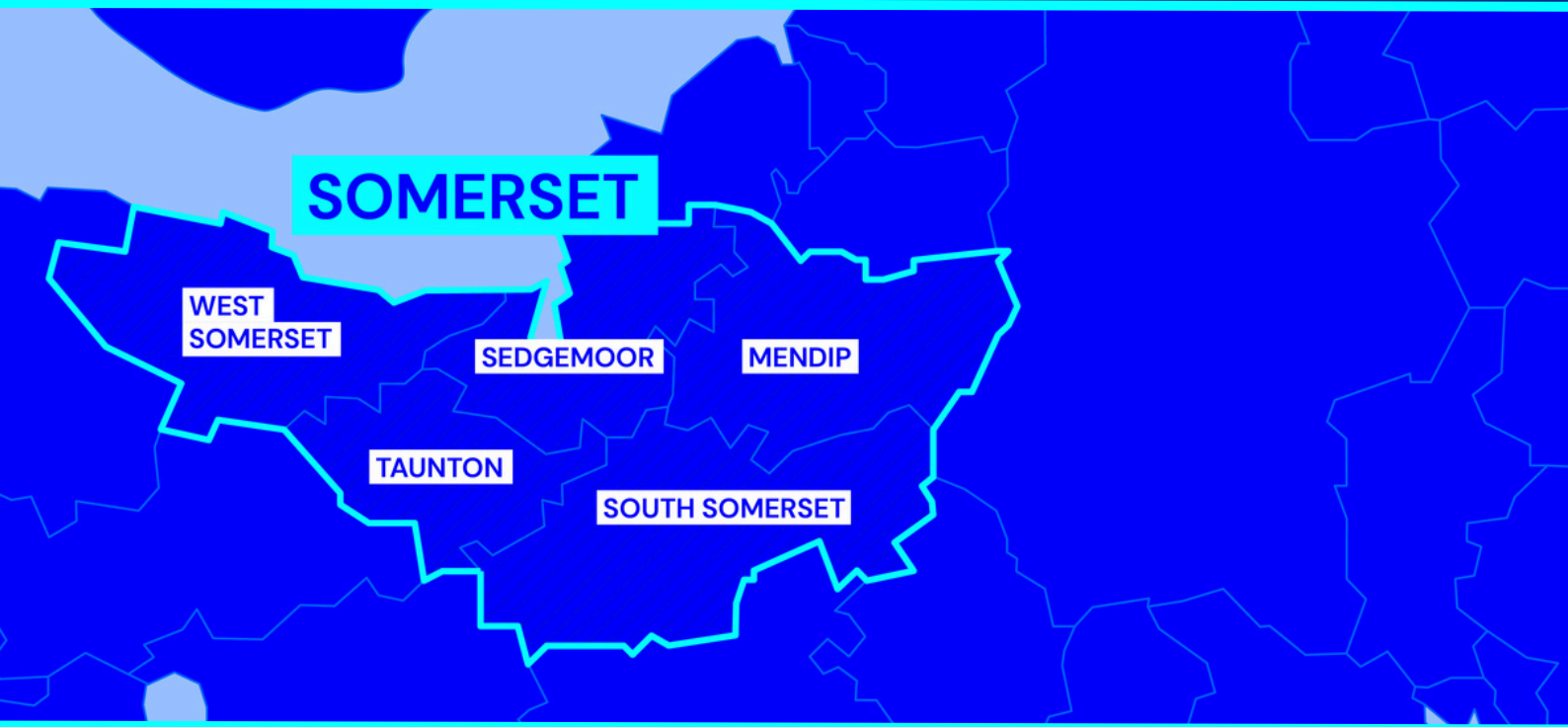


# Somerset Local Skills Improvement Plan 2026



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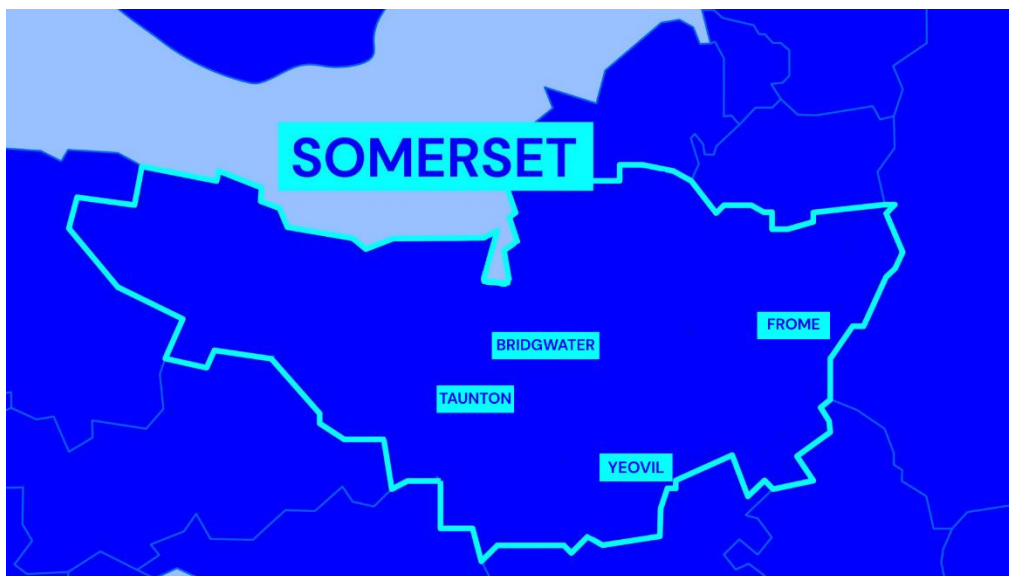
Corporation

**'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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## Introduction



**Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs)** are statutory, employer-led plans, introduced through the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022, that set out priority skills needs and required actions over a rolling three-year cycle. They are designed for employers, education and training providers, and wider stakeholders, aligning provision more closely with labour market demand. In Somerset, the LSIP provides a coordinated framework to address skills gaps, support key sectors, and enable inclusive economic growth – ensuring local people can access opportunity while businesses have the workforce they need to thrive.

The findings in this report have been collated from engagement with local employers, education and training providers and regional stakeholders. In addition, these groups have contributed to the development of the annex of activities (Annex B) in order to ensure ongoing alignment and collaborative working towards these objectives.

Somerset Council, BCP Council, Dorset Council and Wiltshire Council continue to work together as the Wessex Partnership to explore bringing the benefits of devolution to the region. In line with the English Devolution Bill, this could mean the creation of a Strategic Authority in the future, and the devolution of decision making to it in areas such as skills and employment support, culture, economic development and regeneration, transport and infrastructure, housing and strategic planning, environment and net zero, health and wellbeing, and public safety.

Business West and the Somerset Chamber of Commerce work in partnership to deliver the Somerset Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), combining national ERB accountability with strong local insight and engagement. As the designated Employer Representative Body, Business West retains overall responsibility for the development, delivery and governance of the LSIP, ensuring alignment with statutory guidance and Skills England requirements. Somerset Chamber plays a central role in leading local employer engagement, drawing on its established networks and relationships to ensure

that the voice of Somerset businesses is fully reflected in the identification of skills needs and priorities.

This collaborative approach enables a coordinated and locally responsive model of delivery, bringing together regional oversight with place-based expertise. Business West and Somerset Chamber work jointly with employers, education and training providers, local authorities and wider stakeholders to develop and implement actions that address identified skills needs. Through shared engagement activity, aligned governance and ongoing coordination, the partnership ensures that the LSIP remains employer-led, evidence-based and responsive to the evolving needs of Somerset's economy.

The findings align closely with Somerset's wider economic ambitions, including the Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy and Get Somerset Working Plan, alongside national priorities relating to clean energy, advanced manufacturing, digital capability, workforce participation and inclusive growth. Through continued collaboration between employers, providers, local authorities and wider stakeholders, the LSIP aims to support a more responsive, accessible and future-focused skills system for Somerset.

*"Business West are proud to deliver the Somerset Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), in collaboration with Somerset Chambers of Commerce, on behalf of businesses, education and training providers and key stakeholders in the local area. LSIPs put employers at the heart of local skills planning, aligning training with real business need and strengthening collaboration with education providers to improve options for learners, and help businesses plan ahead."*

– **Douglas Ure**, CEO, Business West

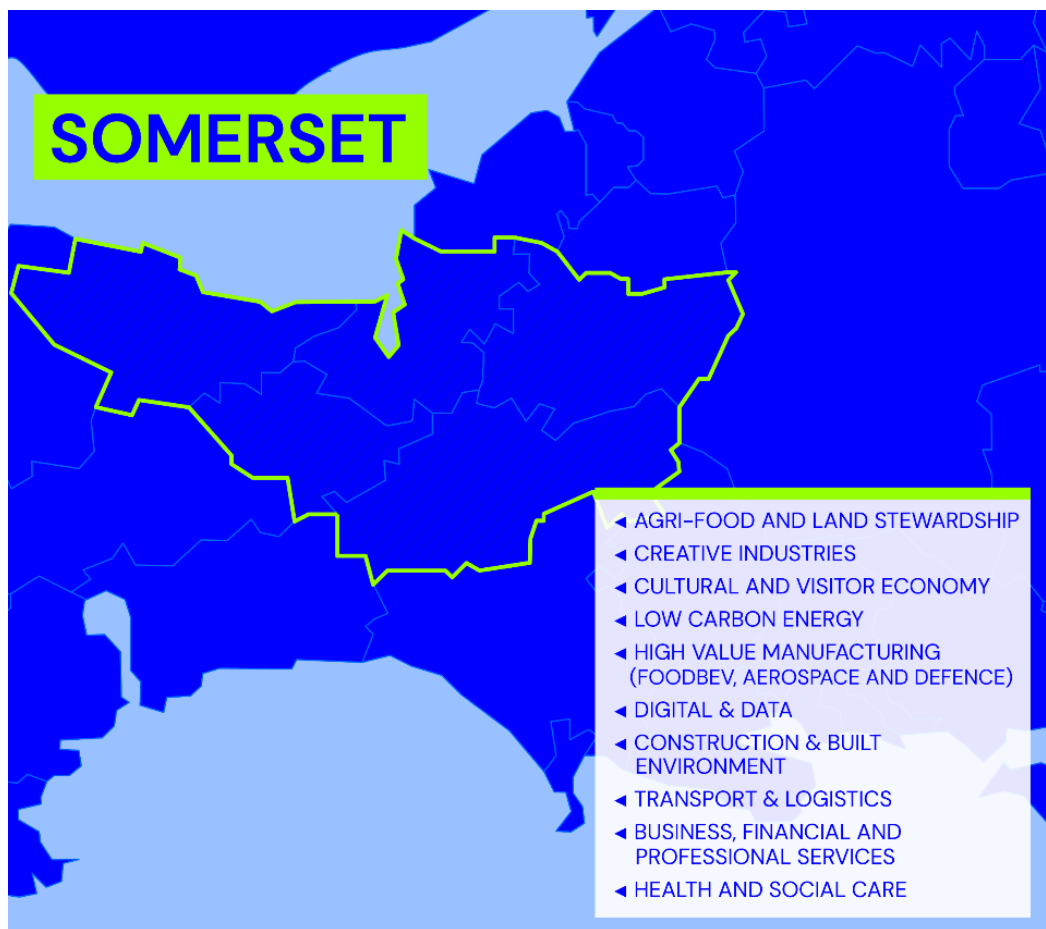
"Somerset Chamber of Commerce is proud to help shape the 2026 Local Skills Improvement Plan, ensuring it reflects the real needs of businesses across the county. By working closely with employers, we have identified the skills priorities that will support growth, strengthen key sectors and create opportunities for local people.

Through our partnership with Business West, we combine strong local insight with regional leadership to ensure the LSIP remains employer-led and action-focused. By continuing to strengthen collaboration between employers, educators and partners, we can ensure Somerset's skills system remains agile and responsive.

This plan sets out a shared commitment: to equip people with the skills they need, enable businesses to grow and compete and support a resilient, inclusive economy for Somerset. We look forward to continuing to work with partners across the system to turn these priorities into reality."

- **David Crew**, Managing Director, Somerset Chamber of Commerce

## Executive Summary



**This Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP)** provides an employer-informed assessment of current and emerging skills needs across Somerset, alongside a set of priority actions to better align post-16 education and training with labour market demand. The findings reflect engagement with employers, providers and stakeholders across the county, supported by wider labour market intelligence and strategic economic evidence. Together, this provides a robust and up-to-date picture of the skills challenges and opportunities shaping Somerset's economy at present.

For the purposes of the 2025–2028 LSIP cycle, the report identifies a focused set of overarching local skills priorities. The report structure sets out a small number of priority skills needs statements in Section 1, supported by associated actions and implementation activity in Section 2, with further granular sectoral intelligence provided in Annex A.

Somerset's economic profile is characterised by a combination of established sectors and areas of emerging growth. The Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy identifies a set of bedrock sectors, including agri-food and land stewardship, the visitor economy, and cultural and creative industries, which underpin employment across the county. Alongside these, priority and distinctive sectors such as low carbon energy, high value

manufacturing (including food and drink, aerospace and defence), and digital and data are expected to play a significant role in driving future growth.

Additional sectors identified through local engagement, including construction and the built environment, transport and logistics, business and professional services, and health and social care – further contribute to the breadth and diversity of the local economy and demonstrate a high degree of interdependency across sectoral supply chains.

A consistent set of skills challenges is evident across Somerset's economy. Employers report increasing demand for skills linked to net zero and sustainability, with environmental considerations becoming more prominent within business operations, procurement processes and regulatory requirements. There is a corresponding need for clearer definitions of 'green skills' and more accessible, sector-relevant training.

Somerset's future growth opportunities are also closely linked to nationally significant investment and innovation activity across many sectors including:

- Clean energy
- Defence
- Aerospace
- Digital technologies
- High value manufacturing.

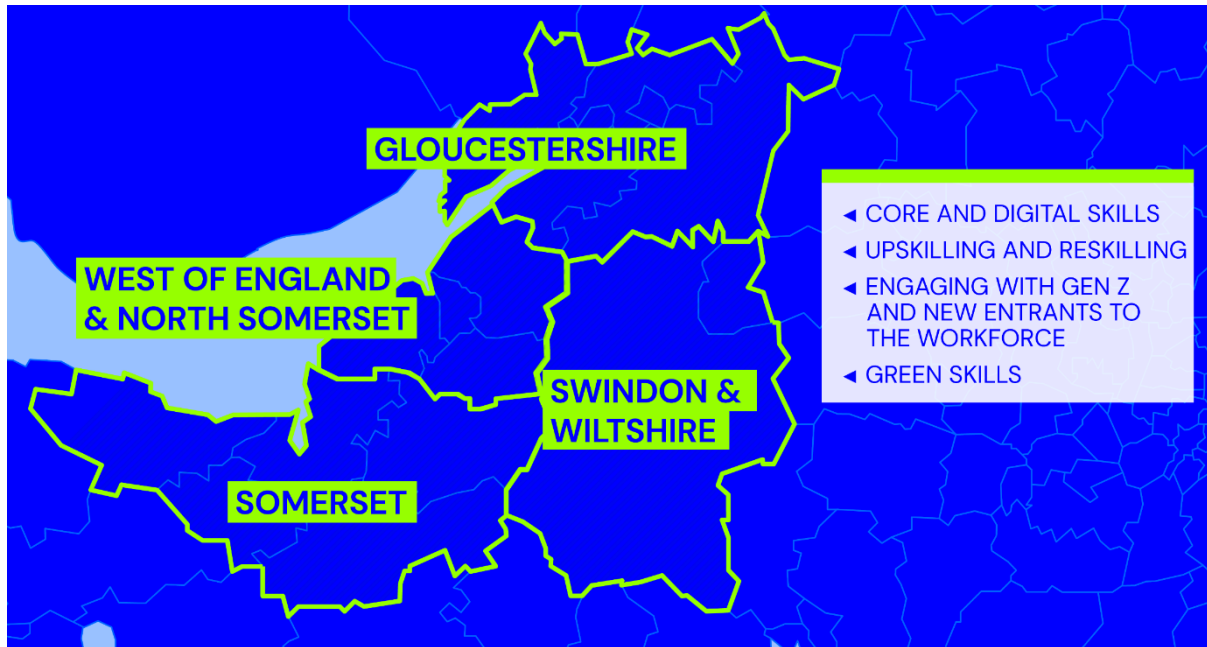
Employers and stakeholders highlighted the importance of strengthening local awareness, technical capability and workforce pathways linked to these sectors, alongside improving support for innovation adoption, productivity improvement and technology integration across the wider business base. This includes ensuring local people and businesses are able to benefit from emerging opportunities associated with major investments such as Hinkley Point C, Agravas, advanced manufacturing supply chains and future aerospace and defence developments centred around Yeovil and South Somerset.

At the same time, digitalisation and the adoption of AI are driving changes across a wide range of roles, with demand spanning both advanced technical capabilities and baseline digital literacy. Employers highlight the pace of technological change as a key challenge, particularly for small and medium-sized businesses seeking to upskill their workforce.

A further cross-cutting theme is the importance of critical and enabling skills, including communication, teamwork, problem solving and resilience. These are consistently identified as areas of weakness, particularly among new entrants to the workforce, and are viewed by employers as essential to long-term workforce development.

Employers also report ongoing recruitment challenges, driven by a combination of skills shortages, a limited labour pool, and a perceived mismatch between employer expectations and those of prospective employees. These challenges are often more pronounced in rural areas, where transport and accessibility issues can further constrain both recruitment and training participation.

In relation to the skills system itself, employers describe variable levels of awareness and engagement with available training provision. While many businesses are making use of apprenticeships, in-house training and external provision, there remains a lack of clarity around available options, funding mechanisms and progression pathways.



There is a clear preference for more flexible, modular and applied training, delivered in a way that aligns with business needs and workforce constraints. This is particularly relevant for SMEs, who often face challenges in releasing staff for training or accessing provision in convenient locations.

In response to these findings, the LSIP sets out a focused programme of actions aimed at:

- Improving the relevance and accessibility of training provision
- Strengthening employer engagement in the design and delivery of skills
- Enhancing pathways into and through the labour market, particularly for young people and new entrants
- Supporting the development of cross-cutting capabilities, including digital, sustainability and transferable skills
- Improving navigation of and access to the skills system

This will be supported through a programme of practical, employer-informed activity, developed in partnership with providers, local authorities and stakeholders. Full details are set out in Annex B, including delivery leads, partners and intended outcomes, with ongoing co-development ensuring activities remain responsive and deliverable. Governance and oversight will be supported through the Somerset Work, Health & Skills Partnership, ensuring strong alignment with employer priorities and local system coordination.

The LSIP will be kept under review to ensure that it remains responsive to changes in the labour market and continues to reflect employer need. Together, these priorities and actions aim to support a more responsive, accessible and future-focused skills system for Somerset, aligned to employer demand, inclusive growth and long-term economic resilience.

# Strategic and Economic Context

## REGIONAL ECONOMIC CONTEXT AND PERFORMANCE

**Somerset enters the current LSIP period with a sizeable and diverse economy**, but one marked by a distinctive combination of economic strengths and structural constraints. The Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy describes the county as a £14.1 billion economy, with around 29,000 businesses, 252,000 jobs and a resident population of approximately 581,000. It also highlights a relatively high business density, significant manufacturing activity, and sustained population growth since 2012 (*Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy*, p.6).<sup>1</sup>

The county's economic geography is important to understanding its strategic and skills context. Somerset is not presented as a single, self-contained economy, but as a set of connected places shaped by major corridors, settlement patterns and sectoral concentrations. The M5 corridor in the north links Somerset strongly to Bristol, Exeter and Plymouth, with Bridgwater and Taunton acting as significant employment centres. In the southern half of the county, the A303 corridor creates connections to Wiltshire, Dorset and the south coast, while different parts of the county display distinct sectoral strengths (*Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy*, p.7–8).<sup>2</sup>

The county also has a strong rural character, with roughly half the population living in rural areas and the remainder in small and medium-sized towns and villages. This creates both opportunities and constraints. Rurality contributes to Somerset's natural assets, visitor offer and quality of life, but it also creates challenges around transport, digital connectivity, social isolation and access to employment, training and services (*Get Somerset Working Plan*, p.9; *Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy*, p.8).<sup>3 4</sup>

The strategic evidence points to a mixed economic picture. Somerset has high employment and economic activity rates relative to England, strong entrepreneurial activity, and nationally significant investments in sectors linked to energy and manufacturing. At the same time, the county has slower overall economic growth than the national average, lower productivity than both England and the South West, and workplace-based earnings below the national average. Higher-level skills attainment also lags the national position (*Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy*, p.9–10).<sup>5</sup>

Demography is a central part of this context. Somerset has an older population than England on average, with 25 per cent of residents aged 65 or over, and this is projected to rise further. Only 58 per cent of the population are of working age, compared with 63 per cent nationally. The strategy identifies this ageing profile as a long-term workforce challenge, while the Working Plan links it directly to economic inactivity, labour supply

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<sup>1</sup> Somerset Council (2025): [Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy 2025-2045](#) (hereafter "SEPS").

<sup>2</sup> SEPS

<sup>3</sup> Somerset Council (2025): [Get Somerset Working Plan](#) (hereafter "GSWP")

<sup>4</sup> SEPS

<sup>5</sup> SEPS

pressures and growing demand for health and care services (*Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy, p.6; Get Somerset Working Plan, p.9*).<sup>6 7</sup>

The sectors and thematic priorities reflected within this LSIP have been informed through a combination of employer engagement, local economic evidence, labour market intelligence and alignment with both national Industrial Strategy priorities and Somerset's wider economic ambitions. While some sectors are identified due to their scale within the existing economy, others reflect emerging growth opportunities, strategic infrastructure investment or areas where employers consistently reported significant workforce pressures and capability gaps. The LSIP will work alongside the Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy, the Get Somerset Working Plan and other local initiatives to ensure these needs are met.

