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**Local Skills
Improvement Plan**
Liverpool City Region

July 2026



**Funded by
UK Government**

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



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Foreword

As the Employer Representative Body for the Liverpool City Region (LCR), Liverpool Chamber of Commerce is proud to present this Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP).

This plan is rooted firmly in what employers have told us. Across sectors and across the City Region, businesses have been clear about what they need from the skills system. They want people entering the workforce who are better prepared for the realities of the job. They want to reduce the time and cost associated with recruitment. They want to avoid having to retrain new starters in basic skills. And critically, they want a system that helps them plan for the future, not just respond to immediate gaps.

The LSIP exists to respond to those challenges. It provides a structured and collective way for employers to influence how skills provision is designed and delivered. Rather than individual businesses trying to navigate and shape the system in isolation, this plan brings together their insight and experience so that colleges, training providers and partners can respond at scale.

A more responsive and better aligned skills system is essential to improving productivity, supporting business growth and ensuring that the Liverpool City Region remains competitive.

At its core, this LSIP is about making the skills system work better for employers, and in doing so, creating stronger opportunities for individuals and communities across our region.

Paul Cherpeau

Chief Executive

Liverpool Chamber of Commerce



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Liverpool City Region Mayor

For far too long, too many people in our region have been held back – not because they lacked talent, ambition or potential, but because opportunity wasn't always there when they needed it.

That is something I've spent my time as Mayor working to change.

Devolution is about putting decisions closer to the people they affect. It's about taking control of our own destiny and making sure that the future of the Liverpool City Region is shaped here, by the people and businesses who know it best.

This Local Skills Improvement Plan is a great example of that approach in action. Developed with employers and partners from across our region, it focuses on the skills businesses need today and the opportunities our residents will need tomorrow.

And there is a huge amount to be optimistic about.

From major investments in clean energy and advanced manufacturing to new homes, improved transport links and large-scale regeneration projects, we are creating the foundations for long-term growth. The Liverpool City Region is uniquely placed to lead in the industries of the future and create thousands of good-quality jobs in the years ahead.

But growth on its own is never enough.

Success should be measured by whether local people can see the benefits in their own lives; whether a young person leaving education can build a career close to home; whether someone looking to retrain can access the support they need; and whether businesses can find the skilled workforce that helps them grow and succeed.

That is why skills matter.

Through our devolved powers, we are investing in training and education that responds to local need. By working hand in hand with employers, training providers and partners, we can build a skills system that is flexible, responsive and rooted in the real economy.

Most importantly, we can make sure that local people are first in line to benefit from the opportunities being created right here in our region.

The Liverpool City Region has always been a place of innovators, pioneers and people who look to the future with confidence. This plan reflects that spirit. It represents a shared commitment to creating a stronger, fairer and more prosperous city region, where talent is nurtured, ambition is rewarded and nobody is left behind.

If we get this right, we won't just fill skills gaps. We'll help more people fulfil their potential, strengthen our economy and ensure that the next chapter in our region's story is written by the people who call it home.

Steve Rotheram

Mayor of Liverpool City Region

Introduction

This Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) sets out what employers across the Liverpool City Region say they need from the skills system, both now and over the next three years.

This LSIP covers the whole of the Liverpool City Region (LCR).



The LSIP brings together evidence from businesses of different sizes and sectors to highlight where employers struggle to recruit, where skills are missing in the current workforce, and what skills will matter most as jobs and industries evolve. Employer engagement is the core of this approach, reflecting the statutory expectation that LSIPs are built primarily on employer insight and provide a distinctive, employer-led view of skills demand.

The LSIP is led by Liverpool Chamber of Commerce as the designated Employer Representative Body (ERB) for the region. It is co-owned by the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, supported by partner chambers (Halton Chamber of Commerce and Enterprise, Knowsley Chamber of Commerce and Wirral Chamber of Commerce), and developed with employers at its core. Its purpose is to ensure that the education and training system responds more effectively to real jobs, real businesses and real skills needs.

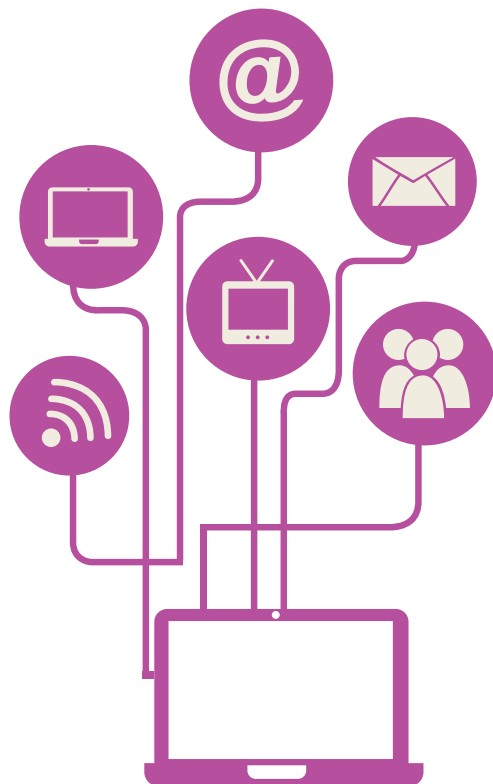
At a national level, the LSIP aligns with the work of Skills England in identifying future workforce needs. Within the LCR, it adds value by translating these national priorities into detailed, employer-led insight on jobs, skills requirements and workforce pressures. This helps ensure that national policy reflects the realities faced by employers locally.

The LSIP supports businesses and employer networks in articulating demand, informs colleges, universities and training providers in shaping provision, and provides a shared evidence base for the Combined Authority and its partners to guide strategic decisions and investment.

Executive Summary

The Liverpool City Region LSIP sets out a clear, employer-led framework for improving how the skills system supports business growth, productivity and workforce development.

It is based on extensive employer engagement, including outreach to over 50,000 businesses and more than 1,500 active engagements through surveys, workshops, events and in-depth interviews.



51,271 Reach via
electronic communications

1,618 Active Engagements
of which...

635 Deep Dive Interviews*
of which **93%** SME and **89%**
non-chamber members

This evidence has been structured using recognised industry and occupational classifications and triangulated with labour market data and wider economic strategies to identify the most important skills priorities.

Employers consistently told us they want a system that produces more job-ready individuals, reduces the cost and time of recruitment, and helps them plan for future skills rather than only addressing immediate gaps. The LSIP responds by providing a stronger collective voice for employers, enabling the system to respond at scale rather than through isolated interventions.

The plan focuses on system-level change and value-added projects rather than individual courses. It prioritises progression within the existing workforce, alongside improving the work-readiness of new entrants. It also recognises the growing importance of digital and AI capability, regulatory and compliance requirements, and the transition to a greener economy, embedding these across all sectors.

A key feature of the approach is the development of simpler and more accessible routes for small and medium-sized enterprises to engage with training and build better talent pipelines. This will be achieved through the embedding of the ERB convened **Industry Skills Partnerships (ISPs)**, the successors to the previous Industry Learning Partnerships (ILPs). Delivery will be structured around the ISPs which will act as the main employer-led mechanism for shaping skills provision. Where relevant, these partnerships align with the City Region's Growth Clusters, ensuring that employer demand, sector priorities and training provision are brought together in a coherent way.

The LSIP will also promote better use of existing resources in the city region such as Be More¹.

Over the lifetime of this plan, there are significant changes and shifts in funding model and available qualifications. Accordingly, the LSIP reflects how employers and providers can work together to implement and benefit from new reforms including the Growth and Skills Levy (GSL)², apprenticeship reform, apprenticeship units³, the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE)⁴ and increasing modularisation. It supports the implementation of new pathways for 16-18-year-olds such as the introduction of V Levels, the expansion of T Levels, and clearer Level 2 routes through new Occupational and Further Study pathways.⁵

The plan also sets out specific actions for equality of opportunity and inclusion, including initiatives to encourage more women in construction; a literacy skills pilot and the implementation of 'skills passports, wallets or digital badges.' This aligns with the Liverpool City Region Mayor's commitment to using micro credentials and digital badges to record learning, with those badges built into Be More.

The plan identifies priority sectors where change is most needed: professional and business services, advanced manufacturing and clean energy, construction, health and life sciences, the visitor economy and creative industries. Across all sectors, digital and AI transformation is a central, cross-cutting theme.

Delivery will be taken forward through a partnership approach, co-owned by the ERB and the Combined Authority, with ISPs providing structure. As a three-year plan, the LSIP sets the strategic direction, with the next phase focused on brokering delivery with providers and partners. Early engagement has already generated broad and positive responses from stakeholders, providing a strong foundation for implementation. Overall, the LSIP is designed to make the skills system more responsive, more coordinated and more aligned with employer need, supporting sustainable economic growth across the Liverpool City Region.

¹ Home Page - BeMore

² Find training and employment schemes for your business - The Growth and Skills Levy

³ Apprenticeship units - Apprenticeship Service Support

⁴ Lifelong learning entitlement (LLE): overview - GOV.UK

⁵ Post-16 level 3 and below pathways - GOV.UK

The Employer-Led Priorities

Employers identified the following priority sectors where change is required.



Priority 1: Professional and Business Services and Financial Services

Priority 2: Advanced Manufacturing and Clean Energy

Priority 3: Construction and the Built Environment

Priority 4: Health, Life Sciences and Care

Priority 5: Visitor Economy

Priority 6: Creative Industries

The cross-cutting theme is AI and Digital Transformation.

The LSIP sets out system-level changes rather than individual courses.



