysts and Data Scientists.	Analysis and interpretation of data to support decision-making.	2425, 2135	Digital.	62.01, 63.11	Growing capability, supporting productivity and innovation across sectors. Often embedded within non-digital industries.

Table A3.7:
Continued...

LSIP Occupation Name	Definition (LSIP context)	Relevant SOC Code(s)	LSIP Sector	Relevant SIC Code(s)	Mapping Limitations / Further Information.
Digital Marketing and Content Professionals.	Use of digital platforms for marketing, communications and engagement.	3543	Digital / Business Services.	73.11	Cross-sector role supporting SMEs and business growth. Increasingly digital-first but not always classified within digital SIC codes.
Digital Technicians and Apprentices (pipeline).	Entry-level roles supporting IT systems, software and digital services.	3131 (pipeline)	Digital.	62.01–62.02	Pipeline into digital occupations, with provision concentrated at Level 3–4. Progression to higher-level technical roles remains limited locally.
AI and Advanced Digital Specialists (emerging).	Development and application of AI, machine learning and advanced digital systems.	Not fully captured in SOC.	Digital.	62.01	Emerging capability, not fully represented in SOC 2020. Demand growing but workforce remains small and highly specialised.

Table A3.8:
LSIP Occupation Mapping Table to SOC–SIC Mapping (Cross–cutting Sustainability)

Sustainability and net zero activity are not captured as discrete sectors within SIC or SOC classifications and are instead reflected through the adaptation of existing occupations across construction, manufacturing, energy and land–based sectors.

LSIP Occupation Name	Definition (LSIP context)	Relevant SOC Code(s)	LSIP Sector	Relevant SIC Code(s)	Mapping Limitations / Further Information.
Electricians and Electrical Installation Trades (Low–Carbon).	Installation of electrical systems supporting low–carbon technologies.	5241	Sustainability / Construction / Clean Energy.	43.21	Core "mid–green" occupation, with demand driven by electrification and retrofit. Activity embedded within construction rather than a standalone sector.
Plumbers and Heating Engineers (Low–Carbon Systems).	Installation of heating systems including heat pumps and energy–efficient technologies.	5314	Sustainability / Construction.	43.22	Critical role in decarbonisation of heat, requiring upskilling from traditional systems to low–carbon technologies.
Engineers (Energy, Environmental, Process).	Design and optimisation of low–carbon systems and processes.	2121, 2123, 2129	Sustainability / Advanced Manufacturing.	35.11, 20.11	Cross–sector role spanning manufacturing, energy and infrastructure. Not identifiable as a distinct sustainability occupation in SIC.
Environmental Professionals.	Monitoring, assessment and management of environmental impact and sustainability.	2152	Sustainability.	74.9	Specialist but relatively small workforce, supporting compliance, planning and environmental management.
Energy Efficiency and Retrofit Specialists.	Delivery of building retrofit, insulation and energy efficiency improvements.	Not fully captured in SOC.	Sustainability / Construction.	43.21–43.22	Emerging role, not fully captured in SOC 2020. Evidence highlights fragmented training provision and system–level delivery constraints.

Table A3.8:
Continued...

LSIP Occupation Name	Definition (LSIP context)	Relevant SOC Code(s)	LSIP Sector	Relevant SIC Code(s)	Mapping Limitations / Further Information.
Sustainability Managers and Consultants.	Development and implementation of sustainability strategies within organisations.	2423	Sustainability / Business Services.	70.22	Growing role driven by regulatory and corporate requirements. Often embedded within broader business functions.
Agricultural and Land-Based Sustainability Roles.	Application of sustainable practices in agriculture and land management.	5119, 1211	Sustainability / Agri-tech.	01.xx	Cross-sector roles linked to environmental land management; not always classified as sustainability occupations.
Green Skills Across Occupations (cross-cutting).	Integration of sustainability knowledge into existing roles (e.g. construction, engineering, logistics).	Not applicable.	All sectors.	All relevant SIC.	Sustainability is a cross-cutting capability, not a discrete occupational category. Majority of demand is within existing occupations rather than new roles.

Annex B

This activity plan is a live document which will be reviewed and updated with stakeholders throughout the LSIP period. Following publication, the ERB will be leading a number of activities to ensure the action plan is deliverable. Specific lead organisation(s) will be agreed and assigned for each activity as the LSIP moves into the delivery phase and to this end engagement with the providers has already commenced.

1. Employer voice, governance and intelligence – ensuring employer insight drives the system.

Priority / Programme: Employer Voice & Governance

Project	Lead Organisation(s)	Supporting Partners	Timescales	Expected Outcomes	Monitoring and measurement
Be part of various Steering Boards across the region, ensuring a consistent business voice on skills into economic growth and Corporate Social Responsibility activities.	ERB / LSIP Team.	Cheshire Chambers. Combined Authority. Local Authorities. Business Advisory Board. Other Business and Provider Boards as identified throughout the period.	April 2026 – March 2029. Ongoing involvement in Advisory Boards, Steering Boards and Groups, providing a clear voice on skills to employers.	Consistent business voice embedded across regional steering boards; skills priorities reflect real employer demand.	Number of boards attended; documented instances of employer input shaping board decisions; annual employer feedback.
Enhance provider employer boards to ensure businesses join, attend and take part in active conversation around skills requirements.	ERB / LSIP Team.	Cheshire Chambers.	Sept 2026 – March 2029. Ongoing communications with business about the benefits of being part of the college employer boards.	Active, well-attended provider employer boards driving curriculum and provision changes informed by employer need.	Board attendance rates; number of curriculum/provision changes evidenced as employer-led each year.
Set up LSIP business voice board for C&W, ensuring all priority sectors are represented, feeding from employer boards and into wider regional activities (intel from college and uni Employer Boards).	ERB / LSIP Team.	Colleges. University of Chester. ITPs. Recruitment Agencies. Trade Unions. TECs.	Sept 2026 - March 2029. First meeting October 2026 with quarterly meetings thereafter. Intel gathered to be shared with BAB / LAs / CA / DWP.	A unified LSIP business voice board representing all priority sectors, feeding intelligence into regional decision-making.	Board established by Sept 2026; sector coverage (% priority sectors represented); meeting frequency and attendance.
Work with CA to ensure skills funding is appropriately targeted, to meet the needs of local businesses, including skills training bids are evidenced with business support and a true need for the course, and providers / consultants are from our local area.	ERB / LSIP Team.	Cheshire & Warrington Combined Authority. CWLPN.	April 2026 – March 2029. ASF confirmation Summer 2026. Subject to Mayoral confirmation from May 2027.	Skills funding consistently targeted at evidenced local need with local providers delivering.	% of funded bids supported by employer evidence; % of delivery awarded to local providers/ consultants.
Maintain engagement with businesses who completed our survey.	ERB / LSIP Team.	Local Authorities Economic Growth Teams.	June 2026 – March 2029 (ongoing quarterly contact).	Strong, engaged employer pipeline feeding live LSIP intelligence via searchable CRM.	CRM operational and populated; engagement and repeat survey participation rates; attendance at events.