## **PRIORITY SECTORS AND DRIVERS OF GROWTH**

The Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy adopts a clear sectoral framework, distinguishing between "distinctive", "bedrock" and "core" sectors. The county's distinctive sectors – those identified as having competitive advantage and the strongest potential to drive productivity-led growth are low-carbon energy, aerospace and defence, high-value manufacturing, and digital and data (*Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy, p.15*).<sup>8</sup>

These sectors are rooted in concrete local assets and investment opportunities. In low-carbon energy, Somerset's role is anchored by Hinkley Point C and by wider opportunities linked to tidal energy in the Severn Estuary and Bridgwater Bay (*Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy, p.17–18*).<sup>9</sup>

High-value manufacturing is another core economic strength. The strategy notes that Somerset already has a strong specialisation in this area, and that activity is spread across the county, particularly in the south (*Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy, p.21*). This is reinforced by the major investment in the Gravity Enterprise Zone near Bridgwater, where Agratas is investing £4 billion in what is expected to be the UK's largest electric vehicle battery plant (*Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy, p.17; p.6*).<sup>10</sup>

In aerospace and defence, the county's strengths are concentrated particularly around Yeovil and Templecombe. The strategy identifies Leonardo UK, the iAero Innovation Centre, the South West Future Flight Innovation Zone, Thales in Templecombe, and the UK Hydrographic Office in Taunton as key assets (*Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy, p.19–20*).<sup>11</sup>

Recent confirmation of Defence and Clean Energy Technical Excellence Colleges (TECs) within Somerset further strengthens the county's position within nationally significant

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<sup>6</sup> SEPS

<sup>7</sup> GSWP

<sup>8</sup> SEPS

<sup>9</sup> SEPS

<sup>10</sup> SEPS

<sup>11</sup> SEPS

growth sectors. These developments build upon existing regional expertise in engineering, advanced manufacturing, clean energy and aerospace, while supporting clearer progression pathways into higher-level technical skills aligned to employer demand. Alongside major investments such as Agratas, Hinkley Point C and the continued development of aerospace and defence capabilities linked to Leonardo and wider supply chains, the TECs provide an opportunity to strengthen collaboration between employers, further education, higher education and innovation partners across Somerset. Collectively, these assets position the county as an increasingly important centre for technical excellence, productivity growth and innovation-led economic development within the South West and nationally. Digital and data is described as an increasingly important distinctive sector, with opportunities linked to data centres and innovation infrastructure, particularly along the M5 corridor (*Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy, p.21*).<sup>12</sup>

Alongside these, the strategy identifies “bedrock” sectors such as agri-food and land stewardship, the visitor economy, and cultural and creative industries as central to the local economy and communities (*Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy, p.22*). It also recognises a wider “core” economy including health and care, retail, education, construction, transport and public administration (*Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy, p.15*).<sup>13</sup>

## **STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND ECONOMIC DIRECTION**

The Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy provides the overarching strategic context for the area. Its vision is for a “flourishing, fair and green” economy, supported by long-term goals relating to productivity, earnings, higher-level skills, employment and economic inactivity (*Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy, p.12–14*).<sup>14</sup>

Within that framework, the strategy identifies five strategic priorities: distinctive assets and opportunities, people, business environment, places and communities, and infrastructure. Skills and workforce development are central, with a clear focus on building an aspirational workforce aligned to current and future labour market needs (*Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy, p.15*).<sup>15</sup>

The strategy also emphasises enabling conditions for growth, including infrastructure, housing, connectivity and environmental sustainability. These are presented as critical to supporting both economic performance and inclusion (*Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy, p.15–16*).<sup>16</sup>

Supporting progression into higher-level technical skills will be increasingly important to Somerset’s future workforce requirements, particularly across clean energy, engineering, digital, manufacturing and defence-related sectors. The LSIP therefore recognises the importance of strengthening progression pathways between further and higher

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<sup>12</sup> SEPS

<sup>13</sup> SEPS

<sup>14</sup> SEPS

<sup>15</sup> SEPS

<sup>16</sup> SEPS

education, including Levels 4–5 technical education and higher-level specialist provision through providers such as University Centre Somerset, Yeovil College University Centre and regional higher education partners. This will support both workforce development and wider innovation capacity within the local economy.

## **LABOUR MARKET DYNAMICS AND KEY CHALLENGES**

Somerset’s labour market performs relatively well on headline indicators, with an employment rate of 78.6 per cent and unemployment at 2.9 per cent. Economic inactivity stands at 19 per cent of the working-age population (*Get Somerset Working Plan, p.7*).<sup>17</sup>

However, this masks significant challenges. There are 61,500 economically inactive working-age residents, of whom only 10,800 want a job (*Get Somerset Working Plan, p.4*). Long-term sickness is the largest driver of inactivity, followed by caring responsibilities and retirement (*Get Somerset Working Plan, p.10*).<sup>18</sup>

Inactivity is strongly shaped by age and gender. Over half of economically inactive individuals are aged 50–64, and women are significantly more likely to be inactive due to caring responsibilities and health-related factors (*Get Somerset Working Plan, p.10–11*).<sup>19</sup>

Barriers to employment are complex and overlapping, including physical and mental health conditions, caring responsibilities, transport challenges, benefit-related concerns and confidence issues. These barriers often interact, making it more difficult for individuals to enter or re-enter the labour market (*Get Somerset Working Plan, p.12*).<sup>20</sup>

These labour market dynamics are reinforced by wider structural issues, including rural connectivity challenges, lower higher-level skills attainment, and an ageing population, all of which shape both labour supply and skills demand (*Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy, p.9–10; Get Somerset Working Plan, p.9*).<sup>21</sup>

## **ALIGNMENT WITH WIDER STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND DELIVERY PLANS**

The LSIP is positioned within a wider strategic framework for economic development and inclusion in Somerset. The Economic Prosperity Strategy explicitly states that it will be supported by a series of implementation plans translating its long-term vision into deliverable actions (*Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy, p.5*).

The Get Somerset Working Plan is one such implementation plan. It explicitly supports the “Fair” and “People” goals of the Economic Prosperity Strategy, including reducing economic inactivity, improving employment outcomes, and building a workforce aligned to the needs of the local economy (*Get Somerset Working Plan, p.4*).<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> GSWP

<sup>18</sup> GSWP

<sup>19</sup> GSWP

<sup>20</sup> GSWP

<sup>21</sup> GSWP

<sup>22</sup> GSWP

Within this framework, the LSIP contributes by aligning skills provision with the needs of Somerset's distinctive, bedrock and core sectors. It complements the Working Plan's focus on reducing economic inactivity by identifying the skills required for both entry into work and progression within key sectors.

The Get Somerset Working Plan also highlights the importance of a "whole system" approach, bringing together employers, service providers, local authorities and communities to address barriers to employment (*Get Somerset Working Plan, p.5*).<sup>23</sup> The LSIP supports this approach by strengthening employer engagement in the skills system and helping to align provision more closely with labour market demand.

Taken together, these relationships position the LSIP as a key component of Somerset's strategic approach to economic development. It operates alongside the Economic Prosperity Strategy and the Get Somerset Working Plan to support sector growth, improve labour market outcomes, and contribute to a more inclusive and resilient local economy.

The Somerset LSIP also aligns with wider national policy direction relating to economic growth, workforce participation and industrial transition. This includes the UK Industrial Strategy and associated sector priorities, the Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper vision for a more employer-responsive and flexible skills system, the Government's Opportunity and Growth Missions, and the Clean Energy Jobs Plan. These national priorities are particularly relevant to Somerset given the county's strengths in clean energy, advanced manufacturing, aerospace and defence, alongside the need to support workforce participation, progression and higher-level technical skills development across both urban and rural communities.

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<sup>23</sup> GSWP

## Section 1: Priority Local Skills Needs

### Priority Skills Needs Statements for Somerset

**While several of the priority skills needs identified** through employer engagement are closely interconnected, they have been presented separately within this LSIP to reflect the distinct operational and workforce challenges reported by employers and stakeholders. Together, these priorities collectively support Somerset's long-term productivity, workforce resilience and inclusive economic growth, while enabling clearer articulation of locally agreed actions and delivery responsibilities.

Across employer engagement activity there was a strong emphasis on the need to improve productivity, workforce adaptability and technology adoption in response to long-term labour supply pressures. Somerset already experiences relatively high employment levels and, in many sectors, employers reported greater difficulty recruiting suitable applicants than individuals finding work. This challenge was particularly pronounced across engineering, advanced manufacturing, construction, clean energy and defence-related industries, where employers described persistent shortages in technical and specialist roles. As a result, businesses increasingly highlighted the importance of innovation, automation, AI adoption, process improvement and wider workforce upskilling as essential mechanisms for sustaining growth and operational resilience. Employers and providers consistently stressed that improving productivity through technology integration and workforce development will be critical to ensuring Somerset can meet future workforce demands despite demographic pressures and a constrained labour pool.

Feedback from employers and providers in Yeovil and South Somerset further reinforced the strategic importance of defence, aerospace, advanced manufacturing and clean energy to Somerset's future economy. Stakeholders highlighted the region's nationally significant concentration of aerospace and defence capability, alongside growing opportunities linked to battery manufacturing, clean energy infrastructure, robotics, autonomy, digital engineering and alternative fuels. Employers consistently identified the need for stronger progression pathways into these sectors, increased visibility of local career opportunities and continued investment in higher-level technical and specialist skills aligned to innovation-led growth. These sectors were viewed not only as major sources of employment, but as key drivers of productivity, inward investment and long-term economic resilience for Somerset.

Across multiple priority areas, employers and providers identified the importance of clearer progression pathways between entry-level provision, technical education, apprenticeships, higher technical qualifications and higher education, enabling learners and employees to progress and adapt as workforce requirements evolve.

The Somerset LSIP recognises that workforce development requires a coherent skills pipeline spanning entry-level provision through to higher technical education and specialist higher-level skills. Employer feedback consistently highlighted the importance of creating accessible progression routes that support individuals to enter, progress within and adapt throughout their working lives.

The priorities identified within this LSIP therefore relate to different stages of the skills and employment system, ranging from foundational employability and digital capability through to advanced technical, innovation and leadership skills linked to Somerset’s growth sectors. While many priorities apply across multiple qualification levels; the table below provides an indicative illustration of how key themes align across the skills pipeline.

The skills needs identified through the Somerset LSIP reflect a combination of immediate workforce pressures, medium-term priorities expected to shape the 2025–2028 LSIP period, and longer-term structural and technological changes likely to influence Somerset’s economy over the next decade. While many themes overlap across these timescales, employers and stakeholders consistently highlighted the importance of balancing urgent recruitment and workforce challenges with longer-term investment in innovation, productivity, technical capability and workforce resilience. The table below provides an indicative overview of how these priorities align across different planning horizons:

Immediate Workforce Pressures	Medium-Term Priorities (2025–2028)	Longer-Term Strategic Needs
Recruitment shortages	Workforce digital adaptation	Innovation pipeline development
Transferable skills gaps	Flexible/localised provision	Clean energy workforce growth
Rural transport barriers	AI readiness and adoption	Higher technical progression
Employer skills system awareness	Sustainability integration	Advanced manufacturing capability

Through input from local employers, education and training providers and key stakeholders, the skills needs statements were developed. The selected needs were all deemed to be of high or medium importance to the region and were prominent in all key priority sectors. Based on the above metric for achievability, time scales for delivery vary, however all priorities are key to contribute towards closing current and future skills gaps.

	Urgency	Economic Impact/Scale	Feasibility
<b>Develop the skills required to support Somerset’s role as a national leader in innovation</b>	Medium	High	High
<b>Address barriers to skills development and employment linked to rurality</b>	High	High	Medium
<b>Strengthen digital and AI capability across the workforce</b>	Medium	Medium	High

<b>Improve work-readiness of young people and new entrants to the workforce</b>	High	Medium	High
<b>Address ongoing recruitment and retention challenges</b>	High	High	High
<b>Improve employer understanding and navigation of the skills system</b>	High	Medium	Medium
<b>Address persistent gaps in critical and enabling skills</b>	High	Medium	High
<b>Improve understanding and practical application of net zero and sustainability</b>	Medium	Medium	Medium

### SOMERSET LOCAL SKILLS NEEDS STATEMENTS:

1. **Develop the skills required to support Somerset's role as a national leader in innovation**, particularly in clean energy, defence, advanced manufacturing and emerging technologies.
2. **Address barriers to skills development and employment linked to rurality**, including transport, connectivity and access to provision.
3. **Strengthen digital and AI capability across the workforce**, including both foundational digital skills and the ability to adopt emerging technologies safely and effectively.
4. **Improve work-readiness of young people and new entrants to the workforce**, particularly transferable skills, workplace behaviours and awareness of career pathways.
5. **Address ongoing recruitment and retention challenges**, including skills shortages, limited labour supply and mismatched expectations between employers and applicants.
6. **Improve employer understanding and navigation of the skills system**, including training provision, funding opportunities and progression pathways.
7. **Address persistent gaps in critical and enabling skills**, including communication, teamwork, resilience and problem solving across all sectors.
8. **Improve understanding and practical application of net zero and sustainability**, including clearer definitions of green skills and access to relevant, sector-specific training.

<b>LSIP Priority Theme</b>	<b>Entry Level / Level 2–3</b>	<b>Level 4–5 / Higher Technical</b>	<b>Level 6–8 / Specialist &amp; Innovation</b>
<b>Clean Energy &amp; Net Zero</b>	Basic sustainability awareness, construction pathways, retrofit fundamentals	Retrofit coordination, electrical systems, heat pumps, energy technologies	Advanced engineering, grid systems, energy innovation, R&D
<b>Digital &amp; AI Capability</b>	Digital literacy, safe AI use, workplace software	Applied AI, cyber, automation, data analysis	AI systems, advanced data, digital innovation, specialist technical roles
<b>Advanced Manufacturing &amp; Engineering</b>	Technical pathways, apprenticeships, work readiness	Robotics, automation, battery technologies, advanced production	Aerospace, defence systems, hydrogen, innovation and R&D
<b>Employability &amp; Workforce Readiness</b>	Communication, resilience, teamwork, workplace behaviours	Supervisory capability, project skills, technical professionalism	Leadership, innovation, strategic workforce capability
<b>Health &amp; Social Care</b>	Care pathways, values-based care, digital confidence	Specialist care practice, leadership, technical health skills	Advanced clinical, management and integrated care systems
<b>Rural Access &amp; Inclusion</b>	Local access to provision, transport support, flexible delivery	Hybrid and modular technical provision	Specialist and higher-level progression accessible through regional partnerships
<b>Skills System Navigation</b>	Careers awareness, pathways and employer engagement	Workforce development planning, modular upskilling	Strategic workforce planning and employer-provider collaboration

This whole-system approach is intended to support both immediate workforce pressures and longer-term economic resilience, ensuring Somerset's skills system supports progression, inclusion and productivity across all stages of learning and employment.

Via in-depth one-to-one interviews, wider skills discussions, surveys and sector sites discussions, we have gathered intelligence from 1458 engagements from October 2025 to June 2026. Utilising existing relationships with businesses already engaged in Chamber of Commerce activity, 32% of survey respondents were Somerset COC members, this equates to below 6% of total LSIP engagements for Somerset.

Supporting this primary data with secondary and quantitative supporting data allows us to illustrate the demand as well as the detail. Through adopting a balance of primary and secondary data gathering methodology we have been able to gather substantial qualitative intel from employees, key stakeholders and education providers in the region to create the Skills Needs Statements prioritised in this LSIP report.

The Priority Skills Needs Statements align with the themes incorporated into the LSIP, with further sectoral and thematic research into employer need broken down in Annex A. Section 2 outlines the headline Actions and Changes Needed to address these needs, with all activities identified through codesign in Annex C.

In addition to direct and survey-based engagement, the LSIP evidence base has been further informed by one-to-many engagement delivered through a programme of general business events and partner-led sessions, as well as the incorporation of LSIP content into general business surveying mechanisms. These engagements enabled the inclusion of a wider employer audience, including those not reached through structured interviews or surveys. In some cases, detailed attendee data was not available to enable full sectoral or geographic classification. However, where events had a defined sectoral focus, contributions have been incorporated and attributed accordingly within the relevant sector evidence base. As with the supplementary survey data, insights gathered through these channels have been used to triangulate and strengthen the overall findings, rather than as standalone determinants of priority skills needs.

### **SUPPLEMENTARY EMPLOYER SURVEYS & PAN-REGIONAL ACTIVITY (\*OTHER & UNCLASSIFIED MAJORITY RESPONSES)**

In addition to targeted LSIP engagement activity, a broad dataset of employer insight was incorporated through general business surveying activity undertaken across Business West activities. Delivery towards engagement activity by Somerset Chamber of Commerce in particular incorporated significant survey activity, and we therefore have additional detail on sectors and sizes through this route. However, some (particularly one to many engagements where we were invited to discuss skills needs but did not have the full attendees' details) responses cannot be fully disaggregated by individual LSIP geography or priority sector.

As such, the findings have been treated as pan-regional evidence to inform overall trends and triangulate key themes emerging from primary LSIP engagement.

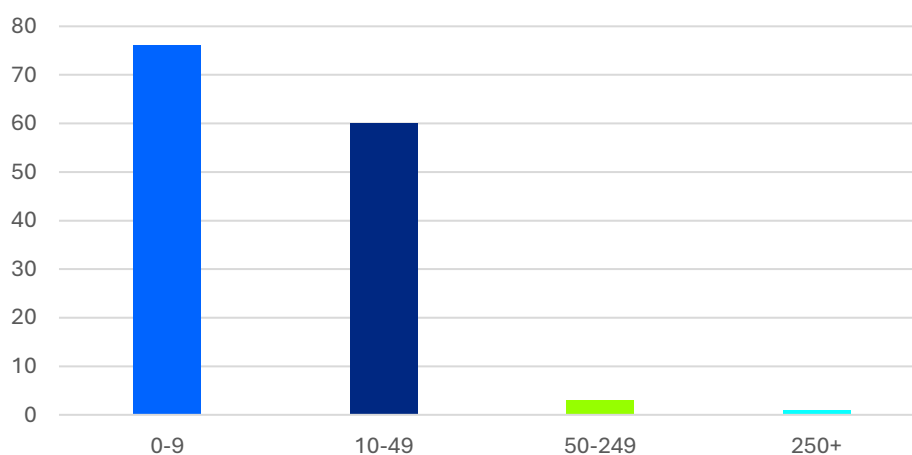
Respondents have been aligned at a high level using Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) groupings and indicative geography. On this basis, the distribution of responses is as follows:

- 28% aligned to Gloucestershire
- 21% aligned to Swindon and Wiltshire
- 26% aligned to Somerset
- 25% aligned to the West of England and North Somerset

Supplimentary evidence respondents based on primary region

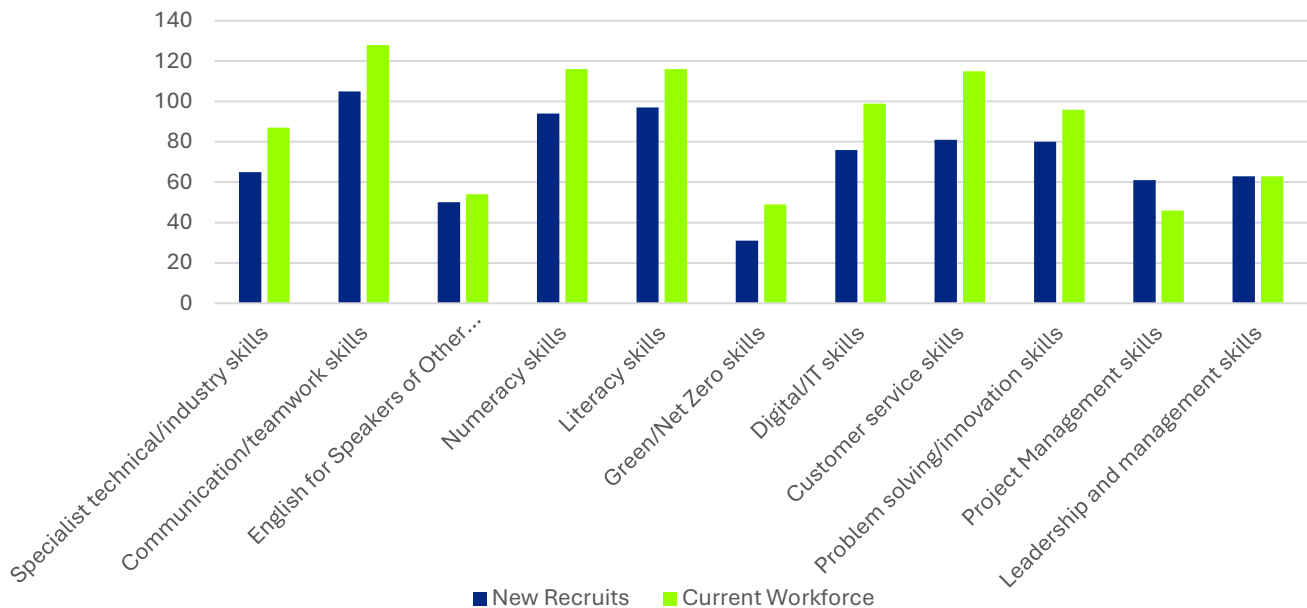


Organisation size for Somerset (from supplementary evidence)

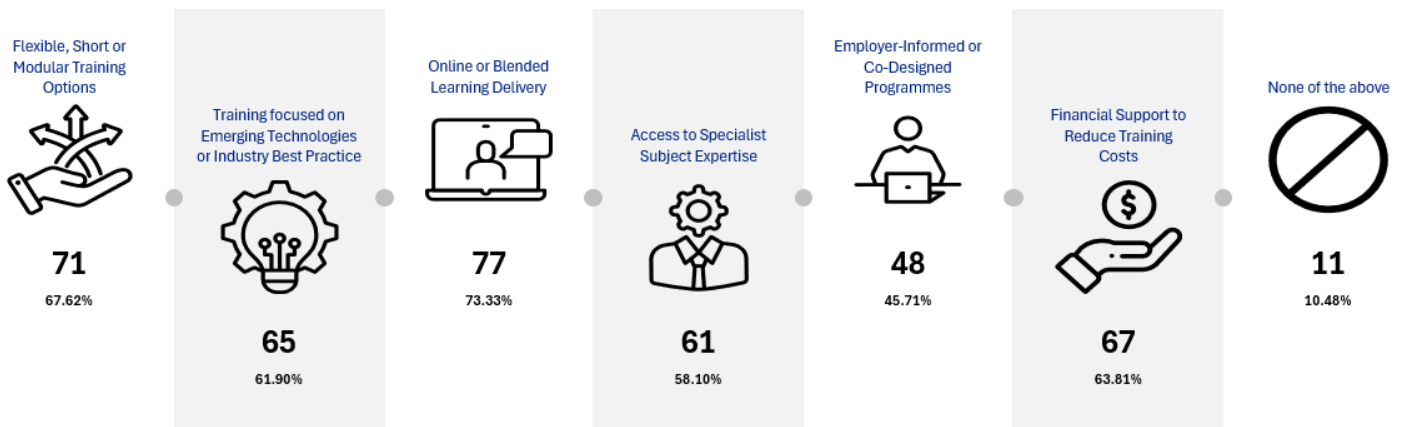


This dataset provides additional context on employer sentiment, workforce challenges, and skills needs across the wider business base. While not used in isolation to determine priority actions, it has been used to validate and reinforce patterns identified through targeted engagement, particularly in relation to cross-cutting themes such as recruitment challenges, skills gaps, and training accessibility.