Change 1: Provide a strategic framework for delivery through ISPs, links to growth clusters, and a clearer system for employer involvement.

Change 2: Create partnerships to improve and simplify SME access to workforce development

Change 3: Embed digital and AI skills across all sectors

Change 4: Improve capabilities for increasing compliance, regulation and green transition skills

Change 5: Focus skills solutions on progression for the existing workforce, not just entry

Change 6: Provide inclusive pathways to work and improve work readiness of new entrants to the workforce

Summary of Identified Priorities

LSIP Priority	Policy Alignment*	LCR Strengths, Growth & Investment Context	Road Map Summary
AI and Digital Transformation	Digital and Technologies (IS-8); LCR Growth Plan – Digital & Technologies, Innovation; Get LCR Working Plan – Employment pathways, workforce progression, digital inclusion	£210m National Centre for Digital Innovation; Sci-Tech Daresbury (150+ high-tech firms); 76% full-fibre coverage (UK-leading); strong AI, data and digital cluster; digital growth of 48% locally	Scale AI and digital capability across all sectors; strengthen advanced data and cyber skills; support SME digital adoption; build clear progression into higher-level digital roles
Professional & Business Services and Financial Services	Professional and Business Services; Financial Services (IS-8); LCR Growth Plan – Professional & Business Services (supporting sector), Inward Investment; Get LCR Working Plan – Career progression, good jobs, in-work development	Major city centre cluster; Grade A office pipeline; strong SME base; links to inward investment and growth sectors	Strengthen regulatory and financial capability; improve digital systems and automation skills; enhance leadership and productivity; create clearer technical and supervisory pathways
Advanced Manufacturing and Clean Energy	Advanced Manufacturing; Clean Energy Industries (IS-8); LCR Growth Plan – Advanced Manufacturing, Clean Energy; Get LCR Working Plan – Access to growth sectors, higher-skilled employment, reskilling	50,000+ manufacturing jobs; 15% of UK automotive output; £2.9bn annual contribution; Freeport targeting 10,000 jobs; Glass Futures leading industrial decarbonisation; Net Zero 2035 ambition, key projects such as Hydrogen & Carbon Capture Skills Accelerator and Tidal.	Expand higher technical engineering pathways; increase automation and robotics capability; accelerate hydrogen and low-carbon skills; strengthen supply chain and maintenance expertise
Construction & Built Environment	Construction and the Built Environment (Skills England additional sector); Clean Energy Industries (IS-8, net zero link); LCR Growth Plan – Housing, Infrastructure, Regeneration; Get LCR Working Plan – Entry routes, local jobs, inclusive access to construction careers	Major regeneration and housing pipeline; retrofit demand linked to decarbonisation; transport and infrastructure upgrades; strong SME contractor base	Scale retrofit and green construction skills; improve building safety and compliance knowledge; increase site management and supervisory capacity; strengthen entry and progression routes

LSIP Priority	Policy Alignment*	LCR Strengths, Growth & Investment Context	Road Map Summary
Health, Life Science and Care	Health and Life Sciences (IS-8); Health and Social Care (Skills England additional sector); LCR Growth Plan – Health & Life Sciences; Get LCR Working Plan – Reducing economic inactivity, health-related employment, care workforce participation	‘Europe’s largest biomanufacturing cluster; Life Sciences Innovation Zone (up to £800m investment, 8000 jobs); Focus on infection prevention and control, e.g. iiCON and The Pandemic Institute; strong NHS and care system’	Increase laboratory and specialist technical capacity; strengthen GMP and regulatory compliance skills; expand digital health and care tech capability; support progression into higher-skill roles. Accelerate the adoption and spread of health innovation in the NHS
Creative Industries	Creative Industries (IS-8, aligned supporting sector); LCR Growth Plan – Visitor Economy, Culture, Place; Get LCR Working Plan – Entry-level jobs, progression pathways, local employment opportunities.	48% sector growth locally (vs 29% nationally); strong city centre and Baltic Triangle cluster; gaming, immersive and digital content strengths	Strengthen digital content production skills; enhance freelance business capability; improve leadership and project management; support technical progression pathways
Visitor Economy	Creative Industries (IS-8, aligned supporting sector); LCR Growth Plan – Visitor Economy, Culture, Place; Get LCR Working Plan – Entry-level jobs, progression pathways, local employment opportunities	50,000+ jobs; internationally recognised destination; waterfront regeneration; Destination Management Plan 2025–2030	Improve leadership and management capability; enhance customer experience standards; support retention and workforce progression

*Industrial Strategy (IS 8); Skills England national priorities; LCR Growth Plan; Get LCR Working Plan

Strategic and Economic Context

A Plan Built for the Liverpool City Region

This LSIP reflects the structure, strengths and priorities of the LCR economy. It translates employer insight into clear skills priorities that support economic growth, improve productivity and enable greater workforce participation.

The LSIP is designed to operate as part of a wider system, aligning closely with national policy, regional economic strategy and local employment plans. Its role is to connect these frameworks by identifying the skills, pathways and system changes required to meet employer demand.

Working Together

This LSIP does not operate in isolation. As can be seen from the table in the previous section, employer insight has been gathered and triangulated with national frameworks, including the Industrial Strategy priorities (IS8) and Skills England priorities, and with local strategies led by the Combined Authority, including the Growth Plan and the Get Liverpool City Region Working Plan.

The Local Triple Lock: Growth, People and Skills

In the Liverpool City Region, the intention is that the LSIP operates as part of a coordinated system that brings together economic growth, workforce participation and employer-led skills planning.

This is reflected in the local **“triple lock”**:

- The Liverpool City Region Growth Plan⁶ sets the strategic direction for economic growth and productivity
- The Get Liverpool City Region Working Plan⁷ focuses on workforce participation, inclusion and access to employment
- The LSIP identifies employer-led skills priorities and system changes.

⁶ LCR Growth Plan

⁷ September-2025-Final-Get-Liverpool-City-Region-Working-Plan.pdf

Together, this “triple lock” ensures that skills provision is aligned to sector growth, supports inward investment and enables more people to access employment and progression opportunities.

The LSIP sits at the centre of this model, translating employer demand into actionable priorities that support both economic expansion and inclusive growth.

The Local Triple Lock



LCR Growth Plan

Sets the economic direction and long term mission

Local Skills Improvement Plan

Sets occupation priorities and creates opportunities for collaboration

Get LCR Working Plan

Focuses on workforce participation and progression

The Liverpool City Region Growth Plan

The Liverpool City Region Growth Plan is a ten-year strategy to grow the economy by over £10 billion and create tens of thousands of jobs. It is underpinned by an £11 billion investment pipeline and a strong partnership between public and private sector stakeholders.

The plan focuses on sector-led cluster development, including:

- Health and Life Sciences
- Digital and Technologies
- Creative Industries
- Advanced Manufacturing
- Clean Energy
- Critical Supporting Sectors
- Maritime
- Professional and Business Services
- Visitor Economy

Cluster boards have been established to drive growth in key sectors. Where appropriate, the LSIP's ISPs (ISPs) align with these structures, ensuring that employer demand directly informs skills provision.

The LSIP aligns with the national Industrial Strategy priorities (IS8) and Skills England priority sectors, while reflecting the specific structure and strengths of the Liverpool City Region (LCR) economy. The LCR has strong alignment with these sectors, particularly in advanced manufacturing, life sciences, digital technologies and professional services.

Defence and maritime are not identified as standalone LSIP priority sectors. Defence-related activity converges strongly with advanced manufacturing, digital and AI, and engineering capability, while maritime

is embedded across advanced manufacturing, clean energy, digital technologies and professional services.

For the purposes of skills planning, the LSIP therefore focuses on the underlying occupational and technical skill requirements rather than treating defence and maritime as separate sectors. Skills needs such as engineering, automation, digital systems, low-carbon technologies and AI are addressed through the priorities for advanced manufacturing and clean energy, alongside digital and AI transformation.

The Get Liverpool City Region Working Plan

Alongside economic growth, the City Region faces workforce participation challenges. Economic inactivity remains above national averages, often linked to health-related barriers, and a significant proportion of the workforce lacks essential employability skills.

The Get LCR Working Plan focuses on:

- Reducing economic inactivity
- Addressing health-related barriers to work
- Supporting progression into higher-paid employment
- Improving inclusion across underrepresented groups

The LSIP complements this by identifying the specific skills and training pathways required by employers, ensuring that increased participation translates into sustainable employment and progression.

System Alignment and Delivery

The LSIP also aligns with emerging national delivery mechanisms. Job Plans⁸ will provide national, sector-based workforce strategies, while LSIPs provide local, employer-led insight. The LSIP will contribute to and align with these plans to ensure consistency between national ambition and local delivery.

In parallel, Technical Excellence Colleges (TECs)⁹ are being developed to strengthen the quality and relevance of technical education. The City Region is already working with the North West Construction Technical Excellence College¹⁰, which is aligning provision more closely with employer standards and sector needs. This provides a strong foundation for new TECs, including the Clean Energy TEC led by the City of Liverpool College. The LSIP will continue to engage with TECs to ensure that they reflect local employer demand and contribute to a more coordinated and responsive skills system.

Regional Context

Productivity remains a core challenge for the Liverpool City Region. Output per hour worked is around 11% below the England average, and GVA per resident stands at £27,300 (just 76% of the UK level) reflecting both lower participation and lower productivity within work (data sourced from the LCR Growth Plan and evidence base provided from the Combined Authority).