1. Employer voice, governance and intelligence – ensuring employer insight drives the system *Continued.*

Priority / Programme: Single Source of Truth – website, regional offer and intelligence

Project	Lead Organisation(s)	Supporting Partners	Timescales	Expected Outcomes	Monitoring and measurement
Continue to improve our website, to ensure it is recognised as the go-to place for business on training and skills.	ERB / LSIP Team.	CA. LAs. Providers. C&W Careers Hub.	June 2026 – March 2027.	Website recognised as the go-to centralised source for business skills and training information.	Web traffic; user feedback and satisfaction; return visit rate.
Maintain accurate knowledge of investment across the region, helping to join up employment and training activity.	LAs.	Cheshire Chambers. CA.	June 2026 – March 2029.	Joined-up employment and training planning aligned to regional investment.	Investment pipeline tracked; alignment of provision to confirmed investments.
Provide training provider brokerage service to all businesses.	ERB / LSIP Team.	CWLPN.	June 2026 – March 2029.	SMEs accessing training easily through trusted brokerage service.	Brokerage requests handled; SME satisfaction; training matched to need.
Regular updates to business to understand education landscape.	ERB / LSIP Team.	Cheshire Chambers. CWLPN. DWP.	January 2027 – March 2029 (quarterly updates).	Employers have current, accurate understanding of the regional education and provider landscape.	Newsletter analytics (open/click rates); employer survey on landscape awareness.

2. Skills system navigation – supporting SMEs to connect with the right provision efficiently.

Priority / Programme: Funding, Levy & Brokerage

Project	Lead Organisation(s)	Supporting Partners	Timescales	Expected Outcomes	Monitoring and measurement
Continue to provide Apprenticeship / Growth and Skills Levy advice and transfer service to all businesses.	ERB / LSIP Team.	Cheshire Chambers. CWLPN.	June 2026 – March 2029.	Increased levy transfer utilisation supporting more apprentices, particularly in SMEs.	£ transferred; number of apprentices supported via transfer.
Create and maintain a full picture of training funding available to businesses across C&W, to be used by Economic Growth teams in the LAs for inward investment.	LA funding leads. DWP.	CWLPN.	June 2026 – March 2029. Once in place, regular review and maintenance required.	Comprehensive, current funding map used by LA Economic Growth teams to support inward investment.	Map updated quarterly; LA usage; inward investment cases citing the resource.
Ensure cross-border information is understood and exploited where possible, to ensure cross-border employment benefits.	WCNWC.	North Wales Regional Skills Partnership.	Jan 2027 – March 2029.	Cross-border employment and training opportunities understood and exploited.	Joint cross-border initiatives; learner/employee mobility data.
Provide up to date information to businesses (via website) on accessing new apprenticeship standards and units and funding via the new Growth & Skills Levy.	ERB / LSIP Team.	Cheshire Chambers.	Delay until we have full visibility of changes Autumn 2026 onwards.	Businesses well-informed on Skills & Growth Levy changes and able to access new modules and funding.	Website resource updates published; visits to levy guidance; employer enquiries.
Enhance employer engagement and coordinated brokerage to support microbusinesses.	ERB / LSIP Team.	Cheshire Chambers. CWLPN. Providers.	January 2027 - March 2029.	Microbusinesses receiving coordinated, accessible employer engagement and brokerage support.	Microbusinesses engaged; brokerage cases handled; satisfaction feedback.
Ensure Providers share their remaining levy and are therefore leading by example.	ERB / LSIP Team.	Providers.	Delay until we have full visibility of changes Autumn 2026 onwards.	Providers leading by example through transferring remaining apprenticeship levy.	£ levy transferred by providers; apprentices supported as a result.

3. Strengthening technical pathways and progression – building the supply of qualified people at the right levels.

Priority / Programme: Graduate, Early-Career and Data Insight

Project	Lead Organisation(s)	Supporting Partners	Timescales	Expected Outcomes	Monitoring and measurement
Increasing higher technical capacity for supervision, assessment and coordination roles.	Providers.	IoT. TECs.	For 26/27 Academic Year.	Increased higher technical capacity in supervision, assessment and coordination roles.	Learner enrolments at higher technical levels; progression into supervisory/assessor roles.
Support graduate and postgraduate progression in bioscience, data science and health technologies.	Uni of Chester.	IoT.	For 26/27 Academic Year.	Strong graduate and postgraduate progression in bioscience, data science and health technologies.	Graduate/postgraduate numbers in target areas; progression into regional roles.
Improve graduate retention and progression into professional roles within the regional labour market.	Uni of Chester.	ERB / LSIP Team. Cheshire Chambers.	For 26/27 Academic Year.	Improved graduate retention with more graduates progressing into regional professional roles.	Graduate retention rate (% staying in C&W); progression into professional roles.
Improve apprenticeship completion and learner support.	Providers.	IoT.	For 26/27 Academic Year.	Improved apprenticeship completion rates through better learner support.	Completion rates year-on-year; learner support engagement; reasons for non-completion tracked.
Undertake study on underemployment in C&W, to consider A Level destinations and university student destinations and L4 to L5 progression, and consider what further interventions might be needed as a result.	Uni of Chester.	ERB / LSIP Team. Providers.	January 2027.	Robust evidence base on underemployment, A Level destinations and L4–5 progression to inform interventions.	Study published; recommendations adopted; follow-up interventions tracked.
Improve visibility of apprenticeship and adult skills data to quantify supply against demand more accurately.	LAs.	Providers.	For 26/27 Academic Year.	Improved visibility of apprenticeship and adult skills supply versus demand.	Data dashboard live; supply/demand gaps quantified; updates published quarterly.
Support local businesses to develop collaborative apprenticeship recruitment and training models for apprenticeships within their sector- City Century type Model – L7 activity pilot in Chester with Chester Uni.	ERB / LSIP Team.	Uni of Chester. Cheshire Chambers.	June 2027 - March 2029.	Collaborative apprenticeship recruitment and training models live within sectors (e.g. City Century pilot).	Number of collaborative cohorts; apprentice numbers; sector models established.
Support to develop NextGen activities across our region (in work progression).	Cheshire Chambers.	ERB / LSIP Team.	January 2027 – March 2029.	Improved in-work progression pathways for existing employees.	NextGen participants; progression outcomes (promotions, pay, qualifications).

3. Strengthening technical pathways and progression – building the supply of qualified people at the right levels *Continued.*