### Which of the following skill areas are currently important to your business?



Employers and providers consistently highlighted the importance of clear progression pathways across the full skills system, including entry-level provision, apprenticeships, technical education, higher technical qualifications and higher education. Across multiple sectors, there was recognition that workforce development increasingly requires flexible progression opportunities that allow individuals to upskill, retrain and progress throughout their careers.



[Preferred training methods from supplementary survey data]

## Somerset Local Skills Needs:

### DEVELOP THE SKILLS REQUIRED TO SUPPORT SOMERSET'S ROLE AS A NATIONAL LEADER IN INNOVATION

**Somerset is home to a significant number of nationally important developments,** such as the Gravity Enterprise Zone and Hinkley Point C, as well as the potential for future opportunities including rotorcraft and tidal. Existing, and future, projects place Somerset at the forefront of innovation, leading the nation with research and development towards next-gen technology and decarbonisation. This includes growing opportunities linked to defence technologies, aerospace systems, advanced materials and associated supply chains connected to nationally significant employers and sector clusters within Somerset and opportunities linked to the development of Defence and Clean Energy Technical Excellence Colleges (TECs), supporting progression pathways into nationally significant growth sectors and strengthening specialist technical capability within Somerset.

These innovations span clean energy, digital technologies, sustainable infrastructure and advanced manufacturing, supported by collaboration between industry, government and education providers, providing opportunities for growth and cross sector collaboration.

Employers highlighted the importance of practical innovation capability alongside technical expertise, including the adoption of new technologies, digital systems, automation and process improvement approaches to support productivity improvement, operational efficiency and workforce adaptability across both high-growth and established sectors. This was particularly evident within manufacturing, engineering, defence, clean energy and professional services sectors, where businesses reported increasing pressure to improve productivity, operational resilience and workforce adaptability.

Large scale projects such as Hinkley Point C are delivering low-carbon electricity and providing opportunities for skills development in nuclear energy. The exploration of additional renewable technologies such as tidal would contribute to the UK's long-term clean energy transition. This is further supported by innovation in energy storage, grid balancing and clean technology manufacturing through initiatives like the Gravity Enterprise Zone and Agratas.

There are research and innovation opportunities to be explored across the key priority sectors including the decarbonisation of agriculture and food supply chains, biodiversity protection and supporting more sustainable farming practices. Further opportunities for development of sustainability practices sit within the construction sector, with sustainable construction methods, green building practices and retrofitting existing buildings, strengthening the region's role in developing low-carbon infrastructure solutions.

While emerging technology has been adopted by employers across all key priority sectors, digital technologies are playing an increasingly important role in the innovation landscape and further exploration would contribute to improved workflows, efficient

planning, operational safety and enhanced productivity across all sectors. There are also opportunities to use this digital innovation to improve workforce training, for example VR environments for workplace exposure – allowing wider industry insights while minimising health and safety risk and the burden on existing workforce capacity, reported during the Adult Social Care Skills for Care Summit that 96% of those who engaged with VR training environments preferred it to traditional role play.

The local area's ability to integrate research, skills development and industrial activity positions it as a key hub for innovation, supporting national priorities in clean energy, infrastructure development and technological advancement.

## **ADDRESS BARRIERS TO SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND EMPLOYMENT LINKED TO RURALITY**

Employers and stakeholders highlighted ongoing challenges relating to transport connectivity, travel times, access to flexible provision and the viability of attending training in more rural and coastal communities. These issues were reported as impacting both learner participation and employer's ability to release staff for training activity, particularly amongst SMEs and lower-margin sectors.

Employers in Somerset highlighted that rurality presents a significant and persistent barrier to both employment and skills development, with challenges relating to transport, connectivity and access to provision impacting workforce participation. Limited public transport, particularly outside of peak hours, alongside reliance on private vehicles, restricts access to employment opportunities, interviews and training. Connectivity issues in some areas further compound this challenge, limiting the ability to engage with digital provision, remote working or online recruitment processes.

There is a clear need to ensure that skills provision and employment opportunities are accessible across Somerset's dispersed communities, including through more flexible and locally delivered training. Employers emphasised the importance of aligning provision to the realities of rural economies, ensuring that individuals are able to access opportunities without disproportionate time, cost or logistical barriers. Addressing these challenges will be critical to widening participation, supporting workforce development and enabling more inclusive economic growth across the county.

## **STRENGTHEN DIGITAL AND AI CAPABILITY ACROSS THE WORKFORCE**

Employers increasingly referenced the growing importance of digital confidence, data literacy and awareness of artificial intelligence tools and systems across a wide range of sectors and occupational levels. While the scale and pace of adoption varies between sectors and businesses, employers consistently identified the need for greater workforce adaptability and understanding of emerging digital technologies (see Annex A). In the previous LSIP, software and coding were a significant skills gap highlighted by employers, however new research indicates that AI has overtaken this as a notable skills gap. Every key priority sector in Somerset highlighted digital skills and AI readiness as a skills gap in their organisation, particularly citing rapid technological change as a reason for this. Due to the pace of change, there are increasing expectations for staff to work

confidently with AI and integrate AI into their day-to-day processes, as well as adopting digital systems, automation tools and data platforms. Employers from Health and Social Care, Professional Services, Creative Industries and High Value Manufacturing organisations all stated that they expect AI to continue reshaping workflows, but many feel that they lack the knowledge and skills to adopt it safely and productively.

Emerging technology was cited as a concern in many of the priority sectors, including Construction and the Built Environment, Visitor Economy, Transport and Logistics and Health and Social Care, in the local area with examples such as data analysis, cyber security, robotics and engineering software highlighted by employers as technologies being adopted within their businesses, as well as sector specific digital tools such as VR, BIM software and Plant Simulators.

While emerging technologies were highlighted across multiple key priority sectors as a focus, it was acknowledged that digital skills gaps vary with the need for basic digital literacy, including administrative office software, still very much in demand.

In Somerset, small and medium sized organisations in particular stated they struggle with the pace of change, and while there is a desire for upskilling and reskilling staff within their organisations, the time required to do it during times of increasing technological change is a challenge. There is a strong demand from businesses in the local area for short, practical and affordable training for digital and AI skills, that reflects the digital adoption of businesses in the local area and allows employees to embrace technology with confidence, while accommodating existing workloads.

## **IMPROVE WORK-READINESS OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND NEW ENTRANTS TO THE WORKFORCE**

Many employers that contributed to the LSIP discussions stated that they found new entrants to the workforce to be lacking in the transferable skills that they value within their organisations, most notably communication, confidence, resilience, teamwork and problem solving, as well as general professional behaviours. Employers stated that without these strong foundational behaviours many new entrants struggle to stay in employment or pursue progression opportunities.

Across Somerset, schools, colleges and training providers are already delivering careers strategies and careers education programmes designed to help learners better understand pathways into employment and progression opportunities. Increasingly, careers education and employability development are being embedded within curriculum delivery, helping learners understand how classroom learning relates to the workplace, industry expectations and future career opportunities.

Employers also highlighted that younger entrants to the workforce have different expectations about work, such as a desire for rapid progression, more supportive working environments, flexibility with their working locations and meaningful work from 'day one'. While these priorities are not necessarily negative, the disconnect reported between employers' expectations and those of the emerging workforce, is what employers are highlighting as a challenge.

Limited exposure to workplaces was offered as a potential reason for the disconnect between emerging workforce expectations and the realities of employment. Employers and providers highlighted the importance of learners gaining earlier and more meaningful exposure to workplaces, career pathways and employer expectations through activities such as work experience, encounters with employers, mentoring, workplace visits and mock interviews. Stakeholders also noted the growing emphasis nationally on careers-related learning and workplace exposure throughout education, including ambitions for young people to complete substantial work experience activity before leaving compulsory education.

While employers consistently cited the benefits of early workplace exposure, concerns were raised by some sectors, including Health and Social Care, regarding safeguarding, insurance, supervision requirements and workforce capacity when offering placements. However, stakeholders also emphasised that employer participation in placements and careers engagement activity is essential to developing a work-ready future workforce and improving understanding of local career opportunities across Somerset.

Overall, employers and training providers in Somerset were in agreement that the emerging workforce would benefit from more structured and consistent work placement opportunities, allowing learners to gain hands-on experience and first-hand knowledge of potential career pathways from an early stage of education. The LSIP will support partners to work towards ensuring access to high-quality careers education, employer encounters and workplace experiences is consistently available to learners across Somerset, including within rural and dispersed communities.

## **ADDRESS ONGOING RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION CHALLENGES**

All the key priority sectors in Somerset reported recruitment challenges, citing weak transferable skills, too few applicants, competition from larger neighbouring cities and some employers, including from the Transport and Logistics sector, noting a change in attitude of candidates.

Technical skills shortages were also cited by employers from some of the sectors as a barrier to recruitment, including mechanical, electrical, CNC and robotics skills for high value engineering organisations, land-based practical skills for those in the agri-food and land stewardship sector and clinical and community care skills in health and social care. Digital and cyber security skills were also noted as a skills gap across employers.

In addition to reporting specific skills gaps, some sectors highlighted particular roles which they are currently struggling to recruit into, including trades and site safety in construction and creative production roles for the creative industries organisations.

Further to highlighting specific skills or roles that are providing challenges, employers across all key priority sectors cited additional barriers to recruiting and retaining staff, including rurality, transport challenges such as no or low public transport availability, and the capacity to offer upskilling and reskilling whilst balancing workloads. Recruiting new talent poses its own obstacles for employers in the area. Many industries cited a disconnect in the expectations of the emerging workforce and the demands of the role,

such as younger applicants expecting rapid career progression without gaining the necessary experience in entry-level tasks.

## **IMPROVE EMPLOYER UNDERSTANDING AND NAVIGATION OF THE SKILLS SYSTEM**

Somerset employers who contributed to the LSIP have engaged with a varied range of training options, including in-house CPD, online courses, apprenticeships, Skills Bootcamps, peer-to-peer learning and simulation-based training. Many also cited using specialist external training providers for technical upskilling and reskilling.

Despite overall displaying high engagement with the skills system, employers in the local area did highlight barriers that restricted their involvement. Employers highlighted ongoing challenges in understanding available training provision, funding mechanisms and routes into the skills system, particularly amongst smaller businesses without dedicated HR or workforce development capacity. There is therefore an opportunity for partners to continue improving coordination, signposting and accessibility of skills support and workforce development information across Somerset.

The lack of tailored or relevant courses, as well as delivery being in inconvenient locations, for example a Construction and the Built Environment employer who reported needing to upskill their team with technical “heritage” skills such as plastering and sash windows, however the nearest training available for these skills was in South Wales. Small and medium employers reported the difficulty with releasing staff to undertake training, especially if the delivery location required excessive travelling.

Many employers reported lacking confidence to navigate the skills system, citing complex or unclear training pathways, insufficient visibility of short, practical training opportunities and lack of clarity around costings and funding opportunities as barriers to engagement. Limited coordination between training providers in the local area was also highlighted as a concern, creating a difficult to navigate skills system.

Employers were very clear about the training they need – modular, flexible, applied training that directly relates to workplace practice. There was a demand for more provision co-designed by employers and training providers, increased clarity on available provision through a single point of contact and improved support for the emerging workforce to effectively prepare them for entering the workforce, including inclusive training pathways.

## **ADDRESS PERSISTENT GAPS IN CRITICAL AND ENABLING SKILLS**

Somerset employers across all priority sectors emphasised the challenges they encounter with work readiness, with basic workplace expectations such as punctuality, appropriate phone and email use and being able to balance taking instruction with taking initiative often lacking, especially in the emerging workforce. Further skills gaps reported include teamwork, adaptability, problem-solving, customer service and reliability – with employers noting that while technical skills can be taught it is these fundamental ‘human’ skills that provide the robust foundation needed for developing

their workforce and are essential to their organisations. For new entrants to the workforce in particular, employers highlighted confidence, communication and resilience as key skills gaps.

Despite these skills being universally reported as an area that requires development, there is a disparity between the critical and enabling skills required in 'hands on' industries such as construction, agri-food and land stewardship, which favoured skills such as discipline, compared to more administrative roles, which require critical thinking as a priority.

## **IMPROVE UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF NET ZERO AND SUSTAINABILITY**

Employers reported a growing need for workforce capability relating to sustainability, energy efficiency, environmental compliance and low-carbon technologies, including both specialist technical skills and broader sustainability awareness across the workforce. In several sectors, employers highlighted concerns that current provision and recognised training pathways have not yet fully kept pace with changing regulatory and operational requirements.

All key sectors in Somerset reported an increased need/desire to focus on sustainability, with many highlighting the steps they are already making towards sustainability, such as the installation of solar panels, adopting electric vehicles and reviewing ESG practices. Businesses also reported a growing demand for training to help support these objectives, including carbon literacy, sustainable operations, environmental compliance and resource efficiency.

While these businesses expressed strong environmental values but they require further clarity about what 'green skills' actually means and how they can apply this in practice to their organisations. While this was a universal concern across the priority sectors, employers from Construction, Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering and Land-Based Industries organisations in particular called for clearer definitions of sustainability terminology, practical examples that can be replicated within their organisations and accessible training to support further upskilling and reskilling. Employers also highlighted a need for clearer, practical guidance on how to begin their sustainability journey, including priority actions, available support and how sustainability translates into day-to-day business operations. There is also a need to better articulate the business case for sustainability, including cost savings, efficiency gains, compliance requirements and long-term commercial value, to support employer investment and engagement.

Employers called for sustainability to be embedded across curriculum, workplace training and organisational processes, rather than being treated as a standalone topic, reflecting its growing importance in supply chains, procurement and regulatory frameworks.

## Section 2: Agreed Changes & Actions Needed

**In response to the needs reported by businesses** and through our work with stakeholders and providers, we have identified the headline changes and actions required to address these skills needs. Below we outline the headline Action or Change and break this down into areas of demand, alongside the potential impact of these actions. Annex C further breaks down this work into 'Activities' that will add up to the required change.

The actions and changes identified within this section have been informed through engagement with employers, providers, local authorities and wider stakeholders across Somerset. They are intended to represent shared local priorities requiring collaborative delivery across the skills and employment system, rather than actions attributable to any single organisation or sector.

In response to the skills needs identified through employer engagement and wider stakeholder consultation, this section sets out the key actions and system changes required to strengthen alignment between workforce demand, technical education and workforce development activity across Somerset over the 2025–2028 LSIP period.

The actions and activities identified throughout are also intended to support both immediate workforce pressures and longer-term economic resilience. While some actions focus on improving access, employability and foundational skills, others support advanced technical capability, productivity, innovation and leadership development aligned to Somerset's emerging growth opportunities.

Delivery and oversight of the Somerset LSIP will be supported through ongoing partnership working between Business West as the designated Employer Representative Body, Somerset Chamber of Commerce, education and training providers, Somerset Council, employers and wider stakeholders. Governance and implementation monitoring will be supported through existing partnership structures, including the Somerset Work, Health and Skills Partnership, helping ensure continued employer input, local accountability and alignment with wider economic and workforce priorities.

The Somerset LSIP recognises the importance of supporting progression across the full skills pipeline, including Levels 2–3 technical education, apprenticeships, higher technical qualifications and Levels 6–8 higher education and specialist provision. Employers and providers consistently highlighted the importance of clearer progression pathways between further and higher education, particularly within clean energy, advanced manufacturing, engineering, digital and health-related sectors. Higher education providers, including Yeovil College University Centre, University Centre Somerset and regional university partners, will therefore play an important role in supporting higher-level technical skills development, specialist workforce capability, innovation activity and progression opportunities linked to Somerset's priority sectors.

To support accountability and delivery monitoring, each priority area includes a set of intended outcomes and indicative success measures. Further detail is provided within Annexes B and C, including delivery leads, supporting partners, implementation activity and monitoring arrangements. Wherever possible, success measures will incorporate

quantitative indicators such as employer participation, learner engagement, progression activity and uptake of workforce development provision alongside qualitative measures relating to employer confidence, collaboration and system improvement.

While several of the priority skills needs identified within the Somerset LSIP are closely interconnected, they have been intentionally presented as distinct priority areas to reflect the specific workforce, sectoral and system challenges highlighted through employer and stakeholder engagement. This approach supports clearer articulation of delivery responsibilities, targeted implementation activity and measurable outcomes, while recognising the significant overlap between themes such as digital capability, workforce readiness, sustainability and workforce access. Collectively, these priorities contribute towards Somerset's wider ambitions relating to productivity, inclusive growth, workforce resilience and economic transformation.

By addressing these needs, we believe Somerset as a region can;

- Raise and widen aspiration in earners towards the region's priorities
- Create meaningful opportunities attached to innovation and emerging technology
- Secure additional investment into the region, in turn creating growth and high value employment and
- Increase business prosperity through further investment into education and training towards productivity, tech adoption, efficiency and the high growth sectors

### **Summarised needs statements:**

- 1. Develop the skills required to support Somerset's role as a national leader in innovation**
- 2. Address barriers to skills development and employment linked to rurality**
- 3. Strengthen digital and AI capability across the workforce**
- 4. Improve work-readiness of young people and new entrants to the workforce**
- 5. Address ongoing recruitment and retention challenges**
- 6. Improve employer understanding and navigation of the skills system**
- 7. Address persistent gaps in critical and enabling skills**
- 8. Improve understanding and practical application of net zero and sustainability**

## Key Priority Skills Needs for Somerset:

### DEVELOP THE SKILLS REQUIRED TO SUPPORT SOMERSET'S ROLE AS A NATIONAL LEADER IN INNOVATION

<b>Need Statement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Somerset requires a workforce equipped with skills to support major innovation and infrastructure projects, including clean energy, advanced manufacturing and digital technologies, alongside integration of innovation across existing sectors</li> </ul>
<b>Actions / Changes Needed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Innovation Integration in Training &amp; Industry</li> <li>Career Pathways into High-Growth Sectors</li> <li>Workplace Exposure to Emerging Industries</li> </ul>
<b>Intended Outcomes/Illustrative measures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Talent Retention in High-Value Sectors</li> <li>Increased Investment &amp; Economic Growth</li> <li>Strengthened Innovation Capability</li> <li>Increased employer participation in curriculum co-design and industry engagement activity</li> <li>Increased participation in innovation-related training and workforce development activity</li> </ul>
<b>Longer-term future needs</b>	

#### Innovation Integration in Existing & Emerging Industries

While Somerset has a number of significant developments underway, and the opportunity to expand this to further industries such as rotorcraft and tidal, innovation should be embedded in the existing industries in the local area. Ensuring that this innovative mindsight is developing all sectors in the region will help Somerset retain its position as a national leader in innovation. Local authorities and further education colleges can help support this by ensuring that training remains relevant and up to date and where possible, innovation is integrated into training development opportunities.

Recent announcements confirming Somerset's successful designation of Defence and Clean Energy Technical Excellence Colleges (TECs) align strongly with both existing further education expertise and nationally significant developments, including Agratas, Hinkley Point C and the continued growth of the aerospace and defence cluster centred around Yeovil. Alongside the award of the future rotorcraft contract to Leonardo, these developments create significant opportunities to strengthen local technical capability, employer engagement and progression pathways into high-value sectors. There is an opportunity for providers, including Yeovil College University Centre and University Centre Somerset to work collaboratively with employers, local authorities and wider partners to support workforce development, promote innovation activity and champion Somerset as a nationally significant centre for clean energy, defence, engineering and advanced manufacturing excellence. The LSIP will review uptake and engagement with FE and HE provision in Somerset to monitor talent retention in the local area, in addition to working with local employers to strengthen the talent pipelines into local high-growth sector employers.

## Next Generation Career Insights

With a vast number of opportunities in the local area, it is essential that the emerging workforce are engaged with potential career pathways that are available to them. Local employers should work in collaboration with local authorities and further education colleges to highlight potential careers in the area and share industry insights. This workplace exposure should be embedded early in the curriculum to allow inspiration and interest to be developed over time, showcasing the evolution of these innovations to the future workforce.

Anticipated impact of further developing the skills required to support Somerset's role as a national leader in innovation include:

**Talent Retention** – this level of innovation will result in high-value job creation; therefore, it is essential to engage the future workforce through early career intervention to retain the talent in the area.

**Economic and Regional Growth** – attracting further investment for the local area and to fund further innovation projects, solidifying the role as a national leader.

**Innovative Approach in All Sectors** – investing in all sectors in the area and developing an innovative mindset will improve productivity and efficiency across Somerset.

## ADDRESS BARRIERS TO SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND EMPLOYMENT LINKED TO RURALITY

<b>Need Statement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Employers report that rurality, transport limitations and connectivity issues create barriers to accessing employment and training, contributing to skills shortages and reduced participation.</li></ul>
<b>Actions/Changes Needed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Improved Transport &amp; Connectivity Consideration</li><li>Flexible &amp; Localised Training Delivery</li><li>Expanded Access to Opportunities</li></ul>
<b>Intended Outcomes/Illustrative measures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Improved Access to Training &amp; Employment</li><li>Increased Participation Across Communities</li><li>Enhanced Regional Inclusion</li></ul>
<b>Immediate workforce pressures</b>	

## Access to Opportunity and Localised Provision and Improved Transport & Connectivity Consideration

Employers highlighted transport and connectivity as key barriers to accessing both employment and training opportunities across Somerset. Limited public transport provision, particularly outside of peak hours, alongside challenges with digital connectivity in rural areas, restricts participation in interviews, employment and skills development. There is a need for local partners to consider how these structural barriers can be addressed to enable greater access to opportunity for both the existing and emerging workforce.

## Flexible & Localised Training Delivery

There is a clear need to ensure that training provision is delivered in a way that reflects the geographic spread of Somerset’s communities. Employers highlighted the challenges associated with travelling to centralised training locations and releasing staff for extended periods. Firstly, by reviewing the existing localities of training and understanding where the cold spots for training are, the LSIP can better liaise with local training providers in the area to highlight where the greatest need could be. Expanding flexible delivery models, including more localised provision and remote or hybrid learning where appropriate, will support greater engagement with training and ensure that provision is accessible to businesses and individuals across the county and the LSIP will work with local training providers to monitor uptake and engagement, highlighting the impact of expanding training opportunities.

## Expanded Access to Opportunities

Addressing rural barriers presents an opportunity to widen participation in both employment and skills development. Ensuring that opportunities are accessible across Somerset’s dispersed communities will support engagement from individuals who may otherwise be excluded, including those in rural areas and those facing transport or connectivity challenges. A more accessible and inclusive approach will support workforce development, improve participation and contribute to more balanced economic growth across the region.