The Growth Plan sets a clear mission to close this gap by increasing productivity through sector growth, innovation, inward investment and higher-value employment, with workforce capability identified as a critical enabler.

The LSIP complements this by focusing on the skills that drive productivity in practice, supporting progression within the workforce, strengthening supervisory and technical capability, and aligning training to the needs of growth sectors. In doing so, it helps ensure that economic growth translates into higher productivity and improved living standards.

Despite strong sector growth, the Liverpool City Region faces persistent labour market challenges. Over 200,000 working-age residents are economically inactive, with particularly high rates among people aged 50–64, often linked to long-term sickness or caring responsibilities. Economic inactivity is also higher among women, driven by factors such as childcare and insecure work, while rates of young people not in education, employment or training remain above national averages.

These challenges directly impact employers, limiting the available labour pool and constraining productivity and growth.

The Get LCR Working Plan focuses on increasing participation, reducing health-related barriers and supporting progression into better-quality employment. The LSIP complements this by ensuring that increased participation is aligned with employer demand.

It does this by identifying the skills needed in growth sectors, strengthening progression pathways and improving job readiness, ensuring that more people can access sustainable employment while supporting business growth and productivity.

⁸ Job Plans are a new national mechanism being developed through Skills England to set out sector-based workforce strategies for priority areas of the economy.

⁹ Next generation empowered through Technical Excellence Colleges - GOV.UK

¹⁰ The North-West Construction Technical Excellence College (CTEC) - Wigan & Leigh College

Priorities

AI and Digital Transformation

The Liverpool City Region is emerging as a nationally significant centre for artificial intelligence, digital technologies and advanced computing, with over 3,000 businesses and around 24,000 jobs. Growth in this sector has outpaced regional and national trends, supported by strong research assets, advanced infrastructure and increasing inward investment.

This includes globally significant capabilities at Sci-Tech Daresbury, the STFC Hartree Centre and the Hartree National Centre for Digital Innovation, alongside a wider innovation ecosystem spanning AI-enabled materials science, data-driven public services and high-performance computing. Combined with leading digital infrastructure, including the LCR Connect full-fibre network, these assets position the City Region as a key location for AI adoption and innovation.

The LCR Growth Plan identifies digital and technologies as a core growth cluster, with a focus on accelerating adoption of AI and emerging technologies across the economy. This reflects the role of digital capability as a cross-cutting driver of productivity, innovation and competitiveness across sectors including advanced manufacturing, health, professional services and maritime.

For the LSIP, this context highlights the need to move beyond specialist digital roles and embed digital and AI capability across the wider workforce. Employers require both advanced technical skills in areas such as data and AI, and broader capability to adopt and apply digital technologies within existing roles.

The LSIP therefore prioritises digital and AI skills as a system-wide requirement, supporting sector growth, enabling technology adoption and contributing directly to improved productivity across the Liverpool City Region economy.

Professional & Business Services and Financial Services

Professional and Business Services (PBS) and Financial Services are a central enabling sector within the LCR economy, supporting growth across all priority clusters. With around 12,000 businesses employing approximately 96,000 people, the sector plays a key role in driving productivity, innovation and business performance.

Within the LCR Growth Plan, PBS is positioned as a core enabler of growth, providing critical expertise in areas such as finance, legal services, consulting and business support. Its role spans advanced manufacturing, digital technologies, health and life sciences, clean energy and the visitor economy, meaning its performance is closely linked to the wider economy.

The sector benefits from a strong talent pipeline, with around 17,000 students studying PBS-related courses each year. However, employers report challenges in accessing talent with the right mix of technical, digital and professional skills, particularly as the sector evolves in response to digital transformation, AI adoption and the transition to net zero.

LCR also has distinctive strengths, including a high concentration of wealth management firms, growing maritime legal services linked to the Freeport, and emerging specialisms connected to life sciences. Combined with inward investment and a strong city centre business base, this creates continued demand for higher-level skills.

For the LSIP, this context highlights the need to strengthen capability in areas such as financial and regulatory knowledge, digital systems and data, and leadership and management.

Advanced Manufacturing and Clean Energy

Advanced Manufacturing and Clean Energy are central to the LCR economy, with over 50,000 manufacturing jobs, a £2.9 billion annual contribution, and a significant role in national output, including 15% of UK automotive production. These sectors are core growth clusters within the LCR Growth Plan and are critical to delivering the region's Net Zero 2035 ambition¹¹.

The City Region is well positioned to lead the UK's clean energy transition. It already hosts one of Europe's largest offshore wind clusters and is at the forefront of carbon capture through HyNet. Future opportunities include hydrogen development, electrification and the proposed Mersey Tidal project, which could generate long-term renewable energy and thousands of skilled jobs. Together, these developments place LCR at the centre of emerging clean energy supply chains.

Advanced manufacturing capability underpins this transition, supported by strengths in engineering, materials science and industrial innovation. Assets such as Glass Futures and major Freeport developments are driving investment, innovation and job creation, with up to 10,000 jobs expected through Freeport activity alone.

These sectors are also shaped by global pressures, including energy security, decarbonisation and supply chain shifts, increasing the importance of reliable, sustainable energy and advanced production capability.

For the LSIP, this context highlights strong demand for engineering, low-carbon and energy-related skills, alongside digital and automation capability. It also reinforces the need for reskilling and progression pathways to enable local people to access higher-skilled roles within these growth sectors.

Construction and the Built Environment

Construction and the Built Environment are central to delivering LCR's growth, regeneration and net zero ambitions. A strong pipeline of housing, infrastructure and regeneration projects is driving demand, supported by a large SME contractor base.

Since 2017, over 32,000 homes have been delivered, alongside a retrofit programme improving 10,000 properties through energy efficiency measures. Looking ahead, the focus is on accelerating housing delivery, improving quality and affordability, and modernising existing stock in line with the LCR Net Zero 2035 targets, alongside increased use of modern methods of construction. LCR will need an estimated 2,940 new workers to deliver Net Zero for its traditional buildings (built prior to 1919) according to Historic England.

¹¹ Pathway to Net Zero | Liverpool City Region Combined Authority

Major regeneration and infrastructure investment, supported by partnerships such as the Strategic Place Partnership with Homes England, will continue to unlock development and connect communities to jobs and opportunity.

The sector also plays a key role in workforce inclusion, offering accessible entry routes into employment. However, skills shortages remain, particularly in skilled trades, retrofit, and supervisory roles.

For the LSIP, this highlights the need to strengthen green construction and retrofit skills, expand entry pathways, and support progression to meet the scale of future demand.

Health, Life Sciences and Care

Health, Life Sciences and Care are a major growth area for the Liverpool City Region, combining a strong NHS and care system with one of Europe's largest biomanufacturing clusters. The sector employs around 7,000 people in life sciences alone, with productivity significantly above the national average.

The LCR Growth Plan positions the sector as a key innovation cluster, supported by the Life Sciences Innovation Zone, which is expected to attract up to £800 million of investment and create up to 8,000 high-skilled jobs. The region has internationally recognised strengths in infection control and health innovation, with assets such as iiCON, the Pandemic Institute, the Civic Data Cooperative and world-class clinical and research facilities.

Growth is being driven by advances in areas such as biopharma manufacturing, digital health, AI-enabled diagnostics and clinical innovation. Major developments, including Health Innovation Liverpool and expanded laboratory and research facilities, are expected to further increase demand for high-level technical and specialist roles.

Alongside this, the health and care system remains a significant employer, with ongoing demand for workforce participation and progression, particularly in response to economic inactivity linked to health conditions.

For the LSIP, this context highlights the need to increase laboratory and technical capacity, strengthen regulatory and compliance skills, and expand digital health capability. It also reinforces the importance of clear progression pathways across both life sciences and care, supporting higher-skilled employment and enabling the wider adoption of innovation across the NHS and care system.

Creative Industries

Creative Industries are a fast-growing sector in the Liverpool City Region, employing over 15,000 people and contributing £1.2 billion to the economy. Growth has outpaced the national average, supported by strong clusters in Liverpool city centre and the Baltic Triangle.

The region is a recognised hub for film, TV, music, gaming and digital content, with major assets and global companies alongside a strong freelance and SME base. Investment in developments such as Littlewoods Studios and innovation through AI and immersive technologies are expected to drive further growth.

The sector also plays a key role in place-making, inward investment and supporting the wider economy, particularly the visitor economy.

For the LSIP, this context highlights the need to strengthen digital content and production skills, support freelance and SME capability, and improve business and leadership skills. It also reinforces the importance of clear progression pathways in a sector characterised by flexible and portfolio careers.

Visitor Economy

The Visitor Economy is a major part of the Liverpool City Region's economy, employing over 50,000 people and contributing around 12% of GVA. The region is internationally recognised for its cultural offer, events and heritage, with a strong city centre, waterfront regeneration and a diverse mix of urban, coastal and rural attractions.

The sector plays a key role in place-making, inward investment and talent attraction. The Growth Plan identifies the Visitor Economy as central to inclusive growth, supported by the Government-designated Liverpool City Region Destination Partnership Board (LCRDPB)¹². This partnership coordinates delivery of the Destination Management Plan 2025–2030, with a focus on strengthening the destination offer, improving productivity, expanding international reach and supporting a resilient, high-quality visitor economy.

The sector also provides significant entry-level employment opportunities and pathways into work, particularly for young people, supporting the ambitions of the Get LCR Working Plan. However, challenges remain around productivity, skills and workforce retention. For the LSIP, this highlights the need to strengthen leadership and management capability, improve employability skills, and support progression pathways to improve retention and productivity across the sector.