Priority / Programme: Pathways & Progression

Project	Lead Organisation(s)	Supporting Partners	Timescales	Expected Outcomes	Monitoring and measurement
Expand professional apprenticeships aligned to key occupations such as accountancy, HR, compliance and data analysis.	Providers.	IoT. TECs.	For 26/27 Academic Year.	Expanded professional apprenticeship offer in accountancy, HR, compliance and data analysis.	Apprenticeship starts in target occupations; completion rates; employer participation.
Support clearer progression between rural, manufacturing and digital routes.	Providers.	IoT. TECs.	For 26/27 Academic Year.	Clearer learner progression pathways across rural, manufacturing and digital routes.	Number of cross-sector progression routes mapped; learner movements between sectors.
Improving starts-to-achievements conversion in core trades and apprenticeships.	Providers.	IoT. TECs.	For 26/27 Academic Year.	Higher conversion from apprenticeship starts to achievements in core trades.	Starts-to-achievements ratio (year-on-year); benchmark against national average.
Improve progression from FE to higher technical and degree-level routes.	Providers.	IoT. TECs.	For 26/27 Academic Year.	Increased FE-to-HE/higher technical progression.	FE leaver progression rates into HE/Level 4+; cohort tracking.
Continue to close electrotechnical skills gaps through Cheshire & Warrington Electrotechnical Training and Careers Alliance (ETCA).	ETCA.	ERB / LSIP Team. ECA. LAs. Providers.	June 2026 - March 2029, with regular reviews.	Reduced electrotechnical skills gaps through coordinated ETCA delivery.	ETCA learner numbers; vacancy fill rates in electrotechnical roles; employer satisfaction.
Scale Level 3–5 technician and skilled-trade routes aligned to clean power, hydrogen and retrofit, applied digital, engineering.	Providers.	LAs.	For 26/27 Academic Year.	Scaled Level 3–5 technician routes aligned to clean power, hydrogen and retrofit, and applied digital pathways.	Learner starts at Level 3–5 in target sectors; completion rates; employer recruitment.
Strengthen higher technical qualifications in automation, mechatronics and industrial digitalisation.	Providers.	IoT. Uni of Chester.	For 26/27 Academic Year.	Strengthened higher technical qualifications in automation, mechatronics and industrial digitalisation.	Enrolments at Level 4–5; employer take-up; progression into roles.
Protect and strengthen Level 4–5 technical engineering capacity.	Providers.	IoT.	For 26/27 Academic Year.	Protected and strengthened Level 4–5 technical engineering capacity in the region.	L4–5 engineering enrolments; provision retained/expanded; employer-confirmed demand met.
Strengthen technician pathways at Level 4–5 supporting laboratory and manufacturing roles.	Providers.	IoT.	For 26/27 Academic Year.	Strengthened Level 4–5 technician pathways supporting laboratory and manufacturing roles.	Learner numbers on lab/manufacturing technician pathways; employer recruitment outcomes.

3. Strengthening technical pathways and progression – building the supply of qualified people at the right levels *Continued.*

Priority / Programme: Pathways & Progression

Project	Lead Organisation(s)	Supporting Partners	Timescales	Expected Outcomes	Monitoring and measurement
Expand Level 4+ supervisory and advanced practitioner routes.	Providers.	IoT.	For 26/27 Academic Year.	Expanded Level 4+ supervisory and advanced practitioner provision.	Enrolments at Level 4+; progression into supervisory roles.
Strengthen higher technical and professional pathways in digital, finance and business services.	Providers.	IoT. Uni of Chester.	For 26/27 Academic Year.	Strengthened higher technical and professional pathways in digital, finance and business services.	Higher technical enrolments in target sectors; employer recruitment from these pathways.
Strengthen progression pathways from care roles into regulated professions.	Providers.	IoT. Skills For Care.	January 2027 – March 2029.	Strengthened progression from care roles into regulated professions (e.g. nursing, allied health).	Number of care workers progressing into regulated professions; pathway uptake.
Strengthen progression and upskilling pathways from hospitality and visitor economy roles into the wider talent pipeline across the region, actively promote accessible entry points into the labour market, providing opportunities to develop core employability skills.	DWP.	C&W Careers Hub. Local Hospitality Groups. Loal Visitor Economy Groups. Local Authorities. Young Chamber. Providers.	January 2027 – March 2029.	Hospitality entry-level roles supporting progression into a wider regional talent pipeline. Accessible entry routes into hospitality and visitor economy with strong core employability skills development.	Number of progressions out of entry roles; sector cross-progression evidenced. Learner starts in hospitality entry routes; progression into employment; employer feedback on core skills.
Use our website to provide "Regional Training Offer" (ETCA action).	ERB / LSIP Team.	ECA.	June 2026 – March 2029, with regular reviews.	A clear, easily-navigable Regional Training Offer accessible to businesses and learners.	Web traffic to the offer; employer/ learner feedback; courses listed and current.
Support JCP Careers Activities, including in-work progression, promoting the service to business (and providing feedback to improve service).	DWP / JCP.	Cheshire Chambers. CWLPN. LA Economic Growth teams.	January 2027 – Mar 2029.	Increased in-work progression and improved business awareness of JCP services.	Employers using JCP progression services; in-work progressions evidenced; service feedback.

4. Cross-cutting skills: digital, sustainability and retrofit.

Priority / Programme: Cross-cutting Skills Uplift

Project	Lead Organisation(s)	Supporting Partners	Timescales	Expected Outcomes	Monitoring and measurement
Employers have access to digital literacy provision for their workforce: MS Office. AI tools. Designing / creating digital content. Online services. Cybersecurity. Data capability / analytics.	Providers.	SNCCCI. DWP. LAs.	September 2026 – March 2029. Existing provision to be advertised for 26/27 academic year, with new courses 27/28 academic year.	Improved baseline digital literacy and confidence across the regional workforce.	Learner numbers on digital literacy provision; pre/post confidence scores; employer-reported digital capability uplift.
Employers have access to understanding of sustainability principles across all sectors: Resource efficiency, environmental management, sustainable design, adapting existing roles towards lower-carbon practices.	Providers.	SNCCCI. DWP. LAs.	September 2026 – March 2029. Existing provision to be advertised for 26/27 academic year, with new courses 27/28 academic year.	Improved cross-sector understanding of sustainability principles embedded into training.	Number of programmes embedding sustainability content; learner assessment outcomes; learner enrolments on relevant provision; employer-reported skills uptake; Number of upskilling courses delivered; participating businesses; case studies of role adaptation.
Embed retrofit competence and quality assurance into mainstream pathways.	Providers.	LAs. CITB. ECITB.	For 27/28 Academic Year.	Retrofit competence and quality assurance embedded across mainstream construction and trade pathways.	Number of pathways including retrofit content; learners certified.
Embed STEM and digital capability within land-based education pathways.	Providers.	IoT. TECs.	For 26/27 Academic Year.	STEM and digital capability embedded within land-based pathways.	Number of land-based programmes with embedded STEM/digital content; learner outcomes.
Embed digital and leadership capability within mainstream training.	Providers.	IoT. TECs.	For 26/27 Academic Year.	Mainstream training equips learners with digital and leadership capability.	Programmes updated; learners assessed; employer feedback on workplace readiness.
Embed digital capability within existing vocational and technical programmes.	Providers.	IoT. TECs.	For 26/27 Academic Year.	Digital capability embedded across vocational and technical programmes.	Number of programmes updated with digital content; learner attainment in digital units.
Support the combination of creative and technical skills that underpin digital innovation.	Providers.	IoT. TECs.	For 26/27 Academic Year.	Cross-disciplinary creative and technical skills supporting digital innovation.	Enrolments on combined creative-technical provision; case studies of learner/business innovation.
Embed sustainability knowledge within technical training programmes.	Providers.	IoT. TECs.	For 26/27 Academic Year.	Sustainability knowledge consistently embedded within technical training.	Number of technical programmes embedding sustainability; learner assessment.