## STRENGTHEN DIGITAL AND AI CAPABILITY ACROSS THE WORKFORCE

<b>Need Statement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employers report increasing demand for digital and AI capability, with gaps in both baseline digital literacy and the ability to adopt emerging technologies safely and effectively, particularly within SMEs</li> </ul>
<b>Actions / Changes Needed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Baseline Digital Skills Development</li> <li>AI Awareness, Safety &amp; Prompt Literacy</li> <li>Short, Practical Digital Training</li> <li>Support for Digital Adoption</li> </ul>
<b>Intended Outcomes/Illustrative measures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved Productivity &amp; Efficiency</li> <li>Increased Digital Confidence</li> <li>Enhanced Business Innovation</li> <li>Increased uptake of digital and AI-related training provision</li> <li>Increased employer confidence in adopting digital technologies safely and effectively</li> </ul>
<b>Medium-term (3 year) priorities</b>	

## **Baseline Digital Skills**

Many employers in Somerset raised concerns regarding the lack of basic digital skills within their workforces and the emerging workforce, with 54% of our survey respondents stating their businesses have an increased need for digital or data skills. Further Education colleges should seek to provide basic, functional IT skills throughout the curriculum, such as Microsoft Suite and email communications, to support new entrants to the workforce. These colleges should also seek to work in partnership with local authorities to ensure that fundamental IT skills are represented in their provision to provide the necessary upskilling and reskilling provision available for the existing workforce to develop their skills.

## **AI Awareness and Safety**

The integration of AI within businesses was acknowledged by businesses across Somerset, with 56% of businesses we surveyed reporting an increased use of AI or Automation in their work, however there was a reported hesitancy due to fears about safe usage. There is an opportunity for local authorities and further education colleges, supported by Business West as the LSIP ERB, to deliver information, support and guidance around the integration of AI, safe and ethical usage and prompt literacy. Employers have highlighted their preference for short, practical and affordable training to address these specific skills needs and we will work with training providers to review the uptake and engagement with this provision.

The expected impacts for employers in Somerset who strengthen the digital and AI capabilities within their businesses include:

**Future Proofing Organisations** – providing training opportunities for both basic and more advanced digital skills needs will ensure that local businesses are equipped with the skills they need to embrace digitalisation and the benefits it provides, such as improved efficiency, productivity and innovation.

**Baseline Digital Capabilities** – ensuring all the local workforce meet a minimum threshold of digital capability will provide equality of opportunity for both the emerging and existing workforce. For existing employees, it boosts productivity, efficiency and confidence – streamlining some processes to allow opportunities for innovation and collaboration within the organisation and for the emerging workforce, it will provide them with the fundamental, transferable skills that can be adapted to all job roles and sectors.

**Digital Resilience** – providing support and training around using AI safely will ensure that both the staff and the organisation as a whole are digitally resilient. It will provide security within their current work environment, as well as providing opportunities for businesses to adapt, build upon these digital capabilities and embrace additional emerging technologies.

## IMPROVE WORK-READINESS OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND NEW ENTRANTS TO THE WORKFORCE

<b>Need Statement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Businesses report that new entrants lack key transferable skills and workplace behaviours, alongside a disconnect between expectations of work and employer requirements, limiting effective entry and progression</li> </ul>
<b>Actions / Changes Needed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthening employer-informed application of employability, workplace behaviours and career-readiness skills across education and training pathways. Increase employer opportunities in Workplace Exposure &amp; Career Pathways</li> <li>• Flexible Work Placement Models</li> <li>• Improved CEIAG Delivery</li> </ul>
<b>Intended Outcomes/Illustrative measures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved Work Readiness</li> <li>• Stronger Transition into Employment</li> <li>• Enhanced Talent Pipelines</li> <li>• Increased number of employer-supported workplace opportunities</li> <li>• Increased learner participation in work placement and industry insight activity</li> </ul>
<b>Immediate workforce pressures</b>	

### **Improve (increase) Careers Education Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) and employability skills integration with more employer engagement, additional support and reduced barriers**

Employers, providers and stakeholders highlighted that employability and careers education activity is already increasingly embedded throughout Somerset’s education and training system, with providers reporting improving learner destination outcomes and stronger integration of workplace skills across curriculum delivery. However, engagement also identified a lack of awareness amongst some employers regarding the breadth of existing activity, and the range of ways businesses can contribute to workforce development. There is therefore an opportunity to strengthen employer ownership and participation within the wider employability system, including clearer communication of placement opportunities, mentoring, industry insight activity and careers engagement models. Developing a clearer “ladder” or hierarchy of engagement opportunities – ranging from careers talks and insight days through to placements, mentoring and curriculum co-design – would help simplify employer participation while demonstrating the mutual benefits for learners, businesses and the wider local economy.

Employers raised concerns about a disconnect between the expectations of young people entering the workforce and the realities of the world of work, therefore reviewing and refining the Careers Education Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) that is offered within the curriculum is essential to ensure that this delivery is matching the

needs of employers. Offering young people the opportunity to explore different industries and career pathways through workplace exposure and insight days will help develop a greater understanding of the needs of the workplace. Integrating employability skills throughout the curriculum and ensuring this intervention is embedded as early as possible will give young people the opportunity to develop these skills over the course of their academic career. The LSIP will review destination data from FE providers to review how these more robust CEIAG offerings support the transition from education.

### **Collaborative Approach to Work Placements**

Employers in the local area acknowledged the value of work experience placements in developing key employability skills and workplace behaviours, however they raised concerns around the burden of taking on extended placements. In addition to highlighting other methods of engaging with the future talent pipeline, such as guest lectures and career talks, there is an opportunity to develop more flexible work experience delivery methods. A collaborative approach to work placements and industry exposure from local authorities, further education colleges and employers could help facilitate shorter engagements such as industry insight days or mentoring opportunities. Concerns were also raised by industries such as Health and Social Care and Construction, who find the administrative and financial burden of taking work placements in high-risk environments to be a barrier to engagement. Engaging with alternative methods of career insights would help overcome this barrier and expose the emerging workforce to these industries.

Opportunities that are expected to arise for employers in the local area who engage with the education and skills system include:

**Increased Employer Engagement** – providing a variety of options for employers to engage with careers exposure will help those that cannot facilitate week-long placements but want to offer some guidance and experience for the emerging workforce the opportunity to do so.

**Future Talent Pipeline** – employers actively engaging with local further education colleges to provide industry insights and career pathway information will connect them with the emerging workforce. By sharing their experiences and expectations, they will be ensuring that the future workforce have realistic expectations and the knowledge of the basic skills they will need in the world of work. These young people often bring with them a new set of skills and experiences that can innovate organisations and reinvigorate the existing workforce.

**Wider Range of Opportunities for the Emerging Workforce** – offering employers the opportunity to host insight days to larger groups, rather than a week's work experience for one person, will ensure that knowledge of that sector will reach a larger audience, providing equality of opportunity and allowing more young people to gain industry exposure.

## ADDRESS ONGOING RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION CHALLENGES

<b>Need Statement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employers face ongoing recruitment challenges driven by skills shortages, limited labour supply, rurality and transport barriers, alongside mismatched expectations between employers and applicants</li> </ul>
<b>Actions/Changes Needed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Career Pathway Insights &amp; Interview Preparation</li> <li>Curriculum Alignment to Technical Skills Needs</li> <li>Addressing Infrastructure Barriers (Transport &amp; Connectivity)</li> </ul>
<b>Intended Outcomes/Illustrative measures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved Recruitment Outcomes</li> <li>Increased Workforce Participation</li> <li>Better Talent Retention</li> </ul>
<b>Immediate workforce pressures</b>	

### Career Pathway Insights and Interview Preparation

38% of Somerset employers we surveyed reported recruitment and retention challenges were affecting their business. Employers have reported that more comprehensive industry awareness would establish expectations of sectors, helping new entrants to the workforce understand the demands of the industry. Further education colleges, with support from local businesses, should seek to showcase career insights and pathways to help the emerging workforce understand the demands and potential progression opportunities of industries they are looking to work in.

Employers in Somerset also highlighted a lack of interview skills as a challenge during the recruitment process, therefore Further Education Colleges should embed these skills into the curriculum so these skills can be developed over time. Local authorities could support this delivery and offer support for career changers and those returning to work.

### Infrastructure Barriers

The Somerset area is vast and has significant challenges which impact access to opportunity for the workforce in the area. Limited public transport, particularly on weekends or outside of peak times, impacts the ability of those entering the workforce to access interviews or commute to work if they do not have access to their own vehicle. There are also reported concerns around connectivity and digital infrastructure – while some employers offer online interviews and flexible/hybrid working options to combat travel concerns, lack of connectivity or unstable connections due to rurality provide further challenges, assuming that job applicants and those in employment have access to the technology they need to engage in this way.

In order to combat these substantial barriers, the local authorities should work to review transport and digital connectivity in the area. Further education colleges and independent training providers can support by offering further training options, rather than restricting delivery to a centralised location. An increase in engagement with further education, training and employment opportunities would be a strong metric of success for these skills needs.

Actions taken to address ongoing recruitment and retention challenges could be expected to see the following positive impacts in the local area:

**Equality of Opportunity for the Workforce** – ensuring all existing and emerging workforce have access to the necessary resources to allow them to pursue training and employment opportunities will retain talent in the local area and provide regional and economic growth.

**Reengage economically inactive and NEETs** – reducing or removing barriers to engagement for those furthest from the workplace will provide them with opportunities to reengage and re-enter the workforce or seek training opportunities to develop their skills.

**Talent Retention** – reinforcing the public transport infrastructure and providing more flexibility for those working outside of peak hours or doing shift work will allow those who live in the area to work there too, ensuring the skills and knowledge of the residents further support local economic development.

## **IMPROVE EMPLOYER UNDERSTANDING AND NAVIGATION OF THE SKILLS SYSTEM**

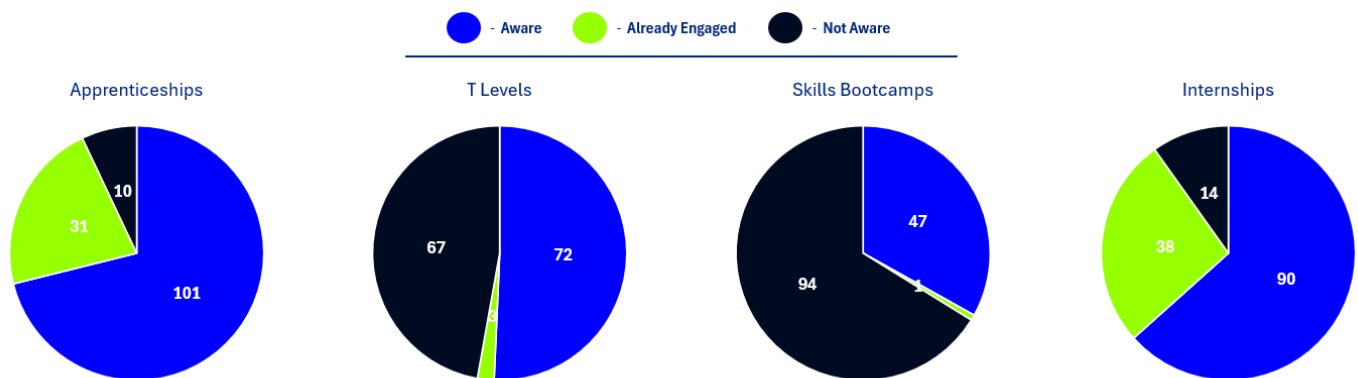
<b>Need Statement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employers report limited awareness and understanding of the skills system, including training options, funding and pathways, alongside challenges accessing relevant and conveniently located provision</li> </ul>
<b>Actions/Changes Needed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved Clarity of Training Provision</li> <li>“One Front Door” Skills System Navigation</li> <li>Curriculum Co-Design with Employers</li> <li>Workforce Development Support</li> </ul>
<b>Intended Outcomes/Illustrative measures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>increased Engagement with Training</li> <li>Improved Uptake of Provision</li> <li>Better Informed Employer Decisions</li> </ul>
<b>Immediate workforce pressures</b>	

### **Relevancy and Availability of Provision**

There is an opportunity for local employers to work with local further education colleges, local authorities and independent training providers to ensure that the curriculum reflects the needs of their sector. Through engaging with initiatives such as Employer Partnership Boards or Curriculum Codesign, employers will be able to directly contribute to the development of the training that their future workforce will be receiving. This will ensure it remains relevant to the industry and encapsulates the skills, knowledge and behaviours they require from their workforce.

## Navigating the Skills System

Employers in Somerset reported a lack of understanding of the skills system and training methods as a barrier to their engagement. As the LSIP ERB for Somerset, Business West will work collaboratively with local authorities and further education providers to create a 'one front door' approach to skills. Business West will continue to provide bespoke workforce development planning support for local businesses through business skills advisors. This impartial service will help businesses identify the training they may require and provide support with navigating the skills landscape in order to engage with the training. The LSIP will work with local training providers to review uptake of provision, an increase and maintaining a higher level of engagement compared with previous years' data will be a clear metric of meeting this skills need.



[Awareness of training pathways for Somerset businesses from supplementary survey data]

It is anticipated that improving businesses' understanding of the skills system, and supporting with navigating through options will have the following impacts:

**Training Relevancy** – checking training is relevant and up to date will ensure that both the emerging and existing workforce will have the necessary skills to work productively and efficiently. Ongoing training costs will be reduced, and businesses with up-to-date skillsets will be more likely to continue engaging with workforce development and organisational innovation.

**Workforce Development Opportunities** – with clear training pathways and opportunities for staff development, employers will be able to upskill and reskill their workforce, future-proofing their business and improving staff morale through career development.

**Improved Knowledge and Understanding of the Skills System** – employers across all sectors had limited knowledge of the available training options, including apprenticeships and skills bootcamps. By showcasing the various opportunities in an accessible way, employers will be able to make informed decisions about which training is relevant for their business – including upskilling and reskilling existing staff and engagement with their future talent pipeline through initiatives such as work experience or T levels.

## ADDRESS PERSISTENT GAPS IN CRITICAL AND ENABLING SKILLS

<b>Need Statement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employers across all sectors highlight persistent gaps in critical and enabling skills, including communication, teamwork, resilience and problem solving, particularly among new entrants to the workforce.</li> </ul>
<b>Actions / Changes Needed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Embedding Employability Skills in Curriculum</li> <li>Industry-Specific Application of Transferable Skills</li> <li>Increased Awareness of Skills' Importance</li> </ul>
<b>Intended Outcomes/Illustrative measures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved Workforce Capability</li> <li>Greater Flexibility Across Roles &amp; Sectors</li> <li>Enhanced Progression Opportunities</li> </ul>
<b>Immediate workforce pressures</b>	

### Awareness of the Importance of Critical and Enabling Skills in the Workplace

Employers in Somerset have highlighted the importance of critical and enabling skills in their workforce, most stating it is a priority when recruiting new staff. Therefore, raising awareness with the emerging workforce about which skills and behaviours are particularly valued by employers is essential, and through the support of Further Education Colleges, these skills can be embedded into the curriculum and developed over the course of their academic career.

Employers and providers also highlighted the continued importance of leadership and management capability across Somerset's economy, particularly within SMEs, frontline supervisory roles and rapidly evolving sectors experiencing technological and operational change. Concerns were raised regarding recent changes to apprenticeship funding and the withdrawal or reform of a number of higher-level apprenticeship standards, including Level 7 provision frequently used to support leadership development. Stakeholders emphasised the importance of mitigating any resulting gaps in leadership progression pathways through alternative modular provision, shorter professional development opportunities and strengthened employer-provider collaboration. Supporting accessible leadership and management development will remain important for workforce resilience, staff retention, innovation adoption and productivity improvement across Somerset's economy, therefore we will work with local authorities and education providers to develop and promote this training to meet local demand.

### Critical and Enabling Skills Industry Disparity

While all employers across all sectors are in agreement that these skills are most sought after, there is a disparity between the critical and enabling skills needed by different industries, and so the umbrella term of 'critical and enabling skills' doesn't highlight the specific industry-based challenge. More 'hands-on' industries such as construction and agri-food and land stewardship, highlighted skills such as discipline and punctuality, compared to more administrative roles, which prioritised customer service and appropriate phone and email use. Further education colleges should highlight the disparity in these skills needs and ensure that appropriate skills are embedded into their

curriculum, consulting with local businesses to ensure that the necessary skills are included.

Positive impacts that could arise from addressing gaps in critical and enabling skills include:

**Career Future Proofing and Flexibility** – these skills provide flexibility for both the individual and organisation, allowing for movement across departments and industries, with human skills remaining relevant and needed in the workplace despite the increased digitalisation of work.

**Bespoke Transferable Skills** – ensuring that more generic critical skills such as communication and teamwork are embedded into the wider curriculum, while more specific skills are integrated into technical delivery, such as construction ensures that the emerging workforce will have a robust skillset, tailored to their chosen industry as well as general transferable skills.

**Increased Awareness of the Importance of Critical and Enabling Skills** – with these skills being stated as a priority for employers across all sectors, embedding them into the curriculum and highlighting the perceived value of these skills will ensure young people both have the skills and understand the value of them as they transition into the workplace.

## IMPROVE UNDERSTANDING AND APPLICATION OF NET ZERO AND SUSTAINABILITY

<b>Need Statement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employers in Somerset report strong commitment to sustainability but lack clarity on green skills, practical application and how to access relevant training, alongside demand for carbon literacy, compliance and resource efficiency skills.</li> </ul>
<b>Actions / Changes Needed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Green Skills Clarity &amp; Definitions</li> <li>“One Front Door” Access to Training</li> <li>Sector-Specific Green Skills Development</li> <li>Practical Business Guidance &amp; ROI Awareness</li> </ul>
<b>Intended Outcomes/ Illustrative measures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased Engagement with Green Skills Training</li> <li>Improved Understanding &amp; Application of Sustainability</li> <li>Stronger Commercial &amp; ESG Outcomes</li> <li>Increased engagement with sustainability-related training and workforce development</li> <li>Increased employer awareness of sector-specific green skills requirements</li> </ul>
<b>Longer-term future needs</b>	

## **Training Clarity, Awareness and Integration**

Employers in Somerset reported a lack of understanding of green skills, as well as a need for clarity in regard to green skills, net zero and sustainability – particularly understanding what training they need, what training is available and where to access it.

To tackle this, Business West will build upon previous efforts to improve understanding of green skills by working in collaboration with local authorities and partners to develop clear, usable definitions of green skills and associated terminology. There is an opportunity for local further education colleges to work in collaboration with the local authority to ensure their training offering is up to date and relevant, for both new entrants to the workforce and existing employees looking to upskill and reskill, with the objective of creating a 'one front door' approach to engaging with the skills system. As the LSIP ERB, we will continue our work to provide impartial signposting to training and development opportunities in the area, offering bespoke support to identify skills needs and highlight appropriate training opportunities and monitoring signposting and referrals to review uptake in engagement, as well as reviewing the topics of the training requested to further support the development of training provision that meets local demand. This will include clearer communication of the commercial and operational value of sustainability, including cost savings, efficiency and competitive advantage.

## **Sector Specific Green Skills**

Employers in the local area also highlighted that using umbrella terms such as green skills created difficulties when understanding how sustainability related specifically to their sector. Therefore, as the LSIP ERB for Somerset, we will work in collaboration with the local authorities to not only highlight the transferable green skills but to identify the skills that are needed for each sector.

## **Practical Business Guidance**

We will seek to develop simple, practical toolkits covering what sustainability means in practice, where to start, priority actions, compliance requirements and available support, funding and training in the local area to provide easy, actionable priorities for employers in the local area. These resources will also include sector-specific examples (agri-food, construction, manufacturing) and provide clear signposting routes so that employers can see more clearly how the actions can be applied to their businesses.

Helping employers in Somerset to improve their understanding of net zero and sustainability, and how to apply this knowledge to their business would have positive impacts, including:

**Strong Regional Approach** – local authorities working in collaboration with the LSIP ERBs to develop a shared definition of green skills and a 'one front door' approach to showcasing training in the local area will provide a concise and robust opportunity for employers to engage with the green skills landscape.

**Sector Specific Refinement** – exploring green skills on a sector specific basis level will allow opportunity for more bespoke interventions and improved engagement from those already working towards more overarching sustainability goals that wish to explore this further.

**Increased Engagement with the Skills System** – adopting a cohesive and robust ‘one front door’ approach to engaging with the skills system, will allow employers and individuals in the local area to navigate with ease, will result in increased engagement with training, upskilling and reskilling of the emerging and existing workforce.

## Annex A: Detailed Sector Skills Needs

### PURPOSE OF THIS ANNEX

**This annex provides more detailed sector-specific skills evidence** that sits behind the priority needs and actions set out in the main Somerset LSIP report. It is intended to complement, rather than repeat, the main narrative and reflects the Somerset priority sectors identified through the Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy and Somerset Chamber priorities.

In line with LSIP statutory guidance, this annex gives additional detail on current and future skills needs, identifies targeted occupations and industries, and includes indicative SOC and SIC mapping. The SOC and SIC codes should be treated as proxies rather than definitive classifications, particularly for emerging roles in AI, clean energy, circular economy and advanced manufacturing, where existing classifications do not fully capture the breadth of employer demand.

### Labour Market Intelligence Introduction

Somerset's labour market combines relatively strong workforce participation with structural economic and demographic challenges. The county has approximately 252,000 jobs, 29,000 businesses and 581,000 residents, with 80% of working-age residents economically active, above the England average of 76%.<sup>24</sup> However, productivity remains below benchmark levels, with average GVA per filled job of £49,900, compared with £55,600 across the South West and £69,414 nationally.<sup>25</sup> Workplace-based earnings are 7% below the national average, while higher-level skills attainment also lags England, with 43% qualified to RQF Level 4+ compared with 47% nationally.<sup>26</sup> Demographic pressures are also significant. 25% of Somerset residents are aged 65+, forecast to rise to 33% by 2043, creating likely workforce replacement pressures over time.<sup>27</sup>

### Cross-cutting Evidence Summary

Across all sectors, employers and stakeholders consistently identified eight linked skills needs: innovation capability; barriers linked to rurality and transport; digital and AI capability; work readiness among young people and new entrants; recruitment and retention pressures; difficulty navigating the skills system; gaps in critical and enabling skills; and the need to improve understanding and application of net zero and sustainability. The strongest repeated themes were digital adoption, AI readiness, sustainability literacy, communication, resilience, sector awareness, transport access, flexible provision and the need for clearer progression pathways from entry level through to higher technical and higher education routes.

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<sup>24</sup> 1 Somerset Council (2025): [Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy 2025-2045](#), pp.6, 9

<sup>25</sup> 2 Somerset Council (2025): [Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy 2025-2045](#), p.6

<sup>26</sup> Somerset Council (2025): [Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy 2025-2045](#), pp.10, 13

<sup>27</sup> Somerset Council (2025): [Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy 2025-2045](#), p.6.