¹² Liverpool City Region's Destination Partnership Board

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Local Skills Needs

This section sets out the skills employers across the Liverpool City Region say they need now and over the next three years. The analysis is drawn directly from employer engagement carried out during the LSIP process, including employer surveys, structured deep dive interviews, group discussions and occupational analysis of the roles that employers reported difficulty recruiting or upskilling. The focus is not on qualifications in isolation. It is on the real job roles, tasks and operational pressures employers face.

As set out in Annex C, this employer engagement, including over 600 deep dive interviews and triangulated with existing data and insights from the Growth Plan, Get LCR Working Plan and other strategies, has strengthened the evidence base and created a robust foundation for targeted action.

The context for this work is the productivity challenge facing the City Region.

Raising productivity is worth billions. The evidence base for the LCR Growth Plan indicates that matching England's productivity would imply an increase of around £5.2bn (12%) in the size of the LCR economy (and £5.6bn if matched to the highest-output MCA comparator cited).

This underlines why employers consistently emphasised the importance of technical progression, stronger supervision, and practical digital capability across the workforce. These are areas where improvements in skills can translate directly into better productivity and business performance.

Across sectors, employers reported that skills gaps are affecting their ability to operate effectively. Businesses described impacts on productivity, staff retention, regulatory compliance, digital adoption and their ability to grow or compete for new contracts. In many cases, the issue is not simply the availability of entry-level workers but the lack of progression routes into technical, supervisory and specialist roles.

Across sectors, employers told us that skills gaps are affecting:

- Productivity
- Staff retention
- Compliance and risk
- Digital adoption
- Ability to grow or win new contracts

The priority areas were identified through a structured process that combined employer evidence with a clear analytical framework. Initial sector mapping aligned the LCR Growth Clusters and foundational industries with national priorities set out in the UK Industrial Strategy and Skills England, as well as regional priorities in the Growth Plan and Get Liverpool City Region Working Plan.¹³ More information on methodology is in Annex C.

In particular, priority was given to areas where skills gaps are already constraining productivity and growth, where current provision does not fully support progression into technical and supervisory roles, where employer evidence showed that new approaches were needed, where gaps existed in current provision, and where employer-led collaboration could accelerate change.

Priority 1: Professional and Business Services and Financial Services

Priority 2: Advanced Manufacturing and Clean Energy

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Priority 6: Creative Industries

The cross-cutting theme is AI and Digital Transformation.

The LSIP sets out system-level changes rather than individual courses.

Change 1: Provide a strategic framework for delivery through ISPs, links to growth clusters, and a clearer system for employer involvement.

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Change 5: Focus skills solutions on progression for the existing workforce, not just entry

Change 6: Provide inclusive pathways to work and improve work readiness of new entrants to the workforce

Section 1 (Local Needs) focuses on articulating the specific needs, pressures and priorities within each sector, ensuring that the evidence and employer voice are clearly grounded in sector context.

Section 2 (Changes Required) then shifts from diagnosis to delivery, organising the response around the cross-cutting system changes required to address those needs collectively, recognising that many challenges such as skills pipelines, workforce participation, employer engagement and provision flexibility are shared across sectors and require coordinated system-level action.

¹³ More information on prioritisation available in Annex C.

Cross Cutting Priority: AI and Digital Transformation Across Sectors

The LCR Growth Plan positions “AI for Good”¹⁴ as a central principle of productivity-led growth. This means harnessing artificial intelligence and data-driven innovation not only to improve efficiency and competitiveness, but to deliver wider social and economic benefit. AI for Good is about responsible adoption to support better public services, improving health outcomes, strengthening environmental sustainability, and widening access to opportunity, while ensuring that businesses, workers and communities have the skills and confidence to use these technologies effectively. The Combined Authority has formed an AI Task Force¹⁵ to lead and support developments across the City Region. For the LSIP, this translates into a focus on building applied digital capability across sectors, embedding ethical AI use, strengthening data literacy, and supporting SMEs to adopt AI safely and productively, so that technological progress drives inclusive growth rather than deepening inequality.

During our engagement and in virtually all of the deep dive interviews we undertook with employers, businesses across the LCR identified digital and AI capability as a critical and immediate skills gap affecting productivity, growth, and competitiveness. This need is particularly acute among SMEs, which dominate the business base but often lack the internal capacity to assess, adopt, and scale digital and AI solutions effectively. As a result, many businesses are not realising efficiency gains or innovation opportunities, contributing to the wider productivity gap in the City Region.

Evidence from employer engagement highlights several consistent issues. Businesses report limited practical understanding of how AI can be applied within their operations, alongside difficulties accessing relevant, flexible training. Where provision exists, it is often too generic, too advanced, or not aligned to real business use cases. This creates a disconnect between training supply and employer demand, particularly in fast-moving areas such as automation tools, data use, and AI-enabled decision making.

“At the same time, employers report that new entrants to the labour market are not consistently equipped with applied digital and AI skills. While some learners have theoretical knowledge, there is a lack of confidence in using tools in workplace settings, alongside gaps in understanding ethical and responsible AI use. This results in additional training burdens for employers and slows workforce productivity.”

These challenges are cross-cutting, affecting all priority sectors including professional services, manufacturing, construction, and the visitor economy. The need is not limited to specialist roles but extends across the wider workforce, requiring a baseline of AI literacy alongside more advanced technical capability in specific occupations.”

¹⁴ ????

¹⁵ Liverpool City Region AI Taskforce | Liverpool City Region combined Authority

Overall, the local skills need is for a more responsive system that enables employers to adopt AI effectively and ensures the workforce is equipped with practical, job-ready digital and AI skills.

AI... is the hot topic for every business right now. The real challenge is helping people understand how powerful these tools can be in their day-to-day work. For example, we often receive technical enquiries that we do not fully understand straight away. Using tools like ChatGPT or Claude allows us to break down the information quickly and give customers a much more informed and higher-quality response."

Small Manufacturing Employer (Deep Dive Interview)

AI is starting to change how we handle documentation. Masters and senior officers are already using it to produce first drafts of risk assessments or incident reports, but the real skill is knowing how to prompt it properly and then critically review what it produces."

Micro Maritime Employer (Deep Dive Interview)

Priority 1

Professional & Business Services and Financial Services (PBS)

Our engagement across different sectors identified that PBS and associated functions (such as legal and finance) are pressing recruitment issues, not only in the stand-alone PBS sector, but also across sectors. For example, roles related to legal, accounting and compliance. For that reason, alongside the fact that PBS is identified in the Growth Plan as a central enabling sector, PBS is an LSIP priority.

Employers in the Professional and Business Services (PBS) sector report persistent and interconnected skills gaps across professional, associate professional, and administrative roles. These occupations underpin the wider business services ecosystem and are critical to the functioning and productivity of firms across all sectors of the LCR economy.

The most immediate pressure is at Levels 3 to 5, where employers face challenges progressing staff into supervisory and middle-management roles. Many individuals are technically competent but lack formal leadership, people management, and organisational skills. This creates bottlenecks in progression, increases reliance on senior staff, and limits overall productivity.

The biggest gaps are in leadership and management capability... and having stronger succession planning in place."

Local Authority (Deep Dive Interview)

SMEs, which dominate the sector, face additional structural barriers to workforce development. Employers consistently report difficulties navigating provision, identifying relevant training, and releasing staff due to time and cost constraints. This reduces engagement with the skills system and limits investment in workforce development, despite strong employer demand.

“I am not short of motivation to train people, but I simply do not have the time... finding the right course that is actually relevant to the job can be harder than paying for it.”

Finance SME (Deep Dive Interview)

Employers also highlight gaps in work readiness among new entrants. While candidates often hold qualifications, they frequently lack applied competence in professional environments. This includes literacy, communication (speaking formally), problem-solving, and the ability to translate knowledge into practical outputs. Often these skills needs are at entry/level 1 to level 2. As a result, employers face increased onboarding and supervision demands, contributing to early attrition.

Alongside this, digital capability remains inconsistent. Employers report that many individuals lack confidence in applying digital tools in a business context, alongside limited ability to critically assess information and use data effectively. This is becoming more significant as roles increasingly require interaction with AI-enabled systems and digital workflows.

“We need people who are genuinely confident using tools like Word and Excel... and able to question and cross-check information.”

Small Accountancy Employer (Deep Dive Interview)

Finally, regulatory and compliance demands are increasing across the sector, particularly in areas such as payroll, employment regulation, and governance. Employers require staff who can understand and apply complex regulatory frameworks in practice, but report gaps in both knowledge and applied capability.

Priority 2

Advanced Manufacturing and Clean Energy

Advanced Manufacturing and Clean Energy are national and regional priorities. During engagement with this sector employers in advanced manufacturing and clean energy reported persistent and increasing skills pressures, particularly in technician, maintenance engineering, and supervisory roles. For these reasons, this sector is also an LSIP priority.

While entry-level recruitment is often achievable, businesses consistently highlighted the difficulty of progressing staff from operative roles into higher-level technical positions. This is creating bottlenecks that constrain productivity, limit operational efficiency, and increase reliance on external recruitment.

A core skills need is therefore the development of clear progression pathways at Levels 2 to 6. Employers reported that existing provision does not sufficiently support the transition from operative to technician and supervisory roles, despite strong demand. This is compounded by limited access to flexible, in-work training that reflects the realities of manufacturing environments, particularly for SMEs.

At the same time, the sector is undergoing rapid technological change. Advancements in automation, robotics, digital production systems, and low-carbon manufacturing are reshaping skills requirements. Employers emphasised the need for a workforce that can integrate mechanical, electrical, and digital skills, particularly in areas such as programming, operating, and maintaining automated systems.