5. Connecting people to employment – building supply and widening access.

Priority / Programme: Careers Inspiration and Role Models

Project	Lead Organisation(s)	Supporting Partners	Timescales	Expected Outcomes	Monitoring and measurement
Support the further development of Young Chamber, employer-led careers activities to secondary and post 16 education across our region.	Cheshire Chambers.	ERB / LSIP Team.	September 2026 – March 2029.	Active Young Chamber programme delivering employer-led careers activity in secondary and post-16 education.	Member schools/colleges; employer-led activities delivered; learner reach.
Create a regional ambassadors and role model databank across priority sectors to deliver careers talks and mentoring.	ERB / LSIP Team.	NWAAN. T Level Ambassador Networ. Sector Bodies. C&W Careers Hub. DWP. VCFSE.	Launch for 26/27 academic year with annual refresh.	Live ambassador networks across all priority sectors providing consistent careers messaging and "someone like me" role models.	Number of ambassadors recruited; school/community engagements; sector coverage; learner reach.
Promotion of existing careers IAG resources, using industry sector experts; to both businesses and providers.	C&W Careers Hub.	Sector Bodies.	Launch for 26/27 academic year with annual refresh.	Increased visibility and use of high-quality, sector-specific careers IAG resources.	Website hits; school/provider uptake of resources; user feedback.

Priority / Programme: Employability and Essential Skills

Project	Lead Organisation(s)	Supporting Partners	Timescales	Expected Outcomes	Monitoring and measurement
Bridge to Industry type model (ETCA activity) to be introduced by all FE and HE providers, to help businesses better understand the calibre of students and ease application processes, whilst focussing students on what businesses are looking for from their applicants.	ERB / LSIP Team.	ETCA. Providers.	September 2027 - March 2029.	Single, shared employability skills framework linked to sector requirements, adopted by schools, colleges and businesses across C&W.	Number of providers running the model; learner participation; employer feedback on applicant calibre.
Introduce one language on essential business skills, to be used by schools, colleges and businesses.	ERB / LSIP Team.	Skills Builder. Providers. SNCCCI to support Business engagement. C&W Careers Hub to support School engagement.	September 2026 – July 2027.	Single, shared essential business skills framework adopted by schools, colleges and businesses across C&W.	Adoption rate across institutions; learners assessed against framework; employer recognition of framework.
Continue to challenge business practices to ensure wider inclusivity and access to disadvantaged groups.	Cheshire Chambers.	DWP / LAs / VCFSE.	January 2027 – March 2029, using website updates.	More inclusive recruitment practices across regional employers, opening access for disadvantaged groups.	Employer pledges signed; inclusive recruitment audits; disadvantaged-group placement rates.

5. Connecting people to employment – building supply and widening access *Continued.*

Priority / Programme: Inclusion, Accessibility and Social Value

Project	Lead Organisation(s)	Supporting Partners	Timescales	Expected Outcomes	Monitoring and measurement
Provide opportunities for businesses to become involved in DWP initiatives, including Over 50s, veterans, ex-offenders, and flexible working.	Cheshire Chambers.	DWP. HMP Thorn Cross. Veteran Groups.	September 2027 – March 2029.	Employer participation in DWP initiatives across Over 50s, veterans, ex-offenders and flexible working.	Employer uptake by initiative; placements/outcomes for each cohort.
Support accessibility themes in rural communities (identify themes).	LAs.	ERB / LSIP Team. CWLPN. Cheshire Chambers.	January 2027 – March 2029.	Improved access to training for rural communities, with priority themes addressed.	Rural postcode participation rates; themes identified and provision delivered.
Support local business to become involved with health and wellbeing activities to better understand and support existing employees with health concerns.	DWP / JCP.	Cheshire Chambers. VCFSE. CWLPN.	January 2027 – March 2029.	Local businesses better supporting employee health and wellbeing.	Employer participation in wellbeing initiatives; case studies of staff support.
Offer opportunities to support local contractors and businesses with a holistic social value approach, which includes community, training, and inclusivity.	ERB / LSIP Team.	CA, LAs.	January 2027 – March 2029.	Local supply chains, communities and learners benefit from holistic social value commitments.	Number of contracts with social value plans delivered; community/training/inclusivity outcomes reported.
Ongoing connections with special needs schools and colleges and outreach programmes, to link them with opportunity for IAG and business support.	ERB / LSIP Team.	C&W Careers Hub.	April 2026 – March 2029.	Stronger SEND outreach with sustained employer connections offering IAG and progression opportunities.	Number of schools/colleges engaged; SEND learner placement and progression numbers.
Support businesses to become involved with Youth Guarantee opportunities.	DWP / JCP.	Cheshire Chambers. CWLPN.	April 2026 – March 2029.	More employers actively engaged in Youth Guarantee opportunities.	Number of employers signed up; young people placed; sustained outcomes (6-month destinations).
Support businesses to upskill their staff on EDI activities, including also mental health and overcoming barriers to engage.	ERB / LSIP Team Petty Pool College.	VCFSE.	June 2026 – March 2030.	Employers better equipped to deliver EDI, mental health support and barrier-removal practices.	Employers trained; staff reached; case studies of practice change.

Priority / Programme: Industry Placements and Work Experience

Project	Lead Organisation(s)	Supporting Partners	Timescales	Expected Outcomes	Monitoring and measurement
Promotion of importance of industry placements to business, promoting best practice model.	Cheshire Chambers / Uni of Chester / ERB / LSIP Team.	CWLPN / DWP / VCFS / T Level Ambassador Network / C&W Careers Hub.	June 2026 – March 2028.	More businesses offering and valuing T Level, FE and HE industry placements.	Placement numbers; new employer sign-ups; placement quality (learner/employer feedback).

6. Provider quality and teaching capacity.

Priority / Programme: Provider Collaboration and One-Message System

Project	Lead Organisation(s)	Supporting Partners	Timescales	Expected Outcomes	Monitoring and measurement
Promote and support the CWLPN as the authoritative hub for quality engagement on local training provision, enabling a coherent and consistent message to be shared with every provider ITPs & Colleges.	CWLPN.	ITPS. Providers.	Messaging from April onwards. September 2026 launch.	CWLPN recognised as the authoritative hub for provider engagement, with consistent messaging across ITPs and colleges.	Provider engagement levels; quarterly newsletter reach; attendance at online events and 3 in-person meetings/year.
Identify opportunities for collaborative working and projects between providers and colleges and DWP and promote these.	CWLPN.	NSN. Colleges. DWP. CA. LAs.	April 2026 – March 2029.	Active collaboration between providers, colleges and DWP on shared projects.	

Priority / Programme: Provider Workforce and Teaching Capacity

Project	Lead Organisation(s)	Supporting Partners	Timescales	Expected Outcomes	Monitoring and measurement
Reconsider recruitment routes for industry to teaching, including outcomes of Gatsby Industry Pilot, and promote routes for industry experience to move in to teaching / support roles, helping to raise profile.	ERB / LSIP Team.	COYO. Recruitment Agencies. Provider HR Teams.	November 2026 - March 2029, including various events to promote opportunities.	Streamlined recruitment routes rom industry into teaching, drawing on Gatsby Industry Pilot and COYO BEST learnings; More industry experts moving in to teaching and support roles.	Number of industry recruits into teaching / support roles; Learning Outcomes adopted into practice; promotional campaign reach.
Strengthening collaboration between employers and providers to ensure training reflects evolving technology needs.	Providers.	ERB / LSIP Team. Cheshire Chambers.	January 2027 – March 2029.	Training reflects current and emerging technology needs through stronger employer-provider collaboration.	Number of curriculum updates triggered by employer input; participating employers and providers.
Map current teaching vacancies across the region, and link current teaching students to these.	Uni of Chester.	Providers.	October 2026, then annual refresh.	Improved FE recruitment with better matching of teaching students to live vacancies.	Vacancy fill rate; mapped vacancies; teaching student placements.
Enable collaboration with colleges to upskill teaching staff.	CWLPN.	Providers.	October 2026 - March 2029.	Upskilled teaching staff with current sector knowledge through college / ITP collaboration.	Number of teachers participating in upskilling; CPD hours delivered; sector knowledge assessments.