Theme	Evidence across sources	Implications for the LSIP
Digital, AI and data	AI and digital capability were identified across every priority sector. Employer responses highlighted Copilot, ChatGPT, Gemini, data visualisation, prompt literacy, cyber awareness, governance and fact checking. Provider and employer forums also emphasised productivity gains from AI, automation and digitalisation.	Treat digital and AI as both a sector need and a cross-sector enabling capability. Distinguish between specialist AI/data roles and practical skills for AI in everyday job roles.
Critical and enabling skills	Communication, confidence, resilience, teamwork, initiative, professional behaviours, interview readiness and problem solving were repeatedly identified through summit responses, surveys and employer discussions.	Embed as a universal requirement but describe sector-specific application rather than generic soft skills.
Rurality, transport and access	Transport was one of the most frequently cited barriers in Skills Summit evidence, particularly for West Somerset, Minehead, rural learners, non-drivers and those accessing work placements or training.	Reflect access barriers in every sector where provision, placements, shift patterns or rural employment locations affect take-up.
Net zero and sustainability	Employers want clearer definitions of green skills, practical business guidance, carbon literacy, compliance awareness, data and reporting capability, and sector-specific training.	Avoid presenting green skills as a separate sector only; embed them in construction, energy, agriculture, visitor economy, manufacturing, logistics, health and professional services.
Skills system navigation	SMEs and employers described training and funding as fragmented, difficult to navigate and administratively burdensome. Bootcamps and short modular provision were frequently valued where they were responsive and employer led.	Include a recurring action need around simpler signposting, flexible provision, co-design and short applied modules.
Productivity and innovation	Provider feedback, especially from Yeovil College and UCS, emphasised the need to focus on productivity, AI, defence, clean energy, advanced manufacturing, hydrogen, batteries, robotics and the region's nationally significant projects.	Position ongoing activity around what will 'turn the dial' for Somerset: productivity, clean energy, defence, advanced manufacturing, digital/AI and inclusive access to these opportunities.

**Indicative priority sector mapping:**

Sector	Indicative SIC sections / divisions	Indicative SOC groups / roles
<b>Agri-food and Land Stewardship</b>	A01 crop and animal production; A02 forestry; C10 food manufacturing; C11 beverages; M72 agri-tech R&D; N81 landscape services	5111 farmers; 5112 horticultural trades; 8111 process operatives; 3111 laboratory technicians; 2122 engineers; 2134 programmers/data analysts; 3550 conservation/environment roles
<b>Visitor Economy</b>	I55 accommodation; I56 food and beverage; N79 travel/tourism; R90-93 arts, culture, recreation; H49 passenger transport	1225 hospitality managers; 5434 chefs; 9272 kitchen/catering assistants; 6215 leisure and travel service roles; 7219 customer service; 3543 marketing and events roles
<b>Cultural and Creative Industries</b>	J58-63 publishing, media and digital; M73 advertising; M74 design; R90 creative arts and entertainment	3411 artists; 3412 authors/writers; 3413 actors/performers; 3422 product/clothing designers; 2137 web design; 3543 marketing; 2473 project management
<b>Low Carbon Energy</b>	D35 energy; F43 electrical/plumbing/heat; C27 electrical equipment; M71 engineering; E38 waste and resources	5241 electricians; 5314 plumbers/HVAC; 2122 engineers; 3113 engineering technicians; 5249 electrical trades; 2134 data analysts; 1259 project managers
<b>High Value Manufacturing including FoodBev, Aerospace and Defence</b>	C10-11 food/drink; C25 fabricated metal; C26 electronics; C27 electrical equipment; C28 machinery; C30 aerospace/transport; M71 engineering R&D	2122 mechanical/electrical engineers; 3113 technicians; 5223 metal machining; 5215 welding trades; 8111 process operatives; 2134 data/AI; 2431 quality/compliance roles

<b>Digital and Data</b>	J62 computer programming; J63 information services; M72 R&D; M70 management consultancy; S95 repair of computers	2134 programmers/software developers; 2135 IT business analysts; 2139 IT professionals n.e.c.; 3131 IT operations technicians; 2425 cyber/security and compliance; 3544 sales/accounts
<b>Construction and Built Environment</b>	F41 construction of buildings; F42 civil engineering; F43 specialist construction; M71 architecture/engineering	5315 carpenters; 5312 bricklayers; 5313 roofers; 5241 electricians; 5319 construction trades; 2435 architects; 3121 building/civil engineering technicians; 1259 site/project managers
<b>Transport and Logistics</b>	H49 land transport; H50 water transport; H51 air transport; H52 warehousing; H53 postal/courier; G46 wholesale	8211 drivers; 8213 forklift/plant; 4134 transport clerks; 1254 logistics managers; 9260 warehouse operatives; 2134 data/logistics optimisation roles
<b>Business, Financial and Professional Services</b>	K64-66 financial services; M69 legal/accounting; M70 consultancy; N82 office admin/support	2421 accountants; 2423 management consultants; 2413 legal professionals; 4122 bookkeeping; 7219 customer service; 2134 data analysts; 3542 business sales
<b>Health and Social Care</b>	Q86 human health; Q87 residential care; Q88 social work; C32 medical devices where relevant	6145 care workers; 2231 nurses; 1242 care managers; 3213 medical technicians; 6135 dental/nursing auxiliaries; 2134 digital/data roles; 1259 estates/maintenance managers

## AGRI-FOOD AND LAND STEWARDSHIP

### Introduction

Agri-food and land stewardship is a bedrock sector for Somerset, central to food resilience, land management, nature recovery and rural employment. The Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy identifies agri-food as particularly important in western and north-eastern areas and links future productivity to innovation in farming practices, agricultural technology, food processing and land stewardship.

### Labour Market Intelligence

The sector is shaped by rurality, dispersed employment sites, seasonal demand, farm business viability, environmental land management and the transition to more data-led, sustainable and resilient food systems. Evidence from UCS highlighted the significance of Cannington as a long-established agricultural college with activity in agritech, methane capture and land-based innovation. Sainsbury's evidence also underlined increasing sustainability expectations across food supply chains, with environmental requirements becoming stronger and more risk-based, particularly where water scarcity, climate risk and supplier resilience affect products.

Agri-food and land stewardship is identified as one of Somerset's core bedrock sectors.

The strategy describes the sector as a significant part of Somerset's economy and landscape, particularly in western and north-eastern parts of the county, with implications for food resilience, food security, land management and environmental sustainability.<sup>28</sup>

Future priorities include promoting innovation in farming practices and agricultural technologies, alongside improved productivity, resilience, decarbonisation and competitiveness in food processing and manufacturing.<sup>29</sup>

### Skills Implications

Likely workforce priorities include agri-tech, sustainable land management, food processing, environmental stewardship, farm productivity, decarbonisation capability and nature recovery skills.

### Job Postings and Forecasts

Immediate demand is likely to remain strongest for practical land-based workers, food processing operatives, maintenance technicians, supervisors and logistics-linked roles. Medium-term demand will grow for precision agriculture technicians, food processing data coordinators, robotics maintenance, environmental monitoring and compliance roles. Longer-term needs include farm and processing digital twins, autonomous field

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<sup>28</sup> Somerset Council (2025): [Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy 2025-2045](#), p.22.

<sup>29</sup> Somerset Council (2025): [Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy 2025-2045](#), p.22.

operations, soil and methane monitoring, sustainable land management and higher technical agri-tech capability.

### **Occupational Priorities**

Farm and land management operatives; agricultural technicians; food and beverage production operatives; maintenance technicians; environmental and biodiversity officers; machinery and robotics technicians; logistics and cold-chain coordinators; food safety and quality technicians; data and sustainability reporting roles.

### **Occupational Opportunities**

Somerset has an opportunity to connect agri-food productivity with clean energy, natural capital, visitor economy and food and drink manufacturing. Employer evidence suggests opportunities for short, applied modules in precision agriculture, machinery maintenance, digital record keeping, environmental compliance, farm business management and carbon/nature reporting.

### **Reported Skills Needs**

Employers and stakeholders reported needs for practical hand skills, environmental awareness, sustainability and compliance knowledge, food safety, equipment maintenance, basic digital skills, data management, customer/supply chain communication and resilience. Supply chain pressure is increasingly linked to climate, water, waste, responsible sourcing and supplier standards.

### **Critical and Enabling Skills**

Communication with suppliers and customers; problem solving in practical settings; reliability and seasonal adaptability; commercial awareness; risk awareness; teamwork; confidence using machinery and digital records; ability to explain sustainability actions without jargon.

### **Digital Skills**

Digital record keeping, farm management systems, sensors, drones, GIS, data platforms, AI-supported decision making, cold-chain optimisation, traceability tools, cyber awareness and use of basic office systems. Digital skills need to be delivered in forms that work for small rural businesses and self-employed workers.

### **Sector Specific**

Precision agriculture; machinery operation and maintenance; soil, water and methane monitoring; sustainable land management; food processing quality systems; cold-chain logistics; environmental compliance; nature recovery; circular economy and waste reduction in food production.

### **Net Zero**

Sector-specific green skills include carbon accounting for land and food businesses, nature recovery, biodiversity net gain, nutrient management, water stewardship, regenerative practice, low-carbon machinery, energy efficiency in processing, waste reduction and sustainable procurement. Sainsbury's evidence suggests supplier

sustainability capability is moving from tick-box compliance to business-critical resilience.

There is a reported disconnect between those working 'on the ground', such as the farmers, and those developing technologies and policies for the industry, including scientists and the government, therefore a priority is to create a more collaborative relationship between these parties to ensure there is consistent and cohesive messaging and approach to the decision making in the sector, while ensuring the industry can incorporate sustainability into their work.

This cohesion and clarity should also align with curriculum delivery. The risk of the workforce ageing out without the next generation taking over will leave skills gaps within the industry, therefore more needs to be done to expose the sector to the emerging workforce. Farming careers need promotion throughout the skills system and college course development, with those currently working in the industry feeding into curriculum content. Inclusion of the importance of agriculture to local and national priorities, industry insights, available job roles and career pathways will allow the next generation of workforce to gain an understanding of the sector and the opportunities available to them. Employers and Further Education colleges frequently report the emerging workforces changing priorities – with more interest being placed on the values of industries, particularly sustainability and net zero. Therefore, using curriculum delivery as an opportunity to highlight how these values are embedded within the industry will further encourage engagement from young people.

### **Further research/evidence gaps**

Further Somerset-specific evidence is needed on the volume of demand for agri-tech technicians, robotics in farming, land stewardship skills, food processing automation and the extent to which farm and food businesses are ready to engage with short modular provision.

## **VISITOR ECONOMY**

### **Introduction**

The visitor economy is a prominent bedrock sector for Somerset, supporting employment in rural, coastal and market town communities. The Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy notes that the sector generates approximately £1.1bn in annual visitor spend and supports more than 20,000 jobs, with assets including Exmoor, the Quantocks, Cheddar Gorge, the Somerset Levels and Moors, Wells Cathedral, Bridgwater Carnival and Glastonbury Festival.

### **Labour Market Intelligence trends for the Somerset region**

The sector is affected by seasonality, cost pressures, labour shortages, rural transport, changing visitor expectations and the need to move towards higher-value, sustainable and year-round tourism. Focus group evidence on sustainable tourism showed strong interest in sustainability but also nervousness about greenwashing, limited capacity among SMEs, and the need for practical, jargon-free guidance.

The visitor economy remains one of Somerset’s prominent employment sectors. The strategy estimates £1.1 billion in annual visitor spend and over 20,000 jobs, particularly in coastal and rural areas.<sup>30</sup>

The strategy highlights major cultural events as significant economic assets. Glastonbury Festival, for example, attracted over 200,000 attendees, generated £168 million for UK businesses, directly benefited Somerset firms by £32 million, and supported over 1,100 jobs.<sup>31</sup> The strategic emphasis is on shifting toward higher-value, sustainable and inclusive tourism, with stronger productivity and improved job quality.<sup>32</sup>

### **Skills Implications**

Likely workforce priorities include hospitality, visitor experience, event management, sustainable tourism, digital marketing, customer service, supervisory capability and progression pathways.

### **Job Postings and Forecasts**

High-volume needs remain in hospitality, accommodation, visitor attractions, food service, events, customer service, marketing and operations. Future growth areas include sustainable tourism coordination, local supply chain development, digital marketing, AI-supported customer engagement, visitor data analysis, inclusive tourism and low-carbon travel communication.

### **Occupational Priorities**

Hospitality managers; chefs and kitchen teams; guest services; attraction and museum staff; events and production roles; tourism development roles; marketing and social media; maintenance and facilities; customer service; supported employment and inclusive recruitment roles.

### **Occupational Opportunities**

Somerset can build a stronger sustainable tourism skills offer by linking visitor economy businesses to practical support on communications, peer learning, local procurement, sustainable transport, accessibility, digital marketing and AI. The focus group evidence suggests peer champions, light-touch schemes and practical case studies are more likely to engage SMEs than complex certification alone.

### **Reported Skills Needs**

Skills needs include customer service, communication, resilience, management, digital marketing, sustainable travel messaging, local sourcing, basic data use, measurement of impact, AI use for survey analysis and content, and practical sustainability in day-to-day operations. Businesses also need support to tell their sustainability stories clearly and credibly.

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<sup>30</sup> Somerset Council (2025): [Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy 2025-2045](#), p.23.

<sup>31</sup> Somerset Council (2025): [Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy 2025-2045](#), p.24.

<sup>32</sup> Somerset Council (2025): [Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy 2025-2045](#), p. 23.

## **Critical and Enabling Skills**

Customer communication; confidence; empathy; teamwork; problem solving under pressure; flexibility around seasonal and unsocial hours; cultural awareness; inclusive service; leadership and staff engagement; ability to handle customer expectations around sustainability measures.

## **Digital Skills**

Online booking systems, social media, website analytics, AI-assisted marketing, review management, digital accessibility, data collection, customer relationship management, and practical use of AI for communication and impact reporting.

## **Sector Specific**

Sustainable tourism practice; Green Key/Green Tourism awareness; local supply chain development; visitor transport planning; events operations; volunteer management; heritage interpretation; food and beverage operations; inclusive tourism.

## **Net Zero**

The strongest needs are sustainability literacy, practical operational changes, energy efficiency, waste reduction, local sourcing, sustainable travel communication and impact measurement. Businesses need support to avoid greenwashing and to translate sustainability into customer-facing value without increasing costs for price-sensitive visitors.

While some Visitor Economy organisations in the local area reported the positive impact of embedding sustainability within their businesses, many reported a reluctance to commit to green skills over fears that they could be doing it “wrong” and face accusations of “greenwashing”. In order to highlight the impact already being made in Somerset, the LSIP will share case studies and the sustainability journeys of employers in the local area, highlighting short, medium and long term interventions that can be adopted by organisations in the area. A ‘business first’ approach will be adopted, ensuring that all communications, campaigns and messaging utilise business-friendly, non-technical language to allow organisations at all stages of their sustainability journey to access support and guidance.

## **Further Research/Evidence Gaps**

More Somerset-specific research is needed into skills demand by sub-sector and geography, including coastal tourism, events, accommodation, food and drink, heritage, and rural attractions. Additional evidence on seasonal workforce patterns, retention and transport barriers would strengthen the annex.

# **CULTURAL AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES**

## **Introduction**

Cultural and creative industries are identified as a bedrock sector in Somerset, particularly in the north-east of the county and in relation to visitor economy, digital and

place-making. The sector includes artists, designers, makers, performers, writers, musicians, creative entrepreneurs, festivals, events, film, games, marketing and digital content.

### **Labour Market Intelligence trends for the Somerset region**

The evidence base is more limited than for construction, health, clean energy and manufacturing, but several sources indicate the importance of creative activity to place attractiveness, inward investment, visitor economy and talent retention. Employer survey evidence from Weston College highlighted communication, confidence, self-promotion, pitching, personal brand, safety culture, feedback and understanding industry hierarchy as priority skills for learners entering creative industries.

Cultural and creative industries are identified as an important bedrock sector, particularly in north-east Somerset.

The strategy explicitly references artists, designers, craftspeople, musicians, writers, performers and creative entrepreneurs as contributing significantly to Somerset's economy and cultural identity.<sup>33</sup>

The strategy also identifies opportunities through stronger linkages with the visitor economy and digital/data sectors.<sup>34</sup>

### **Skills Implications**

Likely workforce priorities include creative enterprise, digital content creation, design capability, cultural production, performance, events management and business skills.

### **Job Postings and Forecasts**

Current opportunities include content creation, events production, digital marketing, design, film and TV support roles, games and software-adjacent creative roles, venue operations, cultural programming, marketing and communications. Future needs include AI-assisted creative production, digital content, audience data analysis, cross-sector innovation and creative entrepreneurship.

### **Occupational Priorities**

Creative producers; digital content creators; designers; marketing and communications roles; events technicians; production assistants; games and interactive media roles; freelance creative practitioners; cultural project managers; venue and festival operations roles.

### **Occupational Opportunities**

Somerset can strengthen links between creative industries, tourism, digital and education by building clearer career pathways, encouraging employer-led project briefs, developing freelance/business skills and creating opportunities for learners to understand the range of roles beyond performance or artistic practice alone.

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<sup>33</sup> Somerset Council (2025): [Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy 2025-2045](#), p.23.

<sup>34</sup> Somerset Council (2025): [Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy 2025-2045](#), p.23.

## **Reported Skills Needs**

Reported needs include communication, presentation, confidence, pitching, self-promotion, personal brand, networking, resilience, tenacity, feedback, professionalism, health and safety on location, digital tools, creative software, AI literacy, and understanding the business models and hierarchy of creative industries.

## **Critical and Enabling Skills**

Communication; self-awareness; resilience in a freelance/project-based labour market; confidence; networking; client care; time management; initiative; cultural competence; teamwork; feedback; ability to understand entry-level expectations and progression routes.

## **Digital Skills**

Creative software, Adobe/Affinity/Canva-style tools, digital marketing, social content, generative AI, image/video tools, website analytics, CRM, online portfolios, cyber safety, data handling and IP/ethics awareness in AI-supported creative production.

## **Sector Specific**

Event production, film and TV location awareness, creative project management, pitching, freelance business skills, intellectual property, health and safety, audience development, digital content production, creative entrepreneurship.

## **Net Zero**

The sector needs practical sustainability skills around event waste, travel planning, responsible procurement, circular set/production materials, energy use in venues, digital carbon awareness and social value measurement. Creative organisations also have a role in communicating sustainability to wider audiences.

There is a reported need from the Creative Industry in Somerset for more clarity and understanding of green skills – namely what does green skills mean in relation to the creative industry and how these skills can be embedded within the sector. In collaboration with local authorities and industry stakeholders, we will seek to develop a definition of green skills, as well as example jobs that can be adapted from existing roles or new roles developed to incorporate these green skills within the industry. In addition, there is an opportunity to engage with creative industry employers who have already embraced sustainability within their business and share best practice through case studies and Meet the Expert webinars to highlight the value that can be added to organisations by embedding green practices.

## **Further Research/Evidence Gaps**

Further research is required to test the scale and economic segmentation of the sector in Somerset, including Frome, Glastonbury, festivals, digital creative businesses, freelancers and links to Bristol/Bath clusters. Stronger quantitative data would help validate priority occupations and provision needs.

## LOW CARBON ENERGY

### Introduction

Low carbon energy is one of Somerset's distinctive growth sectors and central to its national role in clean energy, nuclear, grid transition, tidal opportunity, retrofit and energy systems. Hinkley Point C, the proposed West Somerset tidal lagoon, grid constraints, retrofit demand, solar, battery storage and future clean energy technologies all shape the skills requirement.

### Labour Market Intelligence

Clean energy focus groups identified shortages in people skilled in solar and battery skills, electrical pathways, retrofit, whole-house approaches, data analytics, construction-linked skills, roofing, heat pumps, grid infrastructure and digital energy systems, however prior work and provider engagement has highlighted that the provision for these skills frequently exists but is underutilised, and there remains work to be done in addressing this disconnect and stimulating market demand for the successful scale up of adoption, particularly in the domestic market. Bromford evidence emphasised data scientists, heat pumps, battery storage, energy efficiency sensors, grid constraints, social value and rural inclusion. ECA evidence strongly highlighted the need to maintain core electrical competence before short course renewable upskilling. Low-carbon energy is one of Somerset's most strategically significant growth sectors and is central to the county's long-term economic vision.

The strategy identifies Somerset as having distinctive strengths in low-carbon energy, anchored by Hinkley Point C, described as a £31 billion investment and the first new nuclear build project in the UK for a generation.<sup>35</sup> When operational, Hinkley Point C will generate 7% of current UK electricity demand and power over 6 million homes for 60 years.<sup>36</sup> The strategy also highlights enabling workforce infrastructure including the National College for Nuclear (South West Hub), centres of excellence in mechanical, welding and electrical trades, the Somerset Energy Innovation Centre, and links to the University of Bristol South West Nuclear Hub.<sup>37</sup>

Additional future growth potential is identified through the proposed West Somerset tidal lagoon, which could power up to 2 million UK homes, while generating skills, supply chain and employment opportunities.<sup>38</sup>

### Skills Implications

Likely workforce priorities include nuclear skills, electrical and mechanical engineering, welding, construction trades, energy systems, low-carbon technologies, project delivery and supply chain capability.

### Job Postings and Forecasts

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<sup>35</sup> Somerset Council (2025): [Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy 2025-2045](#), pp.9,19.

<sup>36</sup> Somerset Council (2025): [Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy 2025-2045](#), p.19.

<sup>37</sup> Somerset Council (2025): [Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy 2025-2045](#), p. 19.

<sup>38</sup> Somerset Council (2025): [Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy 2025-2045](#), pp. 17-18.

Immediate demand includes electricians, roofers, general construction workers, retrofit assessors/coordinators, solar PV installers, heat pump installers, battery storage technicians, energy advisers, project managers and data analysts. Medium-term demand includes grid flexibility, energy systems, advanced NDT, inspection robotics and digital QA. Longer-term demand includes AI-orchestrated energy systems, SMR-linked supply chain skills and autonomous inspection/maintenance.

### **Occupational Priorities**

Electricians; electrical technicians; solar PV installers; heat pump installers; battery storage technicians; retrofit coordinators; retrofit assessors; roofers; building services engineers; NDT inspectors; grid and energy systems technicians; data analysts; project managers; compliance roles.

### **Occupational Opportunities**

Somerset has a major opportunity to build an integrated clean energy workforce offer linked to nuclear, tidal, retrofit, heat pumps, solar, battery storage and grid flexibility. This should not be framed as a separate clean energy niche alone; evidence suggests these are modernised construction, engineering, electrical and digital roles requiring core competence plus specialist upskilling.