“This will particularly affect welders... who will need stronger skills in programming, operating and troubleshooting robotic systems.”

Small Manufacturing Employer (Deep Dive Interview)

This highlights the growing importance of embedding digital and AI capability across occupational pathways, rather than treating it as a specialist or standalone skillset.

Regulatory and environmental pressures are also increasing. The transition to low-carbon manufacturing, alongside evolving safety, quality, and compliance requirements, is creating additional demand for skills. Employers require staff who can operate effectively within regulated environments while adapting to new technologies and sustainability standards, including understanding environmental requirements, quality systems, and safe working practices.

Employers also identified challenges in the work readiness of new entrants. While learners may hold relevant qualifications, they often lack experience of real production environments, including the pace of operations, adherence to safety standards, and expectations around quality. Many employers also reported candidates without appropriate communication, literacy skills (at entry/level 1 to level 2). This creates additional onboarding requirements and can affect early retention.

Finally, SMEs within the sector face barriers to accessing training and workforce development. Employers reported challenges relating to time, cost, and navigating complex provision, alongside a lack of flexible, modular training aligned to business need. This limits engagement with the skills system, particularly in relation to emerging technologies and clean manufacturing.

Priority 3

Construction and Built Environment

“We are in a transition period where engineers need skills in both traditional and new technologies.”

Plumbing SME (Deep Dive Interview)

Our employer engagement work reaffirmed the continuing need for Construction to be an LSIP priority. Construction employers report persistent shortages in skilled trades, particularly in bricklaying, electrical installation and building services, alongside increasing demand for site supervision and coordination skills. These shortages are affecting the sector’s ability to deliver housing, infrastructure and retrofit programmes at the required pace and quality.

While entry-level recruitment is often achievable, a key challenge is progression within the existing workforce. Employers highlighted that individuals frequently move into supervisory and management roles without formal training in leadership, planning or coordination.

“They know how to do the work... but haven’t had training in organising work or managing people.”

Medium Construction Employer (Deep Dive Interview)

This creates operational bottlenecks, limits productivity and places additional pressure on experienced staff. Strengthening progression into supervisory roles is therefore a critical skills need, particularly at Levels 2 to 6.

Employers also identified consistent issues with the work readiness of new entrants. While learners may hold relevant qualifications, they often lack experience of real site environments, including understanding of health and safety requirements, site protocols, and the pace and expectations of construction work. Poorer communication (writing and speaking) skills (entry/level 1 to level 2) are also reported in candidates.

“Too many college leavers have never experienced how a construction site operates... health and safety is critical.”

Small Cladding Employer (Deep Dive Interview)

¹⁶ Historic England- Skills Needs Analysis for the Repair, Maintenance and Retrofit of Traditional (Pre 1919) Buildings; Skills Needed to Deliver Net Zero for Historic Buildings

This results in increased onboarding time, higher early attrition, and additional supervision requirements for employers.

A particularly acute skills need in the LCR region is related to heritage buildings. According to Historic England, around 31% of domestic buildings are traditionally constructed in the LCR compared to 20% nationally.¹⁶ These buildings require retrofit and modernisation for net zero, and there are specific skills needs required to work on buildings built prior to 1919.

The electrotechnical sector, represented by the Electrical Contractors' Association (ECA), faces increasing workforce pressures that are directly affecting the delivery of construction and Net Zero priorities. Employers report a widening skills gap. Regulatory changes further restrict the role of part-qualified staff, increasing demand for fully competent electricians and placing additional strain on the pipeline. Within the current workforce, electricians and apprentice electrical engineers are the roles most urgently in need of new skills. Electricians increasingly need training in renewable energy technologies such as solar PV and EV charger installation, alongside skills in fire safety systems, emergency lighting and alarm maintenance. ECA data shows that parts of the LCR region have low or very low numbers in learning on electrotechnical courses.¹⁷

A further challenge is the need to widen and diversify the talent pipeline. The sector continues to draw from a narrow labour pool, with low participation from women and other underrepresented groups. Employers, such as Frank Rogers, recognise that addressing skills shortages will require a broader and more inclusive approach to recruitment, alongside targeted support to attract, retain and progress women within construction careers.

Digital capability is becoming increasingly important across construction roles. Employers highlighted the growing use of site management tools, digital design, and data-driven processes, alongside the adoption of modern methods of construction. There is a need to embed these capabilities within technical pathways so that the workforce can operate effectively in a more digitalised construction environment.

At the same time, regulatory requirements and the transition to low-carbon construction are significantly reshaping skills needs. Employers require staff who can operate confidently within regulated environments and understand evolving standards relating to quality, safety, and environmental performance.

“Standards such as ISO 9001 and ISO 14001 are becoming more important.”

Construction SME (Deep Dive Interview)

The shift towards Net Zero is also creating demand for new technical capabilities, particularly in areas such as retrofit, low-carbon heating, and energy efficiency.

“Engineers now need to understand technologies like heat pumps and wider Net Zero implications.”

Construction Engineering SME (Deep Dive Interview)

¹⁷ <https://www.eca.co.uk/taking-action/skills-for-the-future>

Finally, many construction employers, particularly SMEs, face barriers to accessing training and workforce development. While employers reported positive relationships with colleges and universities delivering relevant programmes, particularly in sustainability and technical disciplines, navigating the system and identifying the right provision remains a challenge. This is compounded by time constraints and the complexity of available offers.

“Local colleges and universities are well aligned with the skills we need... what would help most is better coordination and signposting.”

Construction Engineering SME (Deep Dive Interview)

There is therefore a clear need for better coordination, clearer signposting, and more accessible, flexible training aligned to site-based working and business need.

Priority 4

Health, Life Science and Care

“There is a strong need to develop leaders within the NHS who can drive teams forward and support staff to grow.”

NHS Large Employer (Deep Dive Interview)

This priority brings together health, life sciences and care. While these are distinct parts of the system, employers told us that they share common workforce challenges, particularly around entry routes, progression, digital capability and operating in regulated environments.

Bringing them together enables a more coordinated response, while recognising the different workforce needs within care services and the health and life sciences ecosystem.

In adult social care, employers report significant workforce pressure across both frontline and supervisory roles. Recruitment challenges continue to affect service stability, and high turnover places additional strain on existing staff. A core issue is the lack of clear and accessible progression pathways from care worker to senior care worker and registered manager roles. This limits retention and reduces the sector’s ability to develop experienced staff into leadership positions. Strengthening leadership and management capability is therefore a priority.

Employers also highlight challenges in the work readiness of new entrants. Recruitment difficulties are often linked to practical capability rather than qualifications alone. New entrants may lack confidence in delivering day-to-day tasks, working independently, communicating effectively and managing responsibilities in community settings. Practical constraints, such as the ability to travel between clients, also present barriers.

“We particularly struggle to find staff who can drive and have their own vehicle... geography and travel are a big part of the job.”

Medium Care Provider (Deep Dive Interview)

Digital capability is now an essential requirement across both care and life sciences roles. In care settings, the shift from paper-based systems to digital platforms requires front-line staff to develop confidence in using mobile and online tools to record and manage care delivery.

“Our biggest upskilling need is basic digital confidence for front-line staff... using mobile apps to log visits and care notes.”

Medium Care Provider (Deep Dive Interview)

Care providers, particularly SMEs, also face barriers to workforce development. Time, cost and the complexity of navigating training provision limit engagement, alongside a need for more flexible, accessible training that can be delivered alongside service demands.

In health and life sciences, the focus shifts more towards higher-level technical and specialist skills, although there are overlaps in entry-level and support roles. Employers report shortages in industry-ready technical skills, particularly in laboratory work, biomanufacturing and clinical trials, which are limiting the ability of organisations to scale and commercialise research. There is also a growing need for laboratory technicians and technical specialists capable of working in highly regulated and increasingly digital environments.

Innovation across the NHS and life sciences sector is increasing demand for advanced skills in areas such as automation, robotics, AI and data. These technologies are improving productivity and patient outcomes but require a workforce able to deploy, operate and maintain complex systems. Employers report gaps in these capabilities, particularly as technologies evolve rapidly, making targeted upskilling and specialist training essential.

As the sector becomes more digital, there is rising demand for people who can combine clinical or scientific knowledge with data, AI and digital skills. At the same time, there are gaps in the skills needed to turn research into commercial success, including regulatory affairs, intellectual property and wider commercial capability. There are also not enough technicians and support roles, such as lab technicians and trial staff, despite many of these roles not requiring degree-level qualifications.

Regulatory and compliance requirements are a defining feature across both care and life sciences. Employers need staff who can operate confidently within these environments. In care, this includes safeguarding, reporting and governance. In life sciences, it extends to quality standards, data governance and laboratory safety. These requirements are increasing alongside innovation and service transformation.

Looking ahead, there are also challenges in the longer-term talent pipeline. Fewer young people are taking STEM subjects, reducing the number entering life sciences. At the same time, graduate out-migration reflects a lack of clear, industry-aligned career pathways within the City Region.

Overall, while care, health and life sciences have distinct workforce needs, they are connected through shared challenges. The sector requires a more coordinated, employer-led skills system that strengthens progression, improves work readiness, builds digital and technical capability, and supports staff to operate effectively within highly regulated environments.

Priority 5

Visitor Economy

“Reliability and commitment are the biggest challenges... rather than simply the volume of applicants.”