Annex C

Overview

The Cheshire and Warrington Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) has been developed through a structured and iterative process aligned with statutory guidance and the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022. The approach combines labour market intelligence, strategic alignment and employer and stakeholder engagement to identify priority skills needs and the system changes required to address them.

The process has been led by the Employer Representative Body (ERB), working in collaboration with employers, providers, local authorities and sector stakeholders. This ensures that the LSIP is evidence-based, employer-led and aligned with regional and national priorities. The LSIP has been developed during the establishment of the Combined Authority, with ongoing alignment to emerging governance and strategic priorities.

Stage 1: Identifying and articulating skills needs

Identifying priority sectors

Priority sectors and actions were selected through a structured review of current workforce pressures and future growth requirements. The LSIP considered two linked questions: first, which skills are needed now to support labour market stability, address vacancies and strengthen foundational services, and second, which skills are needed next to support strategic growth, net zero delivery, productivity and progression into higher technical roles. This helped the LSIP balance immediate recruitment and retention pressures with longer-term economic change.

The analysis considered national growth sectors, local strategic priorities, labour market and vacancy evidence, employer insight, provider intelligence and skills supply constraints. Sectors were tested against their fit with Invest 2035, the Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Strategy (SIES), local authority priorities, GVA, labour market intelligence (including BRES, NOMIS, APS and Lightcast data), predicted growth, inclusion impact and delivery role within the wider economy. This process identified where there were mismatches between demand and supply, current vacancies and future growth needs, and economic opportunity and access for residents.

Sectors were organised into a consistent framework including growth, foundational and emerging sectors, alongside cross cutting themes such as digital and net zero. These priority sectors are used consistently throughout the LSIP and comprise Advanced Manufacturing, Construction, Clean Energy, Digital, Health and Social Care, Life Sciences, Business and Professional Services, Visitor Economy and Agri-tech.

Employer engagement

Employer engagement was designed to provide both breadth and depth. The survey, sent to all businesses in a Cheshire and Warrington postcode, provided a broad view of employer experience across recruitment, training, future workforce expectations and skills needs, while one-to-one interviews and employer discussions provided more detailed insight into how those issues are experienced in practice.

The survey evidence includes 184 responses to the core questions on recruitment difficulty, workforce expectations and future skills needs. Response rates varied by question, with lower completion for some profile fields such as sector, business size and location. Where those fields were provided, the responses show engagement across a range of sectors, employer sizes and geographies.

The business size profile shows strong SME representation. Of the respondents where business size was provided, 20% were microbusinesses, 44% were small businesses, 24% were medium-sized businesses and 12% were large employers. This means that 88% of respondents with a known size were SMEs. This was important in shaping the LSIP, because smaller employers often experience different barriers to larger employers, particularly around staff release, funding navigation, apprenticeship administration and capacity to engage with providers.

Geographically, responses with a known location covered Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, Warrington and cross-boundary employers. Cheshire West and Chester accounted for the largest share of known location responses, with additional responses from Cheshire East, Warrington and employers operating across or beyond the sub-region. This reflects the economic geography of Cheshire and Warrington, where labour markets, supply chains and training relationships often cross local authority boundaries.

Sector responses included business and professional services, advanced manufacturing, health and social care, construction and the built environment, digital and creative, clean energy, life sciences, agri-tech and other sectors. Some priority sectors were more strongly represented through interviews, sector discussions and employer groups than through the survey alone. The LSIP therefore used the survey alongside interviews, provider intelligence, labour market data and ongoing employer group engagement, rather than relying on a single source.

The research interviews added depth to the survey findings. Interviewees covered clean energy and advanced manufacturing, life sciences, health and social care, digital, agri-tech and process-related activity. These interviews explored workforce size, hard-to-fill roles, changing skills needs, future digital and green skills, progression routes, provider fit and barriers to recruiting from underrepresented groups. This helped the LSIP team understand not only what skills gaps exist, but why they persist and what kinds of intervention are most likely to help.

Responses were further triangulated through a recruitment agency roundtable event, hosted by the ERB, local business networking groups, and through HE and FE Employer Boards. Local Authority Business Engagement teams were also consulted on the responses. Sector-specific trade unions were invited to contribute, however no responses were received.

Line of sight from employer feedback to priorities and actions

Employer feedback directly shaped the LSIP priorities and interventions. Recurring feedback from SMEs and microbusinesses about the complexity of the skills system informed the focus on brokerage, funding advice, levy transfer support and a clearer regional training offer. Feedback that candidates may have qualifications but lack workplace behaviours, communication, reliability and practical readiness informed the proposed essential business skills framework and Bridge-to-Industry model.

Sector-specific feedback also shaped the Action Plan. Clean energy and engineering employers highlighted the need for training to keep pace with current technologies and infrastructure requirements, which informed actions on Level 3 to 5 technician and skilled-trade routes, curriculum collaboration and improved visibility of clean energy skills data. Life sciences employers and providers identified the need to strengthen laboratory and technical pathways, which informed the focus on Level 4 to 5 technician routes and clearer non-graduate progression pathways. Construction employers and stakeholders highlighted the gap between training starts, completions and site-ready employment, which informed actions on completion, retrofit competence, quality assurance and supervisory progression.

Health and social care employers identified progression, retention and registered manager shortages as key issues, which informed actions on learner support, progression from frontline care and Level 4 to 5 supervisory and advanced practitioner routes. Agri-tech and rural employers highlighted the importance of digital, robotics and precision agriculture skills, alongside transport and access barriers, which informed the inclusion of agri-tech and food security and the focus on rural accessibility. Across sectors, employers also reported multiple and sometimes overlapping requests to engage with education and training providers, which informed the proposed LSIP Business Voice Board and a more coordinated approach to employer voice during delivery.

Confirming the response

Findings were presented to the LSIP Advisory Board for challenge and validation. The Board reviewed the evidence, tested sector definitions and ensured that employer voice was reflected in decision making.

The LSIP evidence base combined quantitative labour market data, employer engagement, provider intelligence and strategic policy review. Labour market data was used to identify occupation and sector pressures; employer interviews and survey responses were used to understand how those pressures are experienced in practice; provider intelligence was used to test whether current provision is able to respond; and governance discussions were used to prioritise actions that are deliverable over the 2026–2029 period. National and local strategies were not treated as background context only; they were used to test whether the skills needs identified through employer engagement aligned with the area's wider growth, inclusion and productivity priorities, including the SIES, national industrial strategy priorities, Net Zero objectives and emerging Combined Authority responsibilities.