### **Reported Skills Needs**

Reported needs include electrical competence, shorter but credible upskilling routes for experienced workers, solar PV, DC systems, battery storage, heat pump installation and maintenance, whole house retrofit, ventilation, data analytics, project management, procurement, compliance, health and safety and customer communication.

### **Critical and Enabling Skills**

Safety culture; reliability; risk awareness; problem solving; communication with householders and clients; ability to explain whole-house options; collaboration across trades; project coordination; resilience in a funding-uncertain market; commercial judgement on quality and standards.

### **Digital Skills**

Energy data platforms, sensors, smart meters, building monitoring, grid flexibility platforms, digital QA, thermal imaging, BIM/digital twins for retrofit, AI-supported energy analysis, CRM and compliance records, data governance and cyber awareness in connected homes.

### **Sector Specific**

Electrical installation; high-voltage awareness; solar PV; battery storage; heat pumps; retrofit coordination; ventilation; PAS/TrustMark/MCS awareness; roofing for solar; building services; grid connection and flexibility; tidal/nuclear supply chain; advanced NDT and inspection.

## **Net Zero**

This is the core net zero sector, but the evidence warns against low-quality short courses. Green skills must include technical competence, quality assurance, whole-house design, safety, data-led decisions, consumer trust, compliance, energy affordability and storage. Employers also need pipeline certainty and funding stability to invest in training.

## **Further Research/Evidence Gaps**

Further research is needed on local clean energy project pipelines, the number of firms active in solar, retrofit, heat pumps, tidal, grid and battery systems, and demand for experienced worker routes. There is a specific evidence gap around high-voltage skills and the local feasibility of public funding for electrical NVQs/experienced worker pathways.

## **HIGH VALUE MANUFACTURING INCLUDING FOODBEV, AEROSPACE AND DEFENCE**

### **Introduction**

High value manufacturing is a distinctive strength for Somerset, spanning food and drink, aerospace, defence, battery manufacturing, engineering, advanced materials, machinery and equipment. The Economic Prosperity Strategy highlights major assets, including Agratas at Gravity, Leonardo in Yeovil, Thales in Templecombe, iAero, the South West Future Flight Innovation Zone and the UK Hydrographic Office.

Somerset's defence, aerospace and advanced manufacturing strengths are increasingly interconnected with developments across clean energy, digital technologies and wider industrial innovation. Employers highlighted that many of the technical capabilities required within defence and aerospace — including systems engineering, robotics, autonomy, AI, advanced materials, cyber security, battery technologies and digital manufacturing — are highly transferable across other growth sectors such as clean energy, automotive electrification and high-value manufacturing supply chains. The continued development of defence-related activity linked to Leonardo, Thales, future rotorcraft programmes and autonomous systems therefore has the potential to generate wider economic and skills spillover effects across Somerset's economy, supporting productivity growth, innovation adoption and higher-level technical capability across multiple sectors. Stakeholders also noted the importance of ensuring local supply chains, SMEs and education providers are connected into these opportunities, enabling broader workforce development and progression pathways that extend beyond the defence sector itself.

### **Labour Market Intelligence**

Evidence from providers strongly emphasises that Somerset's opportunity lies in clean energy, defence, advanced manufacturing, hydrogen, batteries, robotics, automation, AI, autonomy and productivity. Aerospace evidence also highlights sustainability transformation, alternative fuels, compliance, nature/biodiversity, internal culture change

and energy specialists. Yeovil College evidence notes emerging hydrogen and advanced manufacturing assets and the need for flexible funding to support innovation faster than qualification frameworks often allow.

Aerospace and defence is one of Somerset's most important high-value industrial clusters, particularly concentrated in Yeovil and South Somerset. The strategy identifies Leonardo UK as the anchor employer, noting that it is the only UK organisation with end-to-end helicopter manufacturing capability and manufactures over 50% of the UK Armed Forces' frontline helicopter fleet.<sup>39</sup>

The wider ecosystem includes the iAero Innovation Centre, the South West Future Flight Innovation Zone, Thales in Templecombe, and the UK Hydrographic Office in Taunton, whose Admiralty Maritime Data Solutions are used on 90% of ships trading internationally.<sup>40</sup> The strategy explicitly positions Somerset as a centre for next-generation aerospace and defence technologies, including autonomous systems, advanced air mobility and alternative fuels.<sup>41</sup>

### **Skills Implications**

Likely workforce priorities include aerospace engineering, systems engineering, advanced manufacturing, autonomous systems, digital engineering, AI-enabled systems, alternative propulsion technologies and technical project management.

### **High-value Manufacturing**

High-value manufacturing is Somerset's most significant established productive sector.

The strategy identifies 26,000 manufacturing jobs, generating 17% of total GVA, making manufacturing a major contributor to Somerset's economy.<sup>42</sup> The sector spans food and drink, aerospace, defence, low-carbon energy, machinery and equipment, with the strongest concentration of activity in the southern half of the county.<sup>43</sup>

A major future growth driver is Agratas' £4 billion battery manufacturing investment at Gravity Enterprise Zone, expected to create up to 4,000 direct high-value jobs, alongside wider supply chain growth.<sup>44</sup>

The strategy explicitly frames battery manufacturing as a transformational opportunity to establish a wider industrial battery cluster linked to industrial electrification.<sup>45</sup>

### **Skills Implications**

Likely workforce priorities include battery manufacturing, advanced production, automation, maintenance engineering, industrial digitalisation, quality assurance, supply chain capability and manufacturing leadership.

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<sup>39</sup> Somerset Council (2025): [Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy 2025-2045](#), p.19.

<sup>40</sup> Somerset Council (2025): [Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy 2025-2045](#), pp.19-20.

<sup>41</sup> Somerset Council (2025): [Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy 2025-2045](#), p.20.

<sup>42</sup> Somerset Council (2025): [Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy 2025-2045](#), p.6.

<sup>43</sup> Somerset Council (2025): [Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy 2025-2045](#), p.21.

<sup>44</sup> Somerset Council (2025): [Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy 2025-2045](#), pp.5, 17.

<sup>45</sup> Somerset Council (2025): [Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy 2025-2045](#), p.17.

## **Job Postings and Forecasts**

Immediate roles include engineering technicians, CNC/machining, welding, maintenance, production, quality, compliance, mechanical/electrical engineering, digital manufacturing and project management. Medium-term roles include robotics operators/integrators, automation technicians, predictive maintenance, digital twin modelling, additive manufacturing, composites, battery manufacturing, hydrogen systems and sustainable aviation fuels. Longer-term needs include AI-enabled semi-autonomous cells, cobotics and advanced autonomy across defence and future flight.

## **Occupational Priorities**

Mechanical engineers; electrical engineers; engineering technicians; CNC machinists; welders; quality technicians; production supervisors; robotics/automation integrators; maintenance technicians; battery technicians; hydrogen technicians; aerospace/defence systems engineers; compliance specialists; data engineers.

## **Occupational Opportunities**

Somerset can position itself as a nationally significant centre for advanced manufacturing linked to defence, future flight, battery technologies and clean energy. Ongoing activity in the second phase of the LSIP should make defence and clean energy more prominent, reflecting provider feedback that these are the areas most likely to turn the dial for productivity, inward investment and higher-value jobs.

## **Reported Skills Needs**

Reported needs include mechanical and design engineering, practical hand skills, automation, robotics, additive manufacturing, digital twins, AI adoption, lean/process improvement, data management, quality assurance, sustainable fuels, battery materials, compliance, project management and leadership. SMEs reported difficulty competing with major employers on pay and accessing skilled engineers.

## **Critical and Enabling Skills**

Discipline, reliability, problem solving, safety culture, process awareness, teamwork, continuous improvement, communication, leadership, project management, commercial awareness and adaptability to rapid technological change.

## **Digital Skills**

CAD/CAM, digital twins, machine vision QA, MES, industrial data, Industrial Internet of Things (IIoT), predictive maintenance, robotics programming, AI copilots, cyber security, software/data governance, additive manufacturing design, 5G/private networks and automation analytics.

## **Sector Specific**

Aerospace systems; defence technologies; autonomy; future flight; composites; sustainable aviation fuels; hydrogen; battery cells/materials; food and drink processing automation; robotics; quality systems; advanced inspection; lean manufacturing.

## Net Zero

Net zero skills include alternative fuels, energy efficiency, sustainable manufacturing, circular economy, resource efficiency, carbon reporting, biodiversity and nature awareness in corporate sustainability, sustainable procurement and low-carbon process improvement.

Somerset has seen key investment in Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering and has a notable footprint in the UK's largest aerospace cluster. Reported needs for the area centre heavily on alternative fuel development, including hydrogen, biomass and sustainable aviation fuels, as well as battery manufacturing at the Agratas factory.

## Further Research/Evidence Gaps

Further research is needed to quantify demand linked to Agratas, Leonardo/defence contracts, future flight, hydrogen and battery supply chains by occupation, level and timing. Additional insight is needed from SMEs in manufacturing and foodbev, who can be harder to engage than larger anchor employers.

## DIGITAL AND DATA

### Introduction

Digital and data is both a distinctive growth sector and a universal enabling capability across Somerset's economy. The Economic Prosperity Strategy identifies digital and data as a distinctive sector linked to data centres, the M5 corridor, Firepool Centre for Digital Innovation and Somerset's ambition to build an innovation ecosystem.

### Labour Market Intelligence

The evidence base shows that AI has overtaken software and coding as the most visible digital skills issue for many employers, although foundational digital literacy remains a gap. Weston College AI survey responses identified Copilot, ChatGPT, Gemini, Grok, Adobe Firefly and bespoke AI tools, alongside repeated concerns about prompt quality, security, governance, fact checking, ethical use, data quality and over-reliance. CyberFirst evidence identified shortages of specialist teachers, low entry-level pathways and declining basic computer literacy/typing skills.

Digital and data is identified as an emerging high-value growth opportunity.

The strategy highlights Somerset's M5 corridor as having locational advantages for AI-enabled data centres, including land availability, suitable power connectivity, strong digital **connectivity** (dark fibre), and water access. The Firepool Centre for Digital Innovation in Taunton is identified as a supporting innovation asset for digital and data-driven businesses.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Somerset Council (2025): [Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy 2025-2045](#), p.21.

Digital transformation is also identified as a cross-cutting workforce requirement across the wider economy.<sup>47</sup>

### **Skills Implications**

Likely workforce priorities include data analytics, AI, cyber security, software development, digital infrastructure, cloud/data centre operations and wider digital adoption skills.

### **Job Postings and Forecasts**

Immediate demand includes digital literacy across the whole workforce, cyber awareness, AI safe use, administrative digital skills, data visualisation and digital marketing. Specialist demand includes software developers, IT technicians, data analysts, cyber security, AI integration, automation, digital trainers, cloud and systems roles. Longer-term demand includes agentic AI, MLOps, secure data platforms, industrial AI, digital twins and AI governance.

### **Occupational Priorities**

Data analysts; AI application integrators; cyber security analysts; software developers; IT support technicians; digital trainers; digital marketing roles; automation specialists; CRM/systems administrators; data engineers; AI governance/compliance roles.

### **Occupational Opportunities**

Somerset should treat AI as a productivity and inclusion opportunity, not only a specialist technical field. Employers need short, practical, contextual training that helps them identify where AI can improve processes safely. Provider evidence suggests scope for AI bootcamps, digital strategy support, cyber awareness and sector-specific applied AI modules.

### **Reported Skills Needs**

Reported needs include baseline digital skills, Microsoft Office, Teams, email, CRM, digital communication, AI prompt literacy, ethical and safe AI use, fact checking, data privacy, cyber awareness, data analysis, visualisation, Power BI, automation, digital marketing and confidence using changing software tools.

### **Critical and Enabling Skills**

Critical thinking, judgement, questioning, communication, ethical awareness, confidence, adaptability, problem solving, ability to challenge AI outputs, collaboration between technical and non-technical staff, and willingness to learn continuously.

### **Digital Skills**

This section is entirely digital: foundational digital literacy, applied AI, data analysis, cyber security, systems integration, low-code automation, digital marketing, cloud, governance, prompt literacy, software development, digital product design, and digital inclusion.

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<sup>47</sup> Somerset Council (2025): [Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy 2025-2045](#), p.26.

## **Sector Specific**

AI implementation; process mapping; cyber security; data governance; analytics; automation; cloud platforms; software development; digital marketing; digital training; data centres; digital infrastructure; tech adoption for SMEs.

## **Net Zero**

Digital net zero skills include understanding the environmental impact of AI, data centres, cloud computing, water and energy use, sustainable software design, digital carbon reporting and using data to reduce emissions. Employers indicated that the environmental footprint of AI is often not yet properly considered.

The general consensus in Somerset is that more needs to be done to raise awareness regarding the environmental impact of AI integration within organisations, as it is currently being ignored. The LSIP will work with stakeholders and local authorities to develop guidance and resources such as webinars, to demystify the impacts of this technology, including data centres, water usage and energy consumption.

## **Further Research/Evidence Gaps**

Further research is needed on the number and type of digital/data employers in Somerset, data centre-related jobs, AI adoption maturity among SMEs, cyber entry-level pathways, and whether existing provision meets basic digital as well as advanced technical demand.

# **CONSTRUCTION AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT**

## **Introduction**

Construction and the built environment is a core enabling sector for Somerset, underpinning housing, infrastructure, retrofit, clean energy, major project delivery and local SME activity. Although not one of the Economic Prosperity Strategy's distinctive or bedrock sectors, it is vital to delivery of housing, energy, employment sites, infrastructure and the built environment needed for growth.

## **Labour Market Intelligence**

Evidence included from employers and clean energy discussions is extensive. Employers reported shortages in carpentry, bricklaying, groundworks, roofing, scaffolders, electricians, civil engineering, project management, building surveyors, planners/enforcement and site-ready workers. SMEs emphasised bureaucracy, difficulty navigating funding, planning delays, driving/transport barriers and the challenge of taking on apprentices when margins and workloads are tight.

## **Job Postings and Forecasts**

Immediate demand includes trades, groundworkers, roofers, electricians, carpenters, bricklayers, scaffolders, plant operators, project managers, site supervisors, building surveyors, planners and enforcement officers. Medium-term demand includes retrofit, sustainable materials, building physics, BIM, drone surveys, digital site management,

offsite manufacturing and heat/energy infrastructure. Longer-term needs include construction robotics, digital twins, climate adaptation and low-carbon building systems.

### **Occupational Priorities**

Carpenters; bricklayers; roofers; electricians; scaffolders; groundworkers; plant operators; civil engineers; site managers; project managers; building surveyors; planners/enforcement; BIM coordinators; retrofit coordinators; construction technicians.

### **Occupational Opportunities**

Somerset can build a more coherent construction skills offer by linking SME builders, CITB, FMB, colleges, local authority planning/housing teams, retrofit providers and clean energy stakeholders. Employers want practical business support as well as technical training, including AI for admin, quoting, marketing, health and safety and client communications.

### **Reported Skills Needs**

Reported needs include core trades, building safety, health and safety, plant tickets, driving licences, business management, project management, digital tools, BIM/3D design, building physics, moisture movement, ventilation, sustainable materials, retrofit, roofing for solar, electrical integration, communication and work readiness.

### **Critical and Enabling Skills**

Reliability, punctuality, initiative, communication with clients and site managers, resilience, safety culture, attention to detail, professionalism, problem solving on live sites, ability to work outdoors and understand site realities.

### **Digital Skills**

BIM, 3D design, drones, digital photography, CRM, estimating tools, AI for quotes/bids, digital site management, competency apps, plant simulators, Microsoft tools, social media/web presence and digital records for compliance.

### **Sector Specific**

Retrofit; fabric-first approaches; low-carbon and natural materials; ventilation; heat pumps; solar roofing; building safety; heritage skills; tarmac/groundworks; plant; site management; sustainable architecture; climate adaptation; building physics.

### **Net Zero**

Green skills need to be embedded into core construction rather than offered only as optional extras. Employers need a practical understanding of retrofit, whole-house approaches, sustainable materials, moisture, overheating, ventilation, solar integration and quality assurance. Demand is also constrained by client willingness to pay, funding instability and inconsistent standards.

There is a reported need for increased understanding of net zero, low carbon, eco-friendly building materials, clean energy and retrofit. Therefore, it is suggested that a

baseline is developed within the curriculum for understanding of these areas as well as integrating further industry exposure to these methods of construction, ensuring that the emerging workforce is equipped with the relevant skills and knowledge of these sustainable options. In addition to these additions to the curriculum, employers in the local area highlighted a need for curriculum delivery to be up to date and relevant to the industry. To ensure that provision is fit for purpose, employers should collaborate with Further Education Colleges to review the curriculum to ensure it meets their operational needs.

Changes to climate have impacted the Construction and Built Environment industry, with more extreme weather and rising temperatures having an effect on building materials and processes, as well as working conditions and limitations – all of which have an impact on the skills needs of the industry. The LSIP will work with industry bodies and local authorities to provide guidance and support for these changes, as well as supporting pre-emptive climate adaptation measures for organisational resilience.

### **Further Research/Evidence Gaps**

Further research is needed into Somerset-specific construction project pipelines, SME apprenticeship barriers, local availability of heritage skills, demand for retrofit training, building safety requirements and the impact of major projects on SME labour supply.

## **TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS**

### **Introduction**

Transport and logistics is a core enabling sector that supports all priority sectors through freight, warehousing, passenger movement, supply chains, e-commerce, construction logistics, food distribution and access to work and training. In Somerset, it is also a major access issue, because rural transport constraints affect labour supply across the economy.

### **Labour Market Intelligence**

Evidence from the retail, transport and logistics focus group, Logistics UK and the Somerset Skills Summit highlights digitalisation, AI, data visualisation, decarbonisation, electric fleets, recruitment barriers, candidate attitudes, transport access and the need to raise awareness of sustainable logistics careers. Logistics UK emphasised that the sector underpins all sectors but can be overlooked in national skills agendas.

### **Job Postings and Forecasts**

Immediate needs include drivers, warehouse operatives, transport administrators, forklift/plant roles, customer service, logistics coordinators and transport managers. Medium-term needs include data analysts, route optimisation, fleet decarbonisation, telematics, e-commerce fulfilment, supply chain sustainability, electric vehicle infrastructure and compliance roles. Longer-term needs include autonomous logistics pilots, integrated logistics twins and AI-enabled optimisation.

## **Occupational Priorities**

Drivers; HGV and van roles; warehouse operatives; forklift/plant operators; transport managers; logistics coordinators; supply chain administrators; route planners; fleet technicians; data analysts; sustainability/compliance roles.

## **Occupational Opportunities**

There is an opportunity to strengthen the visibility of logistics careers and show their relevance to clean energy, manufacturing, food and drink, construction and health supply chains. Future employer engagement should include that targeted towards SME road haulage operators, transport managers and regional logistics networks.

## **Reported Skills Needs**

Reported needs include digital skills, AI awareness, Power BI/data visualisation, productivity tools, recruitment and inclusive hiring, critical thinking, remote/hybrid working where appropriate, customer service, transport management, decarbonisation, electric fleets and sustainable supply chain reporting.

## **Critical and Enabling Skills**

Reliability, punctuality, communication, safety awareness, customer service, route/problem solving, adaptability, work readiness, inclusive recruitment awareness and understanding of sector expectations around shift patterns and mobility.

## **Digital Skills**

Telematics, route optimisation, fleet management systems, warehouse management systems, e-commerce platforms, Power BI, AI tools, data centres for manufacturing/logistics, digital recruitment, cyber/data protection and automation.

## **Sector Specific**

Driving licences; CPC; warehousing; HGV; plant/forklift; transport management; fleet decarbonisation; electric vehicles; route planning; cold-chain logistics; freight operations; sustainable logistics and supply chain reporting.

## **Net Zero**

Net zero skills include fleet decarbonisation, EV charging, route optimisation, sustainable fuels, carbon reporting, logistics contract requirements, waste reduction and supply chain data. However, infrastructure constraints and cost pressures may limit the pace of adoption.

While there is a range of sustainable careers pathways in the logistics industry, a reported barrier to engaging with these roles is a lack of awareness. It is reported that there is a lack of understanding of the breadth of roles available, as well as the skills needed to carry out these roles. In order to reduce this barrier to engagement, a collaborative approach between local employers, local authorities and the LSIP to raise awareness of these job roles is crucial. This can be done through the development of resources such as webinars and through increased engagement with Further Education Colleges in order to engage the emerging workforce. Employers and Colleges in the local

area have reported a shift in workplace expectations for young people, they are now driven more by values of organisations – with sustainability being particularly notable – therefore providing industry exposure to the next generation of workforce would help to raise awareness of the roles available within the industry.

### **Further Research/Evidence Gaps**

Further research is needed with Somerset logistics employers, especially road freight SMEs, to quantify roles, licence barriers, decarbonisation readiness and training demand. More evidence is also needed on how poor public transport affects recruitment in logistics and other sectors.

## **BUSINESS, FINANCIAL AND PROFESSIONAL SERVICES**

### **Introduction**

Business, financial and professional services are a core part of Somerset's everyday and growth economy, supporting SMEs, start-ups, major employers, supply chains, public services and inward investment. The sector includes accountancy, finance, legal, consultancy, HR, marketing, administration, customer service and business support.

### **Labour Market Intelligence**

Evidence from direct business engagement, wider business events and survey data shows demand for AI adoption, financial literacy, ESG reporting, climate disclosure, project management, stakeholder engagement, communications, marketing and practical business support. Employers also highlighted that SMEs need plain language, help navigating apprenticeships/funding and support to use digital tools productively.

### **Job Postings and Forecasts**

Immediate demand includes accountancy practice roles, administrators, executive assistants, customer service, HR, marketing, project management, ESG/sustainability roles and financial analysts. Future demand includes AI-enabled finance, data analysis, carbon accounting, climate risk reporting, sustainable software/design, business process automation, cyber/compliance and AI governance.

### **Occupational Priorities**

Accountants; bookkeepers; financial analysts; business administrators; executive assistants; HR advisers; marketing specialists; project managers; ESG/sustainability officers; data analysts; AI-enabled finance roles; customer service roles.

### **Occupational Opportunities**

There is a strong opportunity to support SMEs with practical digital and AI adoption, financial literacy, marketing, compliance and workforce planning. Professional services can also help diffuse good practice across other sectors by advising on sustainability, social value, procurement, HR and digital transformation.

## **Reported Skills Needs**

Reported needs include data analytics, reporting, carbon foot printing, climate disclosure, communication, facilitation, virtual meeting productivity, project management, stakeholder management, core IT, Excel/Word, AI tools, financial forecasting, marketing and understanding how to start with sustainability.