Medium Hotel Employer (Deep Dive Interview)

Employer feedback in this sector demonstrated that there was a need for improvements to the talent pipeline that could be addressed by LSIP actions, promoting collaborative work between providers and business. The visitor economy relies heavily on customer-facing roles, supervisors and SME managers. Employers report persistent recruitment pressure in front-line roles, alongside challenges in retaining staff in the early stages of their careers. While there is often a sufficient volume of applicants, the sector faces ongoing issues with work readiness, progression, and retention.

A key skills need is improving work readiness for entry-level roles. Employers emphasised that communication skills, professionalism, resilience, and reliability are critical in customer-facing environments. Gaps in these areas increase turnover and place additional pressure on businesses to provide ongoing supervision and support.

At the same time, progression within the existing workforce is a significant challenge. Employers highlighted consistent gaps in first-line supervision, with many staff promoted into management roles without formal training in leadership or people management.

“The biggest skills gap... is leadership and management capability.”

Medium Hotel Employer (Deep Dive Interview)

Weak supervisory capability affects service quality, staff retention, compliance, and overall customer experience. Strengthening progression into supervisory roles is therefore a priority, particularly for SMEs where management capacity is often limited.

Digital capability is also becoming increasingly important across the sector. Employers reported widespread use of booking platforms, point-of-sale systems, and customer relationship management tools, alongside growing interest in the use of AI to support operations and decision-making.

“AI is increasingly part of the conversation... managers will need to understand tools like Copilot or ChatGPT.”

Hotel Business Medium-Sized Employer (Deep Dive Interview)

This highlights the need to embed practical digital and AI skills across roles, particularly for supervisors and managers.

Regulatory requirements are another key driver of skills demand. Employers must operate within complex and evolving frameworks covering food safety, hygiene, allergens, aviation security, and health and safety. Staff are required to understand and apply these requirements consistently in fast-paced environments, alongside responding to increasing customer expectations.

“Regulation and customer expectations are both increasing... staff must manage stricter food safety rules and complex dietary requirements.”

Restaurant SME (Deep Dive Interview)

The sector also includes specific workforce needs linked to aviation and ground operations. Employers highlighted demand for roles such as ground handling, customer service agents, security, and operations staff linked to Liverpool John Lennon Airport. These roles require a combination of customer service capability, operational awareness, and compliance with strict security and safety standards. There is a need for clearer pathways into these roles, including practical training aligned to airport operations and stronger links between further education provision and employer demand.

Finally, the sector is dominated by SMEs, many of which face barriers in accessing training and workforce development. Employers reported challenges relating to time, cost, and navigating provision, alongside a need for more flexible and accessible training aligned to business operations.

Priority 6

Creative Industries

“The big gap is using AI tools properly... and integrating AI into the workflow.”

Micro Production Business (Deep Dive Interview)

The creative industries are an important and growing part of the Liverpool City Region economy, particularly across film, television, digital media, gaming, music and cultural production. Employer evidence, including independent research conducted by the Cluster Board, highlights strong demand for a workforce that can operate across disciplines, combining creative, technical and commercial capability. Therefore, this is a key action for the LSIP.

A defining skills need within the sector is the development of “fusion skills”. Employers consistently reported that roles are no longer purely creative or purely technical. Instead, individuals are expected to combine artistic capability with digital production skills, data awareness, and an understanding of commercial and client requirements. For example, creative professionals increasingly need to work with AI-assisted tools, virtual production environments, and digital platforms, while also managing projects, budgets and client relationships. This blending of skills is now central to how the sector operates and grows.

Alongside this, progression within the existing workforce is a key challenge. Employers emphasised the need to develop mid-career capability, particularly where individuals must move beyond technical or creative roles into positions requiring leadership, project delivery and client management. Strengthening progression routes for these roles will support business growth and improve retention.

Employers also identified challenges in the work readiness of new entrants. Many individuals enter the sector with strong creative skills but limited understanding of the realities of employment, including freelance careers, portfolio development, and commercial awareness. Roles often require individuals to operate independently and engage with clients from an early stage, creating a need for stronger preparation for self-employment and project-based work.

Digital and AI capability is rapidly reshaping the sector. Employers highlighted increasing use of AI-assisted production, immersive technologies, and data-driven content creation. There is a need for individuals who can integrate these tools into creative workflows effectively, rather than treating them as separate or specialist functions. This reinforces the importance of fusion skills that combine creativity with digital and technical competence.

While less regulated than some sectors, creative businesses also require capability in areas such as intellectual property, contracts, and data use. These skills are particularly important for freelancers and small businesses, who must manage legal and commercial responsibilities alongside creative work.

The sector is characterised by a high proportion of freelancers and micro-businesses, which creates additional challenges in accessing training and workforce development. Many individuals move quickly into self-employment and require flexible, relevant training that supports both creative and business skills. Employers highlighted the need for better coordination, clearer pathways, and provision that reflects the fragmented nature of the sector.

Net Zero and Environmental Sustainability

The transition to a low-carbon economy is a significant and cross-cutting driver of skills demand across the Liverpool City Region. Employers across multiple sectors identified the increasing impact of Net Zero requirements, environmental standards and low-carbon technologies on workforce capability. This is reflected most strongly in construction (particularly in heritage and traditional buildings), manufacturing and energy-related industries, but also extends into sectors such as professional services, where regulatory and reporting requirements are evolving.

The LSIP therefore focuses on embedding environmental and Net Zero capability across occupational pathways, rather than treating it as a standalone specialism. Annex B actions set out how this will be delivered in practice. This includes the development of a coherent retrofit and low-carbon construction skills offer aligned to housing and infrastructure programmes; the alignment of manufacturing provision to clean growth, low-carbon production, and Freeport demand; and the integration of sustainability and regulatory awareness within technical and vocational pathways across sectors.

Equality of Opportunity and Workforce Participation

Employers across the LCR consistently highlighted that addressing skills shortages will require widening participation in the labour market, particularly among groups that are currently underrepresented or economically inactive. This is not only a social priority but a core economic issue, with participation constraints directly limiting the available workforce and contributing to recruitment difficulties across sectors.

The City Region continues to experience higher levels of economic inactivity than the national average, with a significant proportion of working-age residents not engaged in employment. Within this, several groups are disproportionately affected. Young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) remain a key concern, particularly where disengagement at an early stage reduces long-term participation and progression. Employers also identified challenges in attracting and retaining individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds, including those with lower prior attainment, limited work experience, or barriers relating to health, caring responsibilities, or transport.

Gender disparities are particularly evident in certain sectors. In construction and the built environment, women remain significantly underrepresented in technical and trade roles despite strong demand for labour.

“We would also like (colleges) to deliver their courses in a way that increases female engagement and shows our industry, although being male dominated, as a space where girls are welcome.”

Large Engineering Employer (Deep Dive Interview)

to address skills shortages, particularly in areas such as retrofit, building services, and site management. However, this requires earlier engagement, clearer pathways, and more inclusive recruitment and training practices.

Employers also highlighted the need to better engage adults who are currently economically inactive but could enter or return to the workforce with the right support. This includes individuals seeking to retrain or change careers, as well as those requiring flexible or modular learning options to balance work, training and personal responsibilities.

These participation challenges are closely linked to the skills gaps identified across sectors. In many cases, the issue is not solely a lack of training provision, but a disconnect between individuals and accessible pathways into employment and progression. Addressing this requires a more inclusive skills system that supports entry into the labour market, strengthens work readiness, and creates clearer progression routes for individuals from all backgrounds.

In addition, many employers, particularly in the PBS sector reported a need to train the workforce on regulatory requirements including equality legislation, and the knowledge and capability to communicate inclusively and address the needs of diverse clients (e.g. non-binary and LGBTQ)

What happens next

These priorities form the foundation of the LSIP Road Map (Annex B). Each priority is linked to ISP governance structures that will bring together employers, providers and partners to coordinate delivery.

Actions within the Road Map will influence curriculum development, modular and in-work training models (including new opportunities such as the LLE, the GSL and apprenticeship units), the use of devolved adult skills funding. Detailed occupational priorities, identified by research including deep dive interviews, using SOC and SIC codes is provided in Annex A to support national comparison and analysis by Skills England.

02

Agreed Changes and Actions Needed

This section sets out the system-level changes required within the LCR to address the skills priorities identified in Section 1. The narrative is organised by the system level strategic changes required and acts as the accompanying narrative to the actions plans set out in Annex B.

The LSIP sets out a balanced approach to both entry-level and higher-level skills, recognising the need to strengthen the full skills pipeline.

At entry level, the focus is on improving work readiness, expanding accessible pathways and supporting qualification reform, including new Level 2 routes, T Levels and future V Levels. Further Education providers and training providers are expected to embed applied learning, literacy, employability and sector-specific “job-ready” standards, supported by employer engagement through ISPs and stronger careers alignment.

At higher skill levels, the priority is on progression, productivity and advanced capability. FE, Higher Education and training providers will expand modular and flexible provision at Levels 3–6 and beyond, including leadership and management, digital and AI, and specialist technical skills aligned to sector demand. Universities will play a key role in strengthening higher technical and professional pathways, particularly in areas such as life sciences, advanced manufacturing and digital.

All actions identified are intended to be implemented over the three-year period of this LSIP.

The detailed delivery activity that supports these changes is set out in Annex B. This identifies specific actions, delivery partners and monitoring measures linked to each priority area, and mapped to each of the six identified changes, ensuring a clear line of sight between employer-identified skills needs and coordinated system responses.