Feedback was incorporated through an iterative process, resulting in agreed sector priorities. Sector and occupational definitions have been standardised using SIC 2007 and SOC 2020 classifications to ensure consistency, transparency and replicability. Full technical detail is provided in Annex A.

Stage 2: Identifying changes and actions

The evidence gathered through Stage 1 was used to develop a set of problem statements reflecting the key skills challenges facing the local skills system. These include workforce shortages, pipeline constraints, barriers to training access and wider system issues.

These problem statements were derived from consistent themes identified across data analysis, employer engagement and stakeholder input, and were refined through ongoing engagement with the LSIP Advisory Board and separate engagement with DWP. This ensured a shared and evidence–based understanding of system challenges. Proposed actions were developed in response to these challenges, ensuring a clear link between evidence and system change. The actions set out in Annex B address these problem statements and reflect both employer priorities and system level constraints. In developing these actions, consideration was given to employer demand, apprenticeship and training data, and provider insight into delivery capacity, as well as input from DWP to ensure a partnership approach. While Annex B includes both strategic system changes and enabling delivery activity, all actions are derived from the problem statements identified through this process and are intended to improve the functioning of the skills system, including providers, employers, funding and delivery structures. These actions support delivery across all priority sectors identified in Annex A and reflect both sector specific and cross cutting workforce challenges.

Stage 3: Drafting and validation of the LSIP

The LSIP has been developed iteratively, with drafting informed by evidence and engagement from earlier stages. Sector priorities, problem statements and actions have been refined through ongoing review and stakeholder input.

Draft content has been shared with the Advisory Board, local authorities, providers and sector stakeholders. This has enabled challenge, refinement and alignment with local strategies. The Advisory Board has provided strategic oversight throughout the process, validating sector priorities, shaping problem statements and reviewing draft outputs. This governance structure ensures that the LSIP remains employer led, evidence based and aligned with statutory requirements.

Governance and stakeholder engagement

The development of the LSIP has been supported through a collaborative governance structure led by the Employer Representative Body (ERB) and involving a wide range of regional stakeholders. These include employers across priority sectors, further and higher education providers, local authorities, sector bodies and labour market partners.

An LSIP Advisory Board was established in October 2025 to provide strategic oversight, employer–led challenge and validation throughout the development process. The Advisory Board met at key stages to review the methodology, agree sector priorities, test emerging findings and consider draft outputs prior to submission. This ensured that the LSIP reflects a shared understanding of local skills needs and aligns with statutory guidance requirements.

The Advisory Board is chaired by an employer representative and includes membership from business organisations, education providers, local authorities and sector bodies. This structure ensures that employer voice remains central to decision making while enabling input from across the skills system.

The Employer Representative Body (ERB) retains overall accountability for the LSIP, including responsibility for final decisions, while taking full account of Advisory Board input. Engagement with the emerging Combined Authority has taken place throughout the development process to ensure alignment with regional governance and strategic priorities.

Employer engagement has remained central to governance arrangements, ensuring that the LSIP reflects the needs of businesses across Cheshire and Warrington. The LSIP will continue to be informed by updated labour market intelligence, employer engagement and regional strategies throughout the implementation period

Evidence base

The LSIP draws on a wide range of national, regional and local evidence sources to provide a comprehensive understanding of labour market conditions and workforce demand. This includes labour market intelligence from NOMIS, the Office for National Statistics, the Business Register Employment Survey and the Annual Population Survey, alongside Lightcast analytics.

This is complimented by education and training data (where available), including apprenticeship data, further education enrolments and graduate outcomes, as well as sector intelligence from relevant industry bodies.

These sources provide insight into sector employment, occupational structure, workforce demographics and future demand. Where differences exist between datasets or definitions, these have been considered alongside employer insight and regional priorities to ensure a robust and transparent evidence base. See summary overleaf of sources.

Cross–cutting considerations

Net zero considerations have informed sector prioritisation and the identification of skills needs, reflecting the transition to a low carbon economy and regional investment in areas such as hydrogen, carbon capture and industrial decarbonisation.

Equality of opportunity has been considered through analysis of workforce participation, demographic data and barriers to training. This has informed both sector priorities and system level actions aimed at widening access to skills and employment.

Summary

The LSIP has been developed through a structured, evidence based and employer–led process. It aligns with Combined Authority priorities, reflects employer demand and provides a clear link between evidence, identified challenges and proposed actions. The approach is transparent, collaborative and robust, supporting economic growth and workforce development across Cheshire and Warrington.

Relevant Local and National Strategies

Local and Regional Strategic Plans

A summary of the Cheshire West & Chester Adult Social Care Sector (2024/25)

Cheshire and Merseyside VCFSE Health and Care Transformation Programme Progress Report (2025)

Cheshire and Warrington Labour Market Assessment (2023)

Cheshire & Warrington Local Skills Improvement Plan 2022–25 (2022)

Cheshire and Warrington Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Strategy (2025)

Cheshire and Warrington Rural Strategic Needs Analysis Draft (due to be published May 2026)

Cheshire East Economic Strategy 2019–24 (2019)

Get Cheshire & Warrington Working Plan (2025)

Hydrogen Skills Alliance Plan: Empowering the Future 2025

NHS ICP Cheshire and Merseyside Draft Interim HCP Strategy 2023

NW Net Zero Hub Clean Power Report Final (2025)

NW Net Zero Hub NW Retrofit Skills Plan (2024)

Warrington Post-16 Statement of Education and Skills Priorities 2025–28 (2025)

Warrington Skills Commission Report (2023)

Warrington Borough Council Corporate Strategy 2025–29 (2025)

West Cheshire Inclusive Economy Prospectus (2025)

National Strategic Skills Plans

2050 Vision for Automation and Robotics in UK Manufacturing HMV Catapult (2024)

AI Opportunities Action Plan (UK Gov,2025)

Cogent Skills: A Skills Manifesto for Science and Technology (2025)

Cogent Skills: Life Sciences 2035 Developing the Future Skills for Growth (2025)

Cogent Skills: Nuclear Workforce Assessment (2024)

Construction Industry Training Board (CITB): Construction Workforce Outlook 2025–29 (2025)

Engineering and Construction Industry Training Board (ECITB): Leading Industry 2026–29 (2025)

Engineering and Building Services Skills Alliance (EBSSA): Skills Sector Plan 2026 (2026)

Edge Foundation: Skills Shortages in the UK Economy (2025)

Energy and Utilities Skills (EUS) Workforce Skills and Strategy 2025 (2025)

Future of Jobs Report 2025 World Economic Forum (2025)

Industrial Strategy Clean Energy Sector Plan (UK Gov, 2025)

Industrial Strategy Creative Industries Sector Plan (UK Gov, 2025)

Industrial Strategy Defence Industries Sector Plan (UK Gov, 2025)

Industrial Strategy Digital and Technologies Sector Plan (UK Gov, 2025)

Industrial Strategy Life Sciences Industries Sector Plan (UK Gov, 2025)

Industrial Strategy Advanced Manufacturing Industries Sector Plan (UK Gov, 2025)

Industrial Strategy Professional and Business Services Sector Plan (UK Gov, 2025)

MAKE UK: Manufacturing a Sustainable Future (2025)

National Retrofit Hub: Policy recommendations for a national retrofit workforce (2025)

Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper (UK Gov, 2025)

Skills for Care: The State of the Adult Social Care Sector in England (2025)

Skills England: Sector evidence on the growth and skills offer (2025)

Skills England: Driving growth and widening opportunities (2024)

The Skills Imperative 2035: Occupational Outlook – Long run employment prospects for the UK (NFER,2022)

Think Devolution (Association of Colleges, 2025)

Youth Employment UK Census Results Report (2025)

Qualitative Research

→ Review of existing national skills plans and sector plans from Skills England.