## **Critical and Enabling Skills**

Client care, communication, trust, confidentiality, commercial judgement, problem solving, facilitation, stakeholder management, leadership, resilience and ability to simplify complex topics for SMEs and clients.

## **Digital Skills**

AI finance tools, online accounting, Making Tax Digital, Excel, Power BI, CRM, digital marketing, cyber security, data privacy, automation, AI governance and sustainable software/digital design.

## **Sector Specific**

Financial literacy, accounting, tax, ESG reporting, climate disclosure, social value, procurement, HR compliance, employment law, marketing, business planning, project management and consultancy skills.

## **Net Zero**

Needs include carbon accounting, ESG strategy, climate risk and opportunity, social value measurement, supplier data, sustainability communication, responsible procurement and embedding sustainability into wider business events rather than standalone sustainability activity only.

## **Further Research/Evidence gaps**

Further research is needed into specific demand for professional services roles, including accountancy shortages, AI adoption among microbusinesses, ESG reporting capability and business support needs for rural SMEs.

## **HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**

### **Introduction**

Health and social care is a core foundational sector for Somerset, with strategic importance amplified by the county's ageing population and rural geography. It supports economic inclusion, community wellbeing, employment and public service resilience, and is closely linked to the Get Somerset Working agenda.

Employers and stakeholders within the health and social care sector also raised concerns regarding recent and proposed changes to higher-level apprenticeship funding, particularly where these changes may affect progression routes into advanced clinical, leadership and specialist care roles. Providers highlighted the importance of understanding the potential local impact on workforce development pipelines, especially

within a sector already facing significant recruitment and retention pressures. There is therefore a need for continued collaboration between employers, providers and system partners to monitor emerging impacts, identify potential gaps in progression pathways and explore alternative approaches to supporting higher-level workforce development, including modular professional development, flexible technical qualifications and strengthened progression between further and higher education. Maintaining accessible progression opportunities will be important to supporting leadership capacity, workforce resilience and long-term quality of care across Somerset.

### **Labour Market Intelligence**

Skills for Care summit evidence identified adult social care as having the highest number of in-demand occupations and skills needs, with opportunities to position care as a career and industry of choice. It highlighted recruitment, retention, training, digital, EDI, workforce wellbeing, leadership, care academies, VR/AR, young people research, driving licence barriers and the need for values-led recruitment. Somerset Care identified maintenance as a major skills gap, and the sector has an ageing workforce.

### **Job Postings and Forecasts**

Immediate demand includes care workers, support workers, nurses, registered managers, social workers, youth workers, healthcare assistants, maintenance, trainers and specialist roles in learning disability/autism, wound care and mental capacity. Future demand includes digital care, data skills, VR/AR training, telecare, care technology, healthtech, circular procurement, carbon reporting and cross-health/social care roles.

### **Occupational Priorities**

Care workers; support workers; nurses; registered managers; social workers; youth workers; healthcare assistants; maintenance staff; trainers; digital champions; workforce development roles; data leads; care academy coordinators.

### **Occupational Opportunities**

Somerset can build on care academy models, local solutions to local problems, broadcast/simulation training and partnership between care providers, FE/HE, NHS, councils and Skills for Care. There is also an opportunity to use VR/AR to improve exposure to care environments where placements are hard to offer.

### **Reported Skills Needs**

Reported needs include values-based care, empathy, communication, digital upskilling, registered manager development, leadership, wellbeing, retention, training progression, learning disability and autism, wound care, basic life support, mental capacity, maintenance skills, driving/access and reducing silos between NHS and social care.

### **Critical and Enabling Skills**

Empathy, communication, values, resilience, reliability, teamwork, confidence, safeguarding, dignity, emotional intelligence, leadership, reflective practice and ability to work with families and multi-agency partners.

## Digital Skills

Digital care records, Excel/basic digital skills, cyber security, data sharing, care technology, VR/AR simulation, telehealth, digital communication, AI-supported administration and future innovation modules that reduce repetitive tasks.

## Sector Specific

Adult social care certificate, CQC readiness, registered manager leadership, clinical care, community care, learning disability/autism, wound care, mental capacity, basic life support, care academies, workforce wellbeing, maintenance/estates.

## Net Zero

Health and care needs include sustainable procurement, waste segregation, carbon reduction plans, supplier reporting, circular medical devices, travel reduction, estates energy efficiency, climate adaptation and understanding NHS net zero requirements. Life sciences/healthtech evidence also suggests growing needs in circular economy, decontamination, reusable products and supplier benchmarks.

Within the Health and Social Care sector, green skills are needed throughout organisations – from front-line staff to senior leadership and throughout wider supply chains. Research has found that the key green skills needs in the Health and Social Care sector are sustainable procurement, supply chain management, circular economy and the reduction of waste. As well as social value and carbon reduction<sup>48</sup> [7]. While there is already clear sustainable job roles throughout the industry, many organisations struggle with how to embed these job roles and skills within their organisations, therefore the LSIP in collaboration with local authorities will provide support and guidance for employers on how to identify which job roles can be embedded into organisations and what green skills are needed.

## Further Research/Evidence Gaps

Further research is needed on Somerset-specific social care vacancy data, provider appetite for apprenticeships, barriers for young entrants, maintenance skills shortages, travel requirements and the potential role of VR/AR and care academies across the county.

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<sup>48</sup> ABHI, HealthTech and Sustainability: the opportunities and challenges for the sector (April 2024); <https://www.abhi.org.uk/media/2yfbgwe1/sustainability-paper-02.pdf>; Health Industry Leaders, Decarbonising Life Sciences Event, 25 November 2025

## Summary of Evidence Gaps for Further/Future LSIP research

Sector	Suggested further research
<b>Agri-food and Land Stewardship</b>	Further Somerset-specific evidence is needed on the volume of demand for agri-tech technicians, robotics in farming, land stewardship skills, food processing automation and the extent to which farm and food businesses are ready to engage with short modular provision.
<b>Visitor Economy</b>	More Somerset-specific research is needed into skills demand by sub-sector and geography, including coastal tourism, events, accommodation, food and drink, heritage, and rural attractions. Additional evidence on seasonal workforce patterns, retention and transport barriers would strengthen the annex.
<b>Cultural and Creative Industries</b>	Further research is required to test the scale and economic segmentation of the sector in Somerset, including Frome, Glastonbury, festivals, digital creative businesses, freelancers and links to Bristol/Bath clusters. Stronger quantitative data would help validate priority occupations and provision needs.
<b>Low Carbon Energy</b>	Further research is needed on local clean energy project pipelines, the number of firms active in solar, retrofit, heat pumps, tidal, grid and battery systems, and demand for experienced worker routes. There is a specific evidence gap around high-voltage skills and the local feasibility of public funding for electrical NVQs/experienced worker pathways.
<b>High Value Manufacturing including FoodBev, Aerospace and Defence</b>	Further research is needed to quantify demand linked to Agratas, Leonardo/defence contracts, future flight, hydrogen and battery supply chains by occupation, level and timing. Additional insight is needed from SMEs in manufacturing and foodbev, who can be harder to engage than larger anchor employers.
<b>Digital and Data</b>	Further research is needed on the number and type of digital/data employers in Somerset, data centre-related jobs, AI adoption maturity among SMEs, cyber entry-level pathways, and whether existing provision meets basic digital as well as advanced technical demand.
<b>Construction and Built Environment</b>	Further research is needed into Somerset-specific construction project pipelines, SME apprenticeship barriers, local availability of heritage skills, demand for retrofit training, building safety requirements and the impact of major projects on SME labour supply.
<b>Transport and Logistics</b>	Further research is needed with Somerset logistics employers, especially road freight SMEs, to quantify roles, licence barriers, decarbonisation readiness and training demand. More evidence is also needed on how poor public transport affects recruitment in logistics and other sectors.
<b>Business, Financial and Professional Services</b>	Further research is needed into Somerset-specific demand for professional services roles, including accountancy shortages, AI adoption among microbusinesses, ESG reporting capability and business support needs for rural SMEs.
<b>Health and Social Care</b>	Further research is needed on Somerset-specific social care vacancy data, provider appetite for apprenticeships, barriers for young entrants, maintenance skills shortages, travel requirements and the potential role of VR/AR and care academies across the county.

## Indicative SIC/SOC Mapping

**SIC and SOC codes have been used throughout this annex** to support consistency of analysis and alignment with national labour market intelligence approaches. Employer engagement activity was undertaken using accessible business language, with coding applied during analysis stages to support comparison, reporting and future workforce planning.

This report intentionally keeps occupational/SIC/SOC mapping at an indicative level because several emerging occupations, particularly in clean energy, AI, circular economy and advanced manufacturing, are not cleanly captured by existing classifications. Further work within the LSIP should validate SOC/SIC coding against regionally agreed definitions, Skills England analysis, Lightcast/EMSI job postings, ONS classifications and any available local datasets.

LSIP occupation name	Definition within the LSIP report	Relevant SOC Code(s)	LSIP sector name	Relevant SIC Code(s)	Mapping limitations / further information
Software and IT professionals	Professionals developing, maintaining and supporting software systems, including programming, AI, cyber security and IT infrastructure	2134 – Programmers and software development professionals; 2135 – Cyber security professionals; 2137 – IT network professionals; 3131 – IT technicians; 3132 – IT user support technicians	Digital and Data	62	Core cross-cutting occupation across all sectors

Advanced digital, AI and data specialists	Specialists in AI, robotics, data engineering, system architecture and automation technologies	2133 – IT business analysts, architects and systems designers; 2134 – Programmers and software development professionals	Digital and Data	62	Emerging high-demand roles; often not well captured in SIC classification
Data analysts and data technicians	Roles focused on data capture, processing and analysis to support decision-making	3544 – Data analysts; 3133 – Database administrators and web content technicians	Digital and Data	52, 82	Embedded across sectors; not always visible in SIC
Engineering professionals	Engineers involved in design, production, infrastructure and advanced manufacturing systems	2121 – Civil engineers; 2125 – Production and process engineers; 2127 – Engineering project managers and project engineers	High Value Manufacturing / Construction / Low Carbon	25–28, 42	Broad category across multiple sectors
Engineering technicians	Technical specialists supporting engineering design, testing and production processes	3113 – Engineering technicians	High Value Manufacturing	25–28	Often overlap with skilled trades

Skilled metal and manufacturing trades	Skilled workers in welding, fabrication, CNC machining and precision engineering	5213 – Welding trades; 5223 – Metal working production and maintenance fitters and technicians; 8120 – Metal working machine operatives	High Value Manufacturing	24, 25, 28	Strong demand; skill shortages noted
Mechanical and maintenance engineers	Engineers maintaining machinery, industrial systems and equipment	5231 – Vehicle technicians, mechanics and electricians; 5249 – Electrical and electronic trades n.e.c.	High Value Manufacturing	28, 33	Often embedded within firms
Construction and building trades	Skilled workers in carpentry, joinery, bricklaying and general construction	5316 – Carpenters and joiners; 5313 – Bricklayers; 5319 – Construction and building trades n.e.c.	Construction and Built Environment	41–43	Strong demand; linked to CSCS certification
Construction professionals and planners	Professionals in civil engineering, planning and development management	2121 – Civil engineers; 2452 – Chartered architectural technologists, planning officers and consultants	Construction and Built Environment	42	Increasing demand for planning and infrastructure skills

Health and safety professionals	Roles ensuring compliance with safety standards (e.g. CSCS, SMSTS, risk systems)	3582 – Health and safety managers and officers	Construction / Manufacturing	25, 42	Strong regulatory demand signal
Transport and logistics operatives	Workers in warehousing, freight handling and logistics operations	8211 – Heavy goods vehicle drivers; 8222 – Fork-lift truck drivers; 9252 – Warehouse operatives	Transport and Logistics	49, 52	Strong demand for licensed roles
Creative and media professionals	Professionals in creative production including design, film, and media	2142 – Graphic and multimedia designers; 3411 – Artists; 3417 – Audio-visual and broadcasting equipment operators	Creative Industries	59, 90	Increasingly digital and technical
Creative technology and production specialists	Technical roles supporting theatre, film and digital production (lighting, sound, AV, XR)	3417 – Photographers, audio-visual and broadcasting equipment operators	Creative Industries	59, 90	Distinct from purely creative roles

Marketing and digital marketing professionals	Professionals managing digital campaigns, branding and customer engagement	2432 – Marketing and commercial managers; 3554 – Advertising and marketing associate professionals	Business Services / Creative	62, 82, 90	Cross-sector demand
Business and administrative professionals	Administrative, organisational and operational support roles	4111 – National government administrative occupations; 4159 – Other administrative occupations n.e.c.	Business, Financial and Professional Services	82	Increasing digital skill requirement
Financial, legal and compliance professionals	Roles in finance, audit, legal services and regulatory compliance (e.g. FCA standards)	2421 – Chartered accountants; 2412 – Solicitors and lawyers; 3533 – Financial and accounting technicians	Business, Financial and Professional Services	70, 82	Regulatory requirements driving demand
Risk and resilience professionals	Specialists managing organisational risk, safety systems and operational resilience	2431 – Management consultants and business analysts	Business Services	70	Emerging area
Cultural, heritage and archival professionals	Specialists managing heritage assets, archives and collections	2471 – Librarians; 4135 – Library clerks and assistants	Cultural and Visitor Economy	91	Small but specialised workforce

Sports, leisure and event professionals	Roles supporting sport, recreation and event delivery	3432 – Sports coaches, instructors and officials; 3557 – Events managers and organisers	Cultural and Visitor Economy	93	Includes health and safety/event planning
Health and social care workers	Care workers providing direct support in community and residential settings	6135 – Care workers and home carers; 6136 – Senior care workers	Health and Social Care	87	
Medical and specialist health professionals	Doctors and specialists in areas such as psychiatry and emergency medicine	2212 – Specialist medical practitioners and consultants	Health and Social Care	86	High-skill shortage area
Counsellors and mental health professionals	Professionals delivering therapeutic and emotional support	3224 – Counsellors	Health and Social Care	86	Strong demand from charity sector
Environmental and conservation professionals	Roles in ecology, sustainability and land management	2151 – Conservation professionals; 2152 – Environment professionals	Agri-Food / Low Carbon	01-03 proxy	Demand inferred from skills, not SIC
Land-based and arboriculture trades	Workers in landscaping, tree management and land stewardship	5113 – Gardeners and landscape gardeners	Agri-Food and Land Stewardship	01-03 proxy	Previously missing but important

Textile and apparel trades	Workers in sewing, embroidery and textile production	5413 – Tailors and dressmakers; 8146 – Sewing machinists	Manufacturing	13, 14	Niche skills shortages
Print and design production trades	Workers in printing, screen printing and production processes	5422 – Printers	Manufacturing / Creative	18	Complements digital design roles
Cleaning and facilities operatives	Workers providing cleaning and maintenance services (including specialist roles like window cleaning)	9221 – Window cleaners; 9223 – Cleaners and domestics	Local Services	81 (proxy)	Hard-to-fill roles identified
Customer-facing and retail roles	Roles requiring customer interaction, sales and service skills	7111 – Sales and retail assistants; 7219 – Customer service occupations n.e.c.	Retail / Visitor Economy	47	Strong soft skills requirement

## Emerging and Specialist Occupations (Not Yet Covered by SOC)

This table catalogues the emerging occupational profiles and specialised skillsets identified through extensive employer engagement across Somerset’s bedrock and priority growth sectors. Somerset’s economic landscape is characterised by a unique juxtaposition: a resilient baseline economy (agri-food, land stewardship, and the visitor economy) running parallel to massive, nationally significant green infrastructure and technology injections—most notably **Hinkley Point C** and Agratas’ transformational £4 billion smart electricity electric vehicle battery plant at the **Gravity Enterprise Zone**.

As a consequence of these developments, local employers are encountering severe recruitment friction for cross-disciplinary roles that sit between traditional trade silos. Whether navigating the operationalisation of Artificial Intelligence across administrative workflows or scaling up building physics competencies for deep-property retrofitting, the competencies demanded by modern industry have systematically outpaced the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) tracking framework. The following register maps these critical occupational evolution points, contextualises employer demand, and highlights the specific data limitations clouding regional labour market intelligence.

Role / Occupation	Sector	Context & Employer Demand	Closest SOC Code(s) / Occupational Priorities	Classification Gap / Limitation / Reported Skills Needs	Cross-Cutting Themes	Classification Status / Horizon
<b>AI Governance, Prompt Literacy &amp; Ethical Use Roles</b>	Cross-sector (All priority sectors)	Every key priority sector highlighted a gap in AI readiness. Staff are expected to work confidently with AI, write effective prompts, evaluate outputs, and integrate tools safely and productively into day-to-day processes.	AI-enabled roles; Data leads; Cross-sector enabling roles.	Critical thinking, ethical awareness, prompt literacy, ability to challenge AI outputs, and data governance. Small/medium firms struggle heavily with the rapid pace of change.	Digital & AI; Critical & Enabling Skills; Technology Integration.	Medium-Term Priority (2025–2028) / Not fully classified in standard entry-level paths.

<p><b>Clean Energy &amp; Grid Systems Engineers</b></p>	<p>Low Carbon Energy</p>	<p>Rooted in major local assets like Hinkley Point C, Gravity Enterprise Zone, and potential tidal energy investments. Focus is on low-carbon electricity, energy storage, and grid balancing.</p>	<p>Energy innovation roles; Advanced engineering; R&amp;D.</p>	<p>Demand for high-voltage skills and experienced worker pathways. Grid systems and alternative propulsion technologies are expanding rapidly.</p>	<p>Net Zero; Low-Carbon Infrastructure; Engineering Innovation.</p>	<p>Long-Term Strategic Need.</p>
<p><b>Battery Manufacturing &amp; Robotics Technicians</b></p>	<p>High-Value Manufacturing (including Aerospace &amp; Defence)</p>	<p>Driven by Agratas' £4 billion EV battery plant at Gravity Enterprise Zone, creating 4,000 direct jobs, alongside aerospace/defence supply chains (Leonardo, Thales).</p>	<p>Robotics; Automation; Battery technologies; Production engineers.</p>	<p>Shortages in technical and specialist roles. Requires convergence of digital engineering, robotics, and automation software.</p>	<p>Advanced Manufacturing; Digital &amp; AI; Clean Energy Innovation.</p>	<p>Long-Term Strategic Need.</p>
<p><b>Retrofit Coordinators &amp; Green Material Specialists</b></p>	<p>Construction &amp; Built Environment</p>	<p>Critical for local SME activity, housing infrastructure, and clean energy major project delivery. Shifting toward sustainable construction methods and green building physics.</p>	<p>Building surveyors; Project managers; Planners; Heat/energy infrastructure roles.</p>	<p>Transitioning from traditional trades (carpentry, bricklaying) to medium-term demands in retrofit coordination, building physics, BIM, and drone surveys.</p>	<p>Net Zero; Digital Site Management; Infrastructure Solutions.</p>	<p>Medium-Term Priority (2025–2028).</p>

<p><b>Agritech Technicians &amp; Sustainable Agriculture Advisers</b></p>	<p>Agri-food &amp; Land Stewardship</p>	<p>Pivotal bedrock sector navigating the transition toward data-led, sustainable, and resilient food systems, methane capture, and land-based innovation.</p>	<p>Agri-tech technicians; Food processing automation roles.</p>	<p>Traditional farming codes fail to capture the shift to automated food processing, robotics in farming, biodiversity protection, and supply chain carbon reduction.</p>	<p>Rural Economy; Net Zero; Automation.</p>	<p>Long-Term Strategic Need.</p>
<p><b>ESG Accounting &amp; Climate Disclosure Officers</b></p>	<p>Business, Financial &amp; Professional Services</p>	<p>Businesses must comply with shifting ESG reporting, carbon footprinting, and climate disclosure standards while steering SMEs through green compliance.</p>	<p>ESG/Sustainability officers; Financial analysts; Accountants.</p>	<p>Standard accounting roles are fragments; new demand focuses heavily on carbon accounting, climate risk reporting, social value measurement, and responsible procurement.</p>	<p>Net Zero; Professional Services; SME Support.</p>	<p>Medium-Term Priority (2025–2028).</p>
<p><b>Digital Care Records Champions &amp; Telehealth Leads</b></p>	<p>Health &amp; Social Care</p>	<p>Strongly shaped by Somerset's ageing population and rural geography. Focus is moving toward tech-enabled care to reduce repetitive tasks and improve quality.</p>	<p>Digital champions; Care technology leads; Registered managers.</p>	<p>Transition gap from traditional values-based care to digital care records, telecare, telehealth, and AI-supported administration.</p>	<p>Digital &amp; AI; Rural Access &amp; Inclusion; Care Academies.</p>	<p>Immediate Workforce Pressure / Medium-Term.</p>

<p><b>Sustainable Tourism / Green Accreditation Communicators</b></p>	<p>Visitor Economy</p>	<p>Core bedrock sector facing increased consumer demand for local sourcing, eco- friendly travel, and operational waste reduction.</p>	<p>Event planners; Accommodation managers; Marketing specialists.</p>	<p>Roles are embedded in existing hospitality titles but require sustainability literacy. A major gap is employer fear of "greenwashing" accusations due to inconsistent standards.</p>	<p>Net Zero; Rural Economy; Communication.</p>	<p>Medium-Term Priority (2025–2028).</p>
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## Annex B: Delivery Plan & Implementation Activities

The following activities annex outlines planned activities from Business West, as the LSIP ERB, as well as stakeholders, employers, Local Authorities and Further Education providers in Somerset. Where a specific lead organisation for each action has been determined, this is included below. For instances where a lead has not yet been assigned, this will be updated as the action is undertaken and the annex updated accordingly.

This annex is a live document and will be updated regularly, with new activities added and a status update for each proposed activity. Updated versions of Annex B will be hosted on the LSIP pages of the Business West website for transparency, accessibility and engagement from partners in the local area.