Change 1:	Provide a strategic framework for delivery through ISPs, links to growth clusters, and a clearer systemfor employer involvement.
Change 2:	Create partnerships to improve and simplify SME access to workforce development
Change 3:	Embed digital and AI skills across all sectors
Change 4:	Improve capabilities for increasing compliance, regulation and green transition skills
Change 5:	Focus skills solutions on progression for the existing workforce, not just entry
Change 6:	Provide inclusive pathways to work and improve work readiness of new entrants to the workforce

Change 1:

Provide a strategic framework for delivery through the ‘triple lock’, ISPs, links to growth clusters, and a clearer system for employer involvement.

The Liverpool City Region benefits from sector-led cluster boards aligned to the Growth Plan’s priority clusters and clear actions set out by the Get LCR Working Plan. Using the ‘triple lock’ concept, the LSIP work will align through and with these structures with the development of ISPs (ISPs)- opportunities for employers and education and training providers to work together. Annex B sets out each structure in the action plan at sector level.

ISPs are working partnerships that will provide and promote collaboration and publish an annual priorities statement. They will have a focus on helping SMEs navigate, find and fund training.

LCR Combined Authority	LSIP
LCR AI Task Force	Partnership work between Task Force and sector led ISPs as AI is a cross-cutting priority
PBS Board	PBS ISP will align with the cluster board and act as the Skills Group for the cluster
Advanced Manufacturing Cluster Board	Advanced Manufacturing and Clean Energy ISP will align with the cluster board and act as the Skills Group for the cluster
Health and Life Science Cluster Board	Health and Life Science and Care ISP will align with the cluster board and act as the Skills Group for the cluster
Combined Authority alignment to be agreed in summer 2026	Construction ISP will align with the Combined authority
Creative Industries Cluster Board	Creative Industries ISP will align with the cluster board and act as the Skills Group for the cluster
LCR Destination Partnership Board (LCRDPB)	Visitor Economy ISP will align with the cluster board and act as the Skills Group for the cluster

Change 2:

Create partnerships to improve and simplify SME access to workforce development

As described in Section 1, employers across the Liverpool City Region highlighted that while there is strong willingness to invest in workforce development, small and medium-sized enterprises face practical barriers to doing so. This is particularly significant given the structure of the local economy, with around 43,000 active enterprises, approximately 90% of which are micro and small businesses. These firms often operate with limited management capacity, tight margins and constrained time, making it difficult to release staff for training. Many SMEs also reported that navigating the skills system can be complex, making it harder to identify relevant provision and align it with business needs.

The agreed changes are to create a more accessible and coordinated system for SME engagement through ISPs. In addition, the action plan in Annex B recommends shorter training units, workplace-based learning and blended delivery to enable employees to build skills without extended time away from the workplace. ISPs will play a central role by bringing together employers, providers and partners to align provision with sector needs, while improving coordination and reducing complexity in how businesses access support.

The City Region's **Be More platform**¹⁸ will also support this approach by providing a clear entry point for employers and individuals to understand available training and progression routes.

The expected outcome is increased SME participation in workforce development and a more responsive skills system that is easier to navigate. Over time, this will support businesses to upskill their workforce more effectively, strengthen technical, digital and supervisory capability, and contribute to improved productivity and growth across the SME base.

Change 3:

Embed Digital and AI Skills Across All Sectors

As set out in Section 1, employers across all sectors identified digital and AI capability as a critical and immediate skills need. Section 1 highlights consistent gaps in the practical application of digital tools, limited confidence in using data effectively, and a lack of understanding of how AI can be applied to improve business processes. These gaps are particularly acute among SMEs, where capacity constraints mean that opportunities for productivity gains are often unrealised.

The strategic focus is to address both sides of this challenge: enabling businesses to understand and adopt AI, and ensuring the workforce is equipped with the applied skills needed to use it effectively. This represents a shift from generic digital literacy towards practical, workplace-relevant capability embedded across occupational pathways.

¹⁸ Home Page - BeMore

A central component of this approach is the introduction of an SME-focused AI diagnostic pilot, led by Edge Hill University. This directly address employer feedback set out in the previous section which identified a need for businesses to improve their application of AI. The pilot will provide a structured, light-touch assessment tool that enables businesses to evaluate their current digital maturity, identify specific opportunities for AI adoption, and understand the skills required to implement these changes. Rather than offering generic advice, the diagnostic will generate tailored outputs for each business, including priority actions, recommended training pathways, and signposting to relevant provision.

The pilot is designed to be practical and accessible, recognising the constraints faced by SMEs. It will focus on real business use cases such as process automation, data handling, customer interaction, and operational efficiency. Outputs will be directly linked to short, modular training offers, enabling employers to move quickly from diagnosis to action. This creates a more coherent pathway from employer need to skills provision, addressing a key gap identified in Section 1.

Delivery will involve close collaboration between higher education, further education, ITPs, and employers, ensuring that training provision reflects real business demand. The pilot will also test how effectively existing funding mechanisms, including the Lifelong Learning Entitlement, Apprenticeship Units, and devolved Adult Skills funding, can be aligned to support rapid uptake.

The pilot will launch in Q3 2026, followed by evaluation in early 2027 to assess employer engagement, impact on business confidence, and evidence of behaviour change. Subject to evaluation, the approach will scale across the City Region from Q3 2027. Monitoring will include participation rates, uptake of linked training, and employer-reported improvements in efficiency and capability.

Alongside this, a consistent AI capability framework, linked to the Combined Authorities 'AI for Good' and AI Task Force, will be developed and embedded across Level 3 to Level 6 provision. This will ensure that learners develop not only awareness of AI, but the ability to apply tools in practice, understand ethical considerations, and work effectively in AI-enabled environments. Together, these actions will support faster adoption of AI by businesses and improve workforce readiness, directly contributing to productivity growth and alignment with LSIP objectives.

As these actions are applicable across all sectors, the Annex B actions are collated as a separate section.

Change 4:

Improve capabilities for increasing compliance, regulation and green transition skills

An important facet of skills for progression and leadership is knowledge and capability for compliance and regulation. As reported in Section 1, employers across multiple sectors identified increasing regulatory complexity and the transition to low-carbon operations as significant and growing skills challenges. Section 1 highlights gaps in the ability of the workforce

to understand and apply regulatory requirements in practice, alongside shortages in the technical skills needed to support net zero and environmental targets. These gaps create risks for businesses, constrain growth, and limit the ability to respond to policy and market changes.

The strategic focus is to embed compliance, regulatory understanding, and green skills within occupational pathways, rather than treating them as standalone or specialist areas. This requires provision to reflect real-world requirements, ensuring that individuals can apply knowledge in practical settings and support business performance.

In construction, this includes building capability in retrofit and low-carbon technologies, such as insulation, ventilation, solar PV, and whole-house standards, alongside ensuring strong understanding of safety, building regulations, and quality assurance. In manufacturing and clean energy, employers require skills aligned to low-carbon production, environmental standards, and regulatory compliance linked to Freeport and clean growth investment. In professional and business services, regulatory capability is increasingly important in areas such as payroll, employment law, and financial compliance, where changes in legislation are placing additional demands on employers.

In health and care, compliance is critical to service quality and safety, with growing requirements linked to digital systems, data governance, and regulatory frameworks. Employers highlighted the need for staff who can confidently operate within these requirements while maintaining high standards of care.

Annex B actions set out how these needs will be addressed through the integration of regulatory and green skills into mainstream provision. This includes the development of coherent retrofit pathways in construction, alignment of manufacturing provision to low-carbon and Freeport demand and embedding compliance capability within PBS and health and care training. Delivery will be supported through existing funding routes, including the LLE, Apprenticeship Units, Skills Bootcamps, and devolved Adult Skills funding (ASF), alongside employer co-investment.

The expected outcome is a workforce that is better equipped to meet regulatory requirements, support the transition to a low-carbon economy, and contribute to business resilience and growth. This will reduce compliance risks, improve quality and productivity, and ensure that the skills system supports wider economic and environmental priorities.

Change 5:

Focus skills solutions on progression for the existing workforce, not just entry

As set out in Section 1, employers across all priority sectors identified progression within the existing workforce as an immediate and pressing need alongside entry-level supply. Section 1 highlights consistent bottlenecks where employees are often technically competent but lack the supervisory, specialist, or higher technical skills required to progress. This constrains productivity, increases pressure on senior staff, and contributes to persistent vacancies in critical roles.

This approach directly responds to sector-specific needs identified in Section 1. In construction, there is a clear requirement to build capacity in retrofit and low-carbon skills, including insulation, ventilation, solar technologies, and whole-house approaches, to meet net zero and housing targets. In health and care, employers highlighted the need to strengthen capability in electronic patient records, digital care planning, and the use of technology in service delivery, alongside progression into senior care and management roles.

The second strategic focus is to rebalance the skills system towards in-work progression. This requires a shift away from an over-reliance on entry-level provision towards flexible, modular training that supports individuals to upskill and progress within employment. The introduction of the LLE and greater use of Apprenticeship Units (in technical areas) provide key levers to enable this change, allowing for more flexible, bite-sized learning that can be accessed alongside work and tailored to specific job roles.

Changes to the apprenticeship system (March 2026), including a stronger focus on younger entrants and entry-level pathways, reinforce the need to embed supervisory and operational management capability earlier within the skills pipeline and in a modular, flexible way for the existing workforce. Firstly, there is a need to integrate these skills within study programmes, including new Level 2 occupational routes and other pathways leading directly to employment, so that learners enter the workforce with the core competencies required to progress into supervisory roles. This shift reduces reliance on apprenticeships as the primary route for developing management capability and ensures that progression is supported from the outset of an individual's career.