→ Think Tank national thinking on skills, employment, youth, webinars and conferences.

Review of sector specific plans at regional and local level where available, including local economic reports, plus new releases such as Sustainable Inclusive Economic Strategy (Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington) and Get Britain Working Cheshire and Warrington. ECITB, Cogent Skills, Make UK, CITB, Skills for Care. EU Skills, Hydrogen Alliance, NW Net Zero, South Cheshire Chamber – IFATE Research on Engineering and design occupations, May 2023 (Brennan Wilson)

→ Cheshire and Warrington reports (2023)

→ LSIP Employer survey data.

→ LSIP 1:1 interviews with employers.

→ LSIP team sector insight from their comprehensive employer engagement and own attendance at sector insight and skills events.

→ Research from other bodies such as Warwick University on workforce skills and demand.

→ Each college has curriculum employer boards which we have requested feedback from and this was provided to the LSIP team via 'Employer Voice' and face to face meetings to discuss in further detail

→ Electrotechnical Training and Careers Alliance (ETCA) a joint venture between the LSIP team and Electrical Contractors Association (ECA) to inform local provision and in response to a local and national demand for skills

Quantitative:

Labour and employment.

→ ONS Data sets from NOMIS:

→ Business Register Employment Survey – Numbers of people employed in each sector over time, broken down by 2 and 4 digit SIC Code. Key SIC divisions taken from Invest 2035 growth tables. Recent growth and decline signals taken from BRES 2022–24 data. % changes in employment over time by LA.

→ Annual Population Survey – at CW level – % of employment by SOC level over time 2022–24. % in occupations over time and by gender. % employment in sector by age over time 2021–2025. Employment flexibility by sector.

→ Gender and workforce data from ONS

→ Lightcast data – Jobs density vacancy and sector signals from annual reports showing change over time, plus I8 sector reports.

→ DEFRA Agricultural workforce data tables

→ Employer Skills Survey Data – NW 2024 – Skills Shortage Vacancies and regional skills pressures backdrop

→ CWGBW – Evidence base

→ Labour Force Survey – NW – total employed/unemployed and by gender

→ Census data – Workforce qualification levels

→ NEETs data – Annual changes in participation in each LA 2023 and 2025

Education and Training participation data sources

16–19 Data:

→ 16–19 ILR data on participation, achievements by SSA currently not available to access as of 05/05/2026

→ DFE: A–Level Results, T–Level Results, NEETS data

→ ECW (Feb 2026): Future demand and supply of Level 3+ qualified data in C&W

19+ data:

→ ECW Skills Bootcamps 2024/25 and 2025/26

→ Apprenticeship data – DFE – SSA data starts at local authority level 2024/25

→ Apprenticeship data – DFE – SSA data enrolments at local authority level 2024/25

→ Local Skills Dashboard – FE 19+ SSA data starts at local authority level 2024/25

→ Local Skills Dashboard – FE 19+ SSA data enrolments at local authority level 2024/25

Higher Education data:

→ HESA – Enrolments by sector and subsector for University of Chester

→ Graduate Outcomes – LEO 1 year after graduation 2022/23 NW, Industry employment by sector, no granular subsector level available

Predicted growth areas data sources:

→ Skills England – assessment of priority skills by sector

→ Lightcast predicted jobs growth and trends over time

→ Labour productivity: Regional GVA – by industry and output per hour by sector over time (trends)

→ Business Productivity: Regional GVA – GVA over time by LA (1998–2023)

→ UKRI planned investment tables (2024–25), STFC strategic delivery plan 2022–27

→ UKPCC The 7th Carbon Budget (Feb 2026)

→ Employer survey

→ Sector skills councils' reports

List of Training Providers by Sector delivering within Cheshire and Warrington, ordered by learner enrolments 2024/25

(Advanced Manu) Engineering	Agriculture & Horticulture	Business Admin & Law
Warrington & Vale Royal College	Reaseheath College	BPP Professional Education Limited
Cheshire College South And West	CVS (UK) Limited	Babington Business College Limited
Reaseheath College	Myerscough College	Corndel Limited
Wigan And Leigh College	National Horseracing College Limited	Kaplan Financial Limited
Macclesfield College	DCG	Cheshire College South And West
Inspiro Learning Limited	Haddon Training Limited	Warrington & Vale Royal College
Intertrain Uk Ltd.	Lite (Stockport) Limited	Best Practice Network Limited
Maritime + Engineering College North West	Brs Education Limited	Total People Limited
TTE Training Limited	Poultec Training Limited	Lifetime Training Group Limited
Remit Group Limited	Grey Seal Academy Limited	Macclesfield College
Clifford College Ltd	Keits Training Services Ltd	Caroline Pauling
GTG Training Limited	South Staffordshire College	Reaseheath College
Skillnet Limited	Stubbing Court Training Limited	Gi Group Recruitment Ltd
Nottingham College	Provq Limited	The Apprenticeship College Ltd
The Apprenticeship College Ltd	Trendy Pooches Training Academy Limited	MBKB Ltd
Calex Uk Ltd	University Centre Somerset College Group	Apprentify Limited
JTL.	Bottle Green Training Limited.	First Intuition Limited.

(Advanced Manu) Engineering	Agriculture & Horticulture	Business Admin & Law
Newcastle And Stafford Colleges GroupJTL	Central Young Men's Christian Association	Instep Uk Limited
St Helens College	Cheshire College South And West	Serco Holdings Limited
Skills For Security Limited	Cheshire East Council	Fuel Learning Limited
The Growth Company Limited	Coleg Cambria	Damar Limited
Training Event Safety Solutions Ltd.	Warwickshire College.	Liverpool John Moores University.

Construction	Digital	Health & Social Care
Warrington & Vale Royal College	Multiverse Group Limited	Paragon Education & Skills Limited
TTE Training Limited	QA Limited	Marr Corporation Limited
Macclesfield College	Apprentify Limited	Interserve Learning & Employment (Services) Limited
Simian Risk Management Limited	Nowskills Limited	Lifetime Training Group Limited
Cheshire College South And West	Baltic Training Services Limited	Training Works (NW) Ltd
Reaseheath College	Cambridge Spark Limited	Acacia Training Limited
Wigan And Leigh College	Corndel Limited	Kids Planet Day Nurseries Limited
GLP Training Ltd	Firebrand Training Limited	Partnership Training Limited
The Trafford And Stockport College Group	Primary Goal Ltd	Dawn Hodge Associates Limited
St Helens College	Pareto Law Limited	Total People Limited
Liverpool John Moores University	Technical Professionals Limited	Macclesfield College
The Education And Skills Partnership Ltd.	Bpp University Limited.	Cheshire College South And West.