Skills Need	Actions/Changes Needed	Activities	Lead	Partners Involved	Timescale and Milestones	Expected Outcomes	Monitoring and Measurement
Develop the skills required to support Somerset's role as a national leader in innovation	<b>Innovation Integration in Training &amp; Industry</b>	TECs, Agratas, Gravity, Innovation in Manufacturing analysis, Productivity through innovation responses	Local Authority	Business West, FE Colleges	Ongoing August 2026 – June 2028 (TBC)	Ensuring existing provision recognises emerging needs of regional investments and developments, and new provision is developed where it doesn't	Review and development of provision
	<b>Career Pathways into High-Growth Sectors</b>	Recruitment Entry/Apprenticeships – Marketing campaign/modules/incentives/Day in the Life videos	Employers	Business West	Developed between January 2027 – June 2028 (TBC)	Development of a bank of career insights resources	20 careers insights outputs created and hosted on the Business West LSIP Resources Page

	<b>Workplace Exposure to Emerging Industries</b>	Development of robust and flexible Industry Insights (including cross-sectoral opportunities) programme – guest lecturing, placements	Local Authority	FE Colleges, Business West	Ongoing from August 2026 – June 2028 (TBC)	Report highlighting Industry Insights offering in the region.	Increased employer engagement. Wider range of engagement opportunities available.
		Deep dive research sprints into Defence	Business West		Delivery by January 2027 – June 2027 (TBC)	Sprint report into Somerset Defence sector	Proposal and outline of deadline with monitoring requirements embedded
<b>Address barriers to skills development and employment linked to rurality</b>	<b>Improved Transport &amp; Connectivity Consideration</b>	Review transport infrastructure in rural areas	Local Authority		Ongoing between August 2026 – June 2028 (TBC)	Review and identify areas of improvement	Request for intel and update via Governance
		Review digital infrastructure in rural areas	Local Authority		Ongoing between August 2026 – June 2028 (TBC)	Review and identify areas of improvement	Request for intel and update via Governance
	<b>Flexible &amp; Localised Training Delivery</b>	Work collaboratively with training provider network – highlighting localised training opportunities for rural areas	Dorset and Somerset Training Provider Network	Business West, Local Authority	Ongoing between January 2027 – June 2028 (TBC)	Develop and maintain a training provider network. Signposting to localised provision. Increased visibility and uptake of training.	Reviews at Governance meetings
	<b>Expanded Access to Opportunities</b>	Work collaboratively with local training providers to ensure range of	Local Authority		Ongoing between August 2026	Awareness raised around available provision.	Engagement with existing provision

		opportunities for engagement			- June 2028 (TBC)		
		Webinar on flexibility in recruitment processes	Local Authority	Business West	Delivery by June 2027 (TBC)	Raise awareness with employers about the importance of flexibility in recruitment processes due to rurality and connectivity barriers	Amount of webinar attendees
		Review transport infrastructure in rural areas	Local Authority		Ongoing between August 2026 – June 2028 (TBC)	Review and identify areas of improvement	Request for intel and update via Governance
		Review digital infrastructure in rural areas	Local Authority		Ongoing between August 2026 – June 2028 (TBC)	Review and identify areas of improvement	Request for intel and update via Governance
<b>Strengthen digital and AI capability across the workforce</b>	<b>Baseline Digital Skills Development</b>	Develop baseline digital skills threshold/needs matrix	Local Authority	Business West, FE Colleges	Developed by June 2027 (TBC)	Digital skills matrix developed	Adoption by FE colleges in the region
		Strengthen fundamental digital skills provision	Business West	Business West	Ongoing between June 2027 – June 2028 (TBC)	Relevant, up to date and industry aligned provision	College baseline metrics
	<b>AI Awareness, Safety &amp;</b>	Digital and Cyber Skills Online Event	Business West	Stakeholders, Employers	Delivered by June 2026 (TBC)	Improved digital skills knowledge.	Sign up for Cyber Security Training &

	<b>Prompt Literacy</b>						Digital Bootcamp/ new module training
		Digital and Cyber Skills Breakfast	Business West	Stakeholders, Employers	Delivered by December 2026 (TBC)	Improved digital skills knowledge.	Sign up for Cyber Security Training & Digital Bootcamp/ new module training
	<b>Short, Practical Digital Training</b>	Development of skills bootcamps/modular/flexible short course training	Local Authority	FE Colleges, Independent Training Providers	Developed between January 2028 – June 2028 (TBC)	Development of modular provision	Reviews at Governance meetings
	<b>Support for Digital Adoption</b>	Develop AI, Digitalisation and Automation upskilling provision and support mechanism	Local Authority	FE Colleges, Independent Training Providers	Developed by June 2028 (TBC)	Increased engagement with digital training.	Provision developed. Amount of employers engaged with provision.
<b>Improve work-readiness of young people and new entrants to the workforce</b>	<b>Embedding Employability Skills in Curriculum</b>	NextGen Networking – Careers insights event for 16-17 year olds to meet with local employers, build relationships and explore career pathways	Somerset Chamber of Commerce	FE Colleges, Business West	Delivered by April – May 2026	Increased engagement between employers and FE College. Placement opportunities developed. Increased industry knowledge.	Amount of employers and learners in attendance. Placement opportunities/meaningful engagements offered. Relationships between Employers and Education established.
		Embed Employability Skills, CV skills and interview preparation into the curriculum	FE Colleges		Ongoing between August 2026 – June 2028 (TBC)	Increased employability skills in emerging workforce.	Review destination data and work placement uptake.

	<b>Improved CEIAG Delivery</b>	Benefits of Employer/Education Engagement webinar to promote further integration of employers into education	Local Authority	FE Colleges, Business West	Delivered by June 2027 (TBC)	Awareness raised of Employer /Education Engagement opportunities. Increased employer engagement with FE Colleges.	Amount of webinar attendees
		Raising awareness on industries and job roles through Sector Spotlights	Business West	Employers, FE Colleges	Delivered by June 2027 (TBC)	Development of a bank of resources.	5 sector spotlight outputs created and hosted on the Business West LSIP Resources Page.
	<b>Workplace Exposure &amp; Career Pathways</b>	Determine priorities of Gen Z (platforms used, considerations) via survey and share this intel with local businesses through infographics and webinars	Business West	FE Colleges	Completed between March 2027 – June 2027 (TBC)	Report to share with employers and stakeholders highlighting recommendations for Gen Z outreach and engagement methods	Amount of survey responses
		Development of robust and flexible Industry Insights programme – guest lecturing, sample progression pathways	Local Authority	FE Colleges, Business West	Ongoing between August 2026 – June 2028 (TBC)	Report highlighting Industry Insights offering in the region.	Increased employer engagement. Wider range of engagement opportunities available.
	<b>Flexible Work Placement Models</b>	Development of robust and flexible Industry Placements adaptable for all sectors	Local Authority	FE Colleges, Business West	Ongoing between August 2026 – June 2028 (TBC)	Report highlighting Industry Insights offering in the region.	Increased employer engagement. Wider range of engagement opportunities available.

<b>Address ongoing recruitment and retention challenges</b>	<b>Career Pathways Insights &amp; Interview Preparation</b>	Recruitment/Retention info website resources	FE Colleges		Delivered by May 2028 – June 2028 (TBC)	Downloadable resources available	Resources available on LSIP Resource Page
		Recruitment Entry/Apprenticeships – Marketing campaign/modules/incentives/Day in the Life videos	Employers	Business West	Delivered by May 2028 – June 2028 (TBC)	Development of a bank of career insights resources	20 careers insights outputs created and hosted on the Business West LSIP Resources Page
	<b>Curriculum Alignment to Technical Skills Needs</b>	Employer boards to review curriculum and ensure industry alignment, development of curriculum codesign relationship	Business West		Delivered by May 2028 – June 2028 (TBC)	Developing employer skills needs intel. Review and amendment of provision to ensure industry alignment	Attend Employer Boards held in the region
	<b>Addressing Infrastructure Barriers: Transport &amp; Connectivity</b>	Review transport infrastructure in rural areas	Local Authority		Ongoing between August 2026 – June 2028 (TBC)	Review and identify areas of improvement	Reviews at Governance meetings
Review digital infrastructure in rural areas		Local Authority		Ongoing between August 2026 – June 2028 (TBC)	Review and identify areas of improvement	Reviews at Governance meetings	
<b>Improve employer understanding and navigation</b>	<b>Improved Clarity of Training Provision</b>	Cross-stakeholder working group to develop and implement cohesive messaging and promotion of local skills landscape	Local Authority	Business West	Developed by June 2027 (TBC)	Develop and maintain working group – cohesive messaging and marketing	Reviews at Governance meetings

<b>of the skills system</b>	<b>"One Front Door" Skills System Navigation</b>	Showcasing employer skills growth journeys and success stories through marketing (case study)	Business West	Employers, Local Authority	Ongoing between August 2026 – June 2028 (TBC)	Development of a bank of case studies. Increased engagement with skills landscape.	5 careers insights outputs created and hosted on the Business West LSIP Resources Page.
		Work in collaboration with Dorset and Somerset Training Provider Network to amplify localised provision	Dorset and Somerset Training Provider Network	Business West	Ongoing until June 2028	Increased awareness and engagement with provision.	Dorset and Somerset Training Provider Network baselines
		Increased LSIP presence in community to expand engagement	Business West		Ongoing until June 2028	Increased event attendance, Skills Clinic attendance and 121s	Hours of engagement. Amount of employer engagements. Amount of events delivered.
		Develop skills priorities for Wessex Partnership area to support devolution discussions in partnership with the Dorset and Swindon and Wiltshire LSIPs	BCP Council, Dorset Council, Somerset Council and Wiltshire Council	Dorset Chamber, Business West	October 2026 (TBC)	Understanding of the Wessex shared skills needs	Dorset Skills and Workforce Board
		Cross-stakeholder working group to strengthen One Front Door approach to skills system and governance	Local Authority	Business West	Ongoing until June 2027	Develop and maintain working group – cohesive messaging and marketing	Reviews at Governance meetings
		<b>Curriculum Codesign with Employers</b>	Employer boards to review curriculum and ensure industry alignment, development of curriculum codesign relationship	FE Colleges	Business West, Employers	Ongoing between August 2026 – June 2028 (TBC)	Developing employer skills needs intel. Review and amendment of provision to

						ensure industry alignment	
	<b>Workforce Development Support</b>	Delivery of Skills Clinics and development of additional resources to help navigate the Skills System, including raising awareness regarding funding options	Business West	Employers	Ongoing between August 2026 – June 2028 (TBC)	Bespoke workforce development planning. Signposting to provision and resources.	Support businesses across Somerset
		Sector Events – Delivery/Talks/Workshops	Business West		Ongoing between August 2026 – June 2028 (TBC)	Sector specific insight events – topics based on demand from intel	Attendees and engagement
<b>Address persistent gaps in critical and enabling skills</b>	<b>Embedding Employability Skills in Curriculum</b>	Embed Employability Skills, CV skills and interview preparation into the curriculum	FE Colleges		Ongoing until June 2028	Increased employability skills in emerging workforce.	Review destination data and work placement uptake.
	<b>Industry-Specific Application: Transferable Skills</b>	Identify key critical skills required by each sector, and explore opportunities for application	Business West	Employers, FE Colleges	Delivered by June 2027 (TBC)	Report/infographic highlighting sector specific critical skills needs	10 x report/infographic
	<b>Increased Awareness of Skills Importance</b>	Highlight the importance of critical skills to the emerging workforce	FE Colleges		Ongoing until June 2028 (TBC)	Increased understanding	Amount of learners advised
<b>Improve understanding and practical application of</b>	<b>Green Skills Clarity &amp; Definitions</b>	Develop regional green skills definition	Business West	Local Authority, Stakeholders	Developed by January 2027 – June 2027 (TBC)	Clear and accessible green skills definition	Green skills definition developed and rolled out.

<b>net zero and sustainability</b>		Develop and implement clear green skills messaging for the region	Business West	Local Authorities	Developed by January 2027 – June 2027 (TBC)	Clear and accessible green skills messaging	Green skills messaging developed and rolled out.
	<b>"One Front Door" Access to Training</b>	Develop One Front Door approach to training support	Business West	Local Authority, FE Colleges	Ongoing between August 2026 – June 2028 (TBC)	Develop and maintain working group – cohesive messaging and marketing	Reviews at Governance meetings
	<b>Sector-Specific Green Skills Development</b>	Identify sector specific green skills gaps	Business West	Employers	Completed by January 2027 – June 2027 (TBC)	Understanding of sector specific green needs	Report outlining sector specific needs and additional actions identified
	<b>Practical Business Guidance/ROI Awareness</b>	ROI – Sustainability Plan/Social Value offering – Commercial offering?	Business West	Local Authority	Completed by January 2027 – June 2027 (TBC)	Awareness raised on Sustainability ROI	Amount of employers engaged

## Annex C – Background and Method

### 1. Outline of the Evidence Base

This LSIP builds upon the research method and findings of the previous LSIP, adopting an agile methodology and ensuring we are adapting to the highlighted needs and demands of employers, stake-holders and colleges and Independent Training Providers in the local area, as well as being flexible with our data capturing methods to ensure the process is accessible to all who wish to contribute to the LSIP. Business West and Somerset Chamber of Commerce have worked closely together to ensure we have leveraged the strengths of each organisation and will continue to do so throughout the LSIP delivery period. Please note the previous LSIP for Somerset was integrated into the Devon and Somerset LSIP (previously the Heart of the South West LSIP) and is therefore hosted by the ERB leading delivery 2022–2025.

We have continued to embrace successfully tested methods of data capture. such as one to-one interviews and sector skills discussions, whilst acknowledging previous methods. such as Signposting Local Provision didn't garner the volume of engagement we would have wanted and so these were not continued in this round of LSIPs.

We acknowledge that accessibility is key and to have integrated new methods of data capture. such as surveys which will remain open for the duration of the LSIP- allowing respondents to share their thoughts throughout various points- and allowing us to evaluate changes in needs and attitudes over the course of the 3-year LSIP.

In line with our agile methodology we will continue to review and adapt our employer Engagement methods to reflect the needs and demands of employers, stakeholders and education providers in the local area. This will allow us to ensure that the views of those in the local area are represented and up to date. Engagement has included further education providers, higher education institutions, independent training providers, local authority stakeholders, sector bodies and employer representative organisations, alongside employers of different sizes and sectors operating across Somerset.

The previous LSIP provided extensive qualitative data, however it was acknowledged that further qualitative data was required to support these findings. This LSIP utilises both qualitative methods (one to one interviews, focus groups) and quantitative methods (surveys), both with equal weighting. Secondary data was also incorporated to provide further supporting evidence, ensuring the findings in this report are representative of a cross section of employers and the inclusion of the Post 16 White Paper and Industrial Strategy within research ensures alignment with both regional and national priorities.

## 2. Alignment with the LSIP Guidance

This Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) has been developed in accordance with the statutory guidance issued by the Secretary of State and reflects the requirements set out within the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022. The approach taken in Somerset aligns with the three-stage process outlined in the guidance: identifying and articulating skills needs; determining the changes and actions required; and producing a clear, evidence-based plan for implementation.

The LSIP has been developed with full consideration of relevant national strategies and policy frameworks. This includes alignment with the UK Industrial Strategy, with particular reference to those priority sectors that are reflected within the Somerset economy, including advanced manufacturing, clean energy, digital technologies and the creative industries.

The plan also reflects the direction set out in the Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper, particularly in relation to improving access to technical education, supporting progression to higher-level skills, and increasing participation in Level 4 and 5 provisions. In addition, the LSIP takes account of emerging national reforms and developments within the skills system.

The post-16 education and skills system in England is undergoing significant reform, with a clear shift towards a more flexible, employer-aligned and locally responsive model. Recent policy developments indicate a move towards clearer qualification routes, increased modularity in training, and stronger alignment between provision and labour market demand. At the same time, the introduction of new national frameworks for defining and measuring skills is expected to further shape how provision is designed, funded and evaluated. This transition places increased importance on clear local coordination and employer engagement to support navigation of an evolving system, and the Somerset LSIP will continue to integrate these demands in future delivery.

We also recognise the need to ensure both ERBs remain aware of and connected to initiatives to address the labour market, such as Connect to Work, Youth Jobs Grants and Jobs Guarantee activities.

The LSIP is informed by, and aligned with, local strategic and economic priorities. In Somerset, this includes the Somerset Economic Prosperity Strategy 2025–2045, which identifies both bedrock and priority sectors that underpin the local economy. These sectoral priorities have provided a framework for engagement and analysis, ensuring that the LSIP reflects both current economic activity and future growth opportunities.

This has been developed through a robust programme of employer engagement, delivered locally through Somerset Chamber of Commerce, and supported by Business West as the designated Employer Representative Body. This approach has enabled broad and inclusive engagement with employers across sectors, geographies and business sizes. (see section 1 for more information on methodology and engagement). This engagement has been complemented by the use of secondary data sources,

including labour market intelligence and national datasets, to ensure that findings are both locally grounded and analytically robust. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and JobCentre Plus have also been engaged through the development of this LSIP, working collaboratively with the LSIP Skills Advisors to develop and deliver activities that work towards LSIP priorities that align with JobCentre Plus objectives. In addition, the LSIP has identified all relevant Trade Unions that align with the Industrial Strategy priorities and will engage where appropriate.

We have worked extensively with partners in Somerset across the local authority, education & training, business support and individual resident agencies, in both understanding skills needs and identifying actions and activities. It is our intention to continue means testing with providers throughout the remaining time prior to submission to ensure actions and activities align with intent.

### **3. Environmental and Net Zero Goals**

Clean Energy was identified as a key priority sector for Somerset, as well as a cross-cutting theme to investigate in all sectors' therefore a dedicated resource was allocated to focus on outreach and research for the Clean Energy sector. Total engagements for Somerset in this sector were as follows: – 54 engagements (primarily through focus groups, one-to-one wider skills chats), with questions tailored to each business, generally covering the following main areas:

- Business context and growth plans
- Challenges and barriers faced
- Skills needs/gaps
- Specific job role needs/gaps
- Training methods, needs, and preferences
- Support, changes, or interventions to support them and the wider industry

A separate report will be published to accompany the LSIP, consolidating key Clean Energy LMI and secondary research, alongside business insights and recommendations.

Questions regarding green skills were embedded into all engagements across sectors, including one-to-one interviews, wider skills discussions, focus groups, telemarketing and surveys (including surveys shared by stakeholder organisations). This included questions on:

- Actions being taken to become more sustainable
- Challenges and barriers faced
- Skills required
- Job roles
- Support, changes or interventions needed to support them and their wider industry to be more sustainable

Engagement approaches were adapted to simplify language and frame sustainability in practical, business-relevant terms, improving both participation and quality of insight.

Insights were collected across 238 engagements, it should be noted that some of these engagements had multiple contributors, so the number of individuals engaged on this topic is higher. We spoke with 59 organisations who specifically work in the Clean Energy or wider sustainability sector. This includes Consultants, trade unions, associations, business networks or key stakeholder organisations. In addition, we attended a further 17 external events.

A lack of understanding of the terms 'green skills', 'net zero' or 'sustainability' was previously given as a barrier to engagement, as well as unclear communication on who was responsible for this within organisations, therefore our methodology was adapted to ensure engagement was more accessible. Language was amended using terms such as 'environmental sustainability' and providing definitions of 'green skills' helped with understanding as well as keeping the questions open and more general to reduce any concerns about sharing insights. As this topic is a key priority sector in itself, as well as a cross-cutting theme, we will continue to conduct in-depth research, in addition to embedding one mandatory question on sustainability with all engagements, across all sectors, to collect further insight.

In Somerset, engagement highlighted a strong commitment to sustainability across sectors, but varying levels of understanding and capability. Many organisations are taking initial steps, but lack structured approaches, relying instead on informal activity rather than embedded organisational strategies. Employers identified a need for clearer, practical guidance, including understanding key terminology, identifying priority actions, and accessing relevant support, funding and training to implement sustainability effectively.

#### **4. Equality of Opportunity**

This LSIP built upon and refined the methodology of the previous iteration to ensure that the engagement methods and subsequent outputs were representative of the needs of the local area as a whole, and accessible to all.

Concerns raised by employers during this LSIP include ensuring training is accessible to all – taking into consideration restrictions that come from rural locations and connectivity issues. There was a clear demand for short, practical and affordable training that fits around work commitments to support wider participation in skills development from all sectors.

With the majority of employers across all sectors reporting a skills gap in regard to work readiness, ensuring the fundamental employability and digital literacy skills are instilled in the emerging workforce is key, therefore prioritising embedding these skills in the curriculum will allow the future workforce to have a baseline of required knowledge and skills before seeking employment. Employers emphasised the importance of structured work placements and career pathway awareness to give young people from diverse backgrounds meaningful exposure to real working environments however, some sectors,

notably construction and health and social care, highlighted concerns around opening potentially dangerous work environments up for placements. Digital tools such as VR training environments could be utilised to broaden access to industry exposure, instilling key knowledge and behaviours while reducing health and safety risks and workforce capacity pressures that occur with work placement opportunities.

Somerset is well placed to be at the forefront of innovation for the nation, which presents opportunities for developing the local workforce in clean energy and high value manufacturing. It is essential that local communities have access to training that enables them to benefit from these emerging high-growth industries.

Building on the barriers identified, including rurality, transport and access to provision, this LSIP recognises the importance of widening participation across Somerset's workforce. This includes supporting access to opportunities for young people, individuals in rural communities and those seeking to upskill or change careers. Through collaboration with local partners, including providers, local authorities and employer networks, the LSIP will support improved outreach, clearer communication of pathways and more flexible approaches to training delivery. Particular emphasis is placed on ensuring that opportunities are accessible across dispersed communities and that progression routes enable individuals to participate in and contribute to the local economy.

The LSIP also aligns with wider local ambitions relating to inclusion, workforce participation and equality of opportunity across Somerset, recognising the importance of reducing barriers linked to rurality, digital access, transport, health and progression into employment and skills development opportunities. This includes alignment with Somerset Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2026–2030, which sets out the Council's commitment to fairness, inclusion and improving equality of opportunity for people who live and work in Somerset. The strategy emphasises the importance of ensuring equitable access to information, services and opportunities, alongside improving outcomes for communities who may experience additional barriers to participation, including those affected by digital exclusion, disability, low income and rural isolation.

## **5. Governance of the LSIP**

Business West, as the designated Employer Representative Body and LSIP contract holder, retains statutory accountability and will operate within its internal governance and assurance arrangements. In Somerset, LSIP governance and oversight will be supported through the Somerset Work, Health & Skills Partnership and steering would be provided through Somerset Chamber of Commerce, providing an employer-led focal point for oversight, coordination and engagement, and helping ensure the LSIP is firmly rooted in business need.

Subject to discussion with partners, Somerset Chamber of Commerce will continue to provide LSIP updates at the Somerset Work, Health & Skills Partnership Group, which has a business Chair and includes stakeholders from Somerset Council, DWP, employers, University Centre Somerset (UCS), Yeovil College, and other relevant stakeholders,

alongside employers. It is proposed that providing the LSIP continues to receive enough focus and scrutiny at this Group, that rather than duplicate, that this this Somerset Work, Health & Skills Partnership Group is used as the LSIP governance process.

Somerset Chamber of Commerce will manage governance within the group in a manner that they see fit, Work, Health and Skills partnership – regular updates to the Somerset Growth Board for the business perspective. Updates to both and an opportunity to feed in and respond.

These governance arrangements are intended to support ongoing collaboration, implementation oversight and regular review of the LSIP throughout the 2025–2028 cycle, while avoiding duplication with existing partnership and economic governance structures operating across Somerset.