Across all sectors, there is an expressed need to improve leadership skills, both in new employees, and in the existing workforce. In advanced manufacturing and clean energy, employers require faster progression into technician and supervisory roles, particularly at Levels 3 to 6, to support productivity and reduce reliance on external recruitment. In professional and business services, the priority is developing first-line and middle-management capability, alongside strengthening leadership, compliance, and organisational skills. Across the visitor economy and creative industries, progression pathways are needed to support retention, improve job quality, and enable movement into higher-skilled roles.

As leadership capability is common across all sectors, the Annex B actions present these priorities as a separate section.

¹⁹ Employer skills survey 2024: full UK research report

²⁰ Early talent development trends to watch in 2025 | Luminare

Change 6:

Provide inclusive pathways to work and improve work readiness of new entrants to the workforce

Employers across sectors reported that new entrants often arrive with qualifications but lack the applied skills, behaviours, and confidence required to operate effectively in the workplace. Section 1 highlights consistent gaps in communication, problem-solving, professional judgement, and the ability to translate knowledge into practical outputs. This increases onboarding time, places additional pressure on existing staff, and contributes to early attrition.

The strategic focus is to strengthen work readiness through more applied, employer-informed learning and clearer expectations of what constitutes job-ready competence. This will be supported by the opportunities presented through qualification reform, including expansion and increased uptake of T Levels, and preparation for the introduction of new Level 2 and V Level qualifications from 2027 (starting with early years, digital and finance and accounting).

A key element of this approach is the embedding of structured, employer-recognised standards for entry. Annex B actions include the development of sector-based skills passports or digital wallets underpinned by micro credentials and digital badges, particularly in sectors such as construction and the visitor economy. This aligns with the Mayor's manifesto commitment to embed digital badges and micro credentials within the Be More platform, enabling individuals to capture and evidence their learning in a consistent way. In this model, badges and micro credentials provide verified evidence of specific skills and competencies, the digital wallet enables individuals to store and share that evidence, and the passport brings this together into a clear, employer-facing statement of work readiness. This creates consistent expectations around core competencies such as health and safety, behaviours and technical capability, helping employers recruit with greater confidence while giving learners a clearer and more portable way to understand and demonstrate workplace requirements.

Applied learning models will be expanded to support this shift. This includes initiatives such as business clinics in PBS, where learners work on real employer challenges, and increased use of employer-led projects and live briefs across sectors. These approaches ensure that technical knowledge is reinforced through practical application.

Recent evidence shows that employers in England place significant emphasis on strong literacy and speaking skills yet continue to report notable gaps among new entrants to the workforce. The Department for Education Employer Skills Survey 2024¹⁹ highlights that a substantial proportion of employers experience skills deficiencies, particularly in core communication abilities such as reading and understanding instructions (contributing to 30% of skill-shortage vacancies). Complementing this, research by the Institute of Student Employers (2025)²⁰ finds that many employers are concerned about school and university leavers' ability to communicate effectively, both in written form and in spoken interactions. Work-appropriate verbal communication was a concern for 22% (up from 17% in 2024 and 7% in 2023).

²¹ LCR-PathwaytoNetZero-Report-2022-FINAL-compressed.pdf

These concerns are echoed at a regional level: in deep-dive interviews with Liverpool City Region employers (as reported in Section 1), businesses reported practical issues linked to weak communication skills, including difficulties with the standard of written and spoken English among applicants, which in turn affected day-to-day performance and contributed to recruitment and training challenges.

Targeted interventions will also address specific barriers to work readiness. The literacy (reading, speaking and listening) skills proficiency pilot, delivered with further education providers and employers, will test new approaches to strengthening core English skills and improving the transition from education into employment. This responds directly to employer concerns about foundational skills and their impact on job performance and is also a pilot explicitly targeted for NEET prevention. As this is a pilot with cross-sector potential, this is included in the section for all sectors.

Improving equality of opportunity is also central to this priority. Annex B includes the expansion of initiatives such as Women in Construction, which aim to broaden participation, challenge occupational stereotypes, and strengthen the pipeline of talent into underrepresented roles.

Annex B actions related to this change are to be found in sector specific plans as well as a strategic section related to work-readiness that is applicable to all sectors.

Net Zero and Green Skills

Supporting the transition to a low-carbon economy is a core component of the system-level changes set out in this LSIP. Employers consistently identified a growing need for skills that enable businesses to meet environmental standards, adopt low-carbon technologies and respond to regulatory and market pressures. This requires a shift from treating green skills as a niche specialism to embedding them across mainstream education and workforce development.

The LSIP responds by integrating Net Zero capability across priority sectors, rather than addressing it in isolation. This is critical in construction (particularly in heritage and traditional buildings), advanced manufacturing and clean energy, where demand is immediate and linked to major investment and infrastructure pipelines. Agreed changes include strengthening provision in retrofit, low-carbon technologies and sustainable production, and ensuring that environmental and regulatory knowledge is embedded within occupational pathways rather than delivered as standalone content.

Beyond priority sectors, there is also a need to raise baseline awareness of environmental standards and sustainable working practices across the wider workforce. This includes embedding sustainability principles within core programmes and progression pathways, ensuring that all learners develop an understanding of how Net Zero requirements affect their role and sector.

Delivery will be coordinated through the LSIP system architecture, including ISPs and alignment with Growth Plan clusters, ensuring that provision reflects employer demand, investment priorities and supply chain requirements. This approach supports a more consistent and scalable response to Net Zero skills across the City Region.

The LSIP approach is informed by the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority's Net Zero strategy and evidence base, including the Pathway to Net Zero report²¹, which highlights the scale of workforce transformation required and the importance of aligning skills provision with decarbonisation, energy transition and sustainable growth objectives.

Equality of Opportunity and Inclusive Growth

Improving equality of opportunity is integral to the delivery of the LSIP and underpins the system-level changes set out in this section. Employers were clear that addressing skills shortages cannot be achieved through provision alone but requires widening participation in the labour market and ensuring that individuals from all backgrounds can access and progress within employment.

The approach set out in this LSIP embeds inclusion within mainstream skills reform rather than treating it as a standalone activity. This includes strengthening entry routes into employment, improving work readiness, expanding flexible and modular provision, and creating clearer progression pathways across sectors. Particular focus is given to groups that are currently underrepresented in the workforce, including young people at risk of becoming NEET and women in sectors such as construction where there is significant unmet labour demand.

Targeted interventions, including pilot activity focused on literacy and sector-specific participation, will support this approach by testing practical ways to improve access, engagement and progression. These will inform future delivery and enable effective models to be scaled across the City Region.

How Success Will Be Measured

The LSIP will use a practical approach to measuring success. The aim is not to claim that the LSIP alone will change outcomes such as productivity or recruitment pressures. These are shaped by many factors across the economy. Instead, the LSIP will focus on whether the skills system is responding to employer priorities and whether employers, education providers and partners are working together to deliver the actions set out in the roadmap. This approach reflects the role of the LSIP as an employer-led plan that brings partners together to improve the alignment between training and workforce need.

The core evidence will come from ISPs. Each ISP will produce an annual statement of progress. These statements will summarise what has changed during the year, including progress against roadmap actions, emerging workforce issues, and where further action may be needed. This ensures that employer insight continues to shape the plan as it is implemented, rather than being captured only during the original research phase.

Education and training providers will also provide an annual response. For FE providers, this will be linked to their existing FE accountability agreements. This means colleges can demonstrate how their curriculum planning, course development, and employer engagement activity are responding to the priorities identified through the LSIP. This approach avoids creating a separate reporting system and instead uses the accountability arrangements that are already in place. Universities and other training providers will also be invited to provide an annual update explaining how they are responding to the priorities raised by employers through the ISPs.

Oversight of this process will sit with an employer-led LSIP Board. The Board will meet three times each year to review progress and agree the next steps.

In September each year, the Board will review the plans in place for the year ahead, including the actions agreed through the LSIP roadmap and any updates from ISPs.

In February each year, the Board will receive a progress update from the ISPs and presentations from education and training providers explaining how they have responded to employer priorities and what changes have been made to provision.

In April each year, the Board will review the evidence gathered during the year and finalise the annual statement of progress for the LSIP.

Proposed indicators for monitoring LSIP progress include:

Indicator	What will be monitored	Source of evidence	Frequency
Employer engagement	Number of employers actively participating in ISPs and related LSIP activity	ISP attendance records and engagement tracker	Quarterly
Delivery of LSIP Actions	Progress against the actions and milestones set out in the LSIP sector roadmaps	Updates from ISPs, quarterly reviews	Quarterly
Sector insight	Updates from ISPs summarising workforce issues and progress on LSIP actions	ISP updates and meeting summaries	Twice a year
Provider response	Evidence of curriculum changes, new courses or expanded provision aligned to LSIP priorities	Provider planning documents and annual responses	Annual
Collaboration	Examples of employer-provider partnerships supporting training development, delivery or careers activity	Case studies and partnership activity	Quarterly
Learner participation	Participation in training provision aligned to LSIP priority sectors where data is available	Provider data and national datasets	Annual

The annual cycle is designed to keep the LSIP active and responsive. It provides a clear way for employers to review progress, for providers to demonstrate how they are responding to local need, and for partners to identify where further collaboration or action is required. Over time, these updates can also be considered alongside wider labour market data from the Combined Authority and other sources to understand how the LSIP is contributing to longer term economic and workforce outcomes.





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to find out more



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