Construction	Digital	Health & Social Care
Total People Limited	Instep Uk Limited	The Child Care Company (Old Windsor) Limited
T3 Training & Development Ltd	Kaplan Financial Limited	Dutton Fisher Associates Limited
Newcastle And Stafford Colleges Group	Nch At Northeastern Limited	Partners In Training (North West) Limited
The Growth Company Limited	The Apprenticeship College Ltd	Impact Futures Training Limited
Bedford College	Ldn Apprenticeships Ltd	Buttercups Training Limited
Hybrid Technical Services Limited	Serco Holdings Limited	Trendy Pooches Training Academy Limited
Learning Skills Partnership Ltd	Warrington & Vale Royal College	University Of Chester
PB Learning Limited Liability Partnership.	Aspire Sports Health & Fitness Ltd.	Aspiration Training Limited
		Eden Training Solutions Limited
		Central Young Men's Christian Association.

Science
Youth Force Limited
The S&A Transform Group Limited
Access Further Education Limited
Brighter Futures Merseyside Limited
Cheshire College South And West
Cogent Ssc Limited
Csr Scientific Training Limited
Macclesfield College
Morthyng Group Limited
Myerscough College
Pinc College
Priestley College
Reaseheath College
Sir John Deane's College
The University Of Kent
Total People Limited
Tte Training Limited
Warrington & Vale Royal College
West Suffolk College.

Cheshire & Warrington Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) Advisory Board Terms of Reference

Purpose

The purpose of the LSIP Advisory Board is to oversee and support successful development and delivery of a new 3-year Local Skills Improvement Plan covering the period 2026–29 and to keep it under review, working with the Project Team, other employer representative bodies and other stakeholders.

The intention is for the LSIP to be developed and implemented in a way which takes stakeholders with us, working in genuine collaboration and cooperation in the best interests of Cheshire & Warrington, and ensuring that it is genuinely employer led, while working constructively with the range of stakeholders.

Membership

Membership of the Group is as follows:

- → Private Sector Chair
- → Chamber Chief Executives *(South and North Cheshire Chamber, West Cheshire and North Wales Chamber, East Cheshire Chamber, Warrington Chamber Plus)*
- → Chamber LSIP Project Manager
- → Cheshire & Warrington FE Principals *(Cheshire College South and West, Macclesfield College, Warrington and Vale Royal College, Reaseheath College)*
- → University of Chester HE Representative
- → Independent Training Providers Nominated Representatives *(Skills For Care, CITB, Cogent Skills, Cheshire and Warrington Learning Provider Network)*
- → Cheshire & Warrington Local Authority Economic Growth Representatives *(Cheshire West and Chester, Cheshire East, Warrington)*
- → Cheshire & Warrington Business Advisory Board Skills Representative
- → DWP Representative
- → ECW Skills and Careers Hub Representative
- → Further Private Sector Representatives, including BID

Where applicable, members are expected to represent the views of the group they represent, while ensuring that any potential conflict of interest is effectively managed. During the meetings and in their LSIP Advisory Board role all members are expected to operate in the best interests of the Cheshire & Warrington LSIP.

Role and Responsibilities

- → Provide direction and support delivery.
- → Review and comment on implementation and delivery plans and progress.
- → Ensure activity covers the requirements of the LSIP Statutory Guidance.
- → Represent the interests of the range of stakeholders and, in particular (where this applies) the Group(s) they represent, and to feed back to those groups.
- → Support the LSIP Project Team in identifying and mitigating key relevant delivery risks.
- → Where necessary, to agree any sub-groups to support the delivery of the LSIP.

The South & North Cheshire Chamber of Commerce & Industry, as the designated Employer Representative Body (ERB), is the contract holder and has full financial responsibility for the LSIP contract. As such, this is an advisory group and, while the Chamber will take full cognisance of the views of the LSIP Advisory Board, final decisions will always lie with the Chamber.

Schedule of Meetings

The intention is that meetings will take place in October, January and March for Phase 1 (Research Stage), and for subsequent phases as deemed appropriate by the Chair. The Chair will determine, in consultation with the Board and Project Team, whether these need to occur more of less frequently as business determines.

Secretariat support will be provided by the LSIP Project Team / ERB. We will aim to circulate papers at least five working days in advance of meetings.

A note of each meeting (recording key points of discussion, decisions made, and actions agreed) and an action log will be produced and maintained by the LSIP Project Team / ERB.

Conflict of Interest

We recognise that, by the very nature of the activity and the Group, there will be conflicts of interest.

Although the Group does not have any direct financial decision-making responsibilities, it does have a significant influence on the LSIP report, project activities and recommendations. It is therefore essential that any member who may have a pecuniary or non-pecuniary benefit from any discussions or decisions declares those at the outset (through a Conflict-of-Interest form) and again prior to any relevant discussion to enable potential conflicts to be recognised and managed appropriately.

Please also refer to the Conflicts of Interest Policy.

Publicity and Speaking on Behalf of the LSIP Project

All publicity and comment relating to the LSIP must be agreed by the LSIP Project Manager or ERB Chamber Chief Executive in advance in order to ensure that we meet Skills England requirements and reflect the best interests of the LSIP project.

Confidentiality

Feedback and comments provided by individual groups, organisations or businesses in developing the LSIP should be treated as confidential unless clearly stated otherwise. While this is intended to be an open and inclusive activity, we need to be aware of potential sensitivities and so only drafts provided for sharing should be shared.

References

[1] Get Cheshire and Warrington Working Plan (2026)

[2] Warwick Institute for Employment Research, NFER (2022)

[3] Cheshire & Warrington Rural Needs Analysis (2026)

[4] Cogent Skills: A Skills Manifesto for Science and Technology (2025)

[5] Cogent Skills: Nuclear Workforce Assessment (2025)

[6] IFATE Digital Route C&W (C&W LEP, 2023)

[7] Skills England Engineering and Occupational Pathway Map (2025)

[8] NOMIS Annual Population Survey (2024)

[9] Apprenticeships data (2024/25)

[10] T-Levels Data (2025/26)

[11] FE Skills Enrolment 19+ (2025/26)

[12] Skills bootcamp data C&W (2024–25)

[13] HESA enrolments (2024–25)

[14] Job postings Jan– Dec 2025, Cheshire & Warrington (Lightcast)

[15] The Skills Imperative 2035 (NFER, 2022)

[16] Industry Overview Cheshire & Warrington (Lightcast, September 2025)

[17] BRES (2022–24)

[18] Apprenticeship enrolments 2024/25

[19] HESA enrolments 2024/25

[20] Annual Population Survey Data (2024–25)

[21] Hydrogen Skills Alliance (2025)

[22] Nuclear Workforce Assessment (Cogent Skills, 2024)

[23] NW Clean Power Report (NW Net Zero, 2024)

[24] Employer Skills Survey SSV (2019–2024)

[25] Life Sciences 2035 (2025)

[26] A Skills Manifesto for Science and Technology (Cogent Skills, 2026)

[27] Life Sciences 2035 (2025)

[28] BRES (2022–24)

[29] Engineering and Building Sector Skills (2025)

[30] National Retrofit Hub Results PPT (2025)

[31] DFE Apprenticeships Data (2024/25)

[32] Skills for Care (2025)

[33] Apprenticeships data (2024/25)

[34] HESA (2024/25)

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