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Business West Local Skills Improvement Plan Frequently Asked Questions

Contents (Click below to jump to that section)

What is the LSIP?	1-4
Who is the LSIP for?	4-5
LSIP for Businesses	5
LSIP Stakeholders	5-6
LSIP Timelines	6-8
Outcomes of the LSIP	8-9
Key Topics	9

What is the LSIP?

Q: “What is a Local Skills Improvement Plan and how did they come about?”

A: Local Skills Improvement Plans, or LSIPs, are projects funded by the Department for Education to gather research into a region’s businesses’ needs and provide an agreed set of actionable priorities that bring together employers, Further Education and training providers and stakeholders in a local area to set out the key priorities and changes needed in the area to ensure post-16 technical education and training prepares employees better for work.

An LSIP is developed by an employer representative body (ERB, Business West in this instance) for a LEP or Combined authority area, to summarise the skills, capabilities or expertise that are required by businesses and to identify actions that providers can take to address business needs

LSIP Trailblazers were introduced in the Skills for Jobs White Paper in January 2021 and Business West were one of eight designated LSIP Trailblazers nationwide. The Skills for Jobs white paper set out the government’s blueprint for reshaping the technical skills system to better support the needs of the local labour market and the wider economy. Our team delivered the pilot LSIP in the West of England Plus region from November 2021 – March 2022, focusing on Aerospace, Advanced Engineering, Health and Social Care.

Since the Trailblazer, Business West has been designated as the Employer Representative Body to deliver the LSIPs across Swindon and Wiltshire,



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Gloucestershire, and the West of England in 2022, as part of the national rollout of LSIPs, with 38 currently in delivery across England.

Q: “What’s the difference between the LSIPs and the LSIP Trailblazers?”

A: The West of England Plus Local Skills Improvement Plan Trailblazer was a pilot research project, led by Business West Chambers of Commerce, and an outcome of the Skills for Jobs White Paper in January 2021. The **Skills for Jobs** white paper set out the government’s blueprint for reshaping the technical skills system to better support the needs of the local labour market and the wider economy. The Business West team delivered the West of England Plus Trailblazer pilot from November 2021 – March 2022.

The focus of the West of England Plus LSIP Trailblazer was to contribute robust, current and granular business voice to help the region deliver training that the region’s employers need, through the methods and at the times and prices they want, now and in the future. The Trailblazer covered the West of England region and parts of Somerset and Gloucestershire; it was geographically aligned with the West of England Institute of Technology’s Strategic Development Fund (under the Skills Accelerator remit) ensuring a cohesive approach across the two programmes.

For the Trailblazer, we focused our efforts across two prioritised sectors that have faced greater than average recent upheaval and change. It has also provided exploration and evaluation of best practice methodologies, to inform the continued business engagement activities for alignment of post-16 technical training provision through the LSIP mechanism in future.

After the LSIP Trailblazers, the Department for Education designated local skills improvement plans in 38 areas (the whole of England) over the next three years in the national rollout and Business West Chambers of Commerce was designated three LSIPs, aligned with LEP areas– in Gloucestershire, Swindon and Wiltshire and West of England. For each of the Business West LSIPs as part of the national rollout, we focused on one unique sector, two baseline sectors, one to two comparator sectors and three cross cutting themes across each region.

We have been building on the success of our Trailblazer by further engaging with businesses and stakeholders from first time around as well as incorporating similar engagement methods to understand direct business intelligence from all our regions. The research for the national rollout of LSIPs will be collated into a report that is due to be updated yearly for the duration of the project period (until 2025) as well as a “roadmap” that will set out specific actions for employers, providers and other stakeholders.

Q: “How are the LSIPs funded?”



A: The LSIPs are UK Government funded research projects, designated by the Department for Education to help post-16 technical education align with the needs of employers, as part of the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022.

LSIPs do not involve giving procurement, commissioning or funding powers to ERBs, nor do they remove any of the functions devolved to Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs). However, when planning provision, the Department for Education suggests that providers should consider ways to flex their mainstream funding to better meet the skills needs identified within the LSIP. The LSIP guidance explains that MCAs should be involved in relevant geographies given their role as commissioners of adult education budget funded provision.

Q: “What do the LSIPs aim to achieve?”

A: LSIPs aim to ensure a better match between the supply and demand for the skills employers most need, as well as make provision more accessible and help employers to better understand their skills needs and improve their ability to plan to achieve them.

Q: “Who is Business West? And how do they relate to the LSIPs?”

A: Business West is a not-for-profit business support organisation based in the South West, with chambers covering the regions of Bristol, Bath, Somerset, Gloucestershire, and Wiltshire and other projects across other geographies. It is the largest membership organisation in the region, and one of the largest chambers of commerce in the UK.

As a Chambers of Commerce, Business West serves as a representative body for businesses in the West of England, advocating on their behalf to government and providing a range of support services to help them succeed. This includes providing information and advice on a wide range of business topics, as well as networking opportunities, training and development programs, access to funding and finance, and international trade support.

Business West has been designated as an Employer Representative Body (ERB) to run three LSIPs in the South West of England.

As an ERB, Business West plays a leading role in the development and implementation of LSIPs in the region, working in collaboration with employers, education and training providers and local stakeholders to identify local skills needs and set out strategies for addressing them.

Q: “What sectors are you focusing on and why did you choose them?”



A: We worked closely with stakeholders to identify our sectoral foci using a combination of factors, including where is there the most need and where could we have the most impact. Additionally, as the LSIPs are primarily focused on post-16 technical and further education, we ensured that the initial sectors chosen aligned with provision in the region.

Area	West of England	Gloucestershire	Swindon and Wiltshire
Cross Cutting Drivers of Change	Digitalisation and Technological Change, Core Digital Net Zero, Sustainability, Decarbonisation and Climate Change Core and Transferable Skills (e.g. Leadership, Communication, Teamwork)		
Comparators	Health, Social Care and Life Sciences	Agriculture, Agritech and Land Management	Agriculture, Agritech and Land Management Health, Social Care and Life Sciences
Baseline Sectors	Across all three regions: Construction Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering		
Unique Sectors	Creative Industries	Digital Industries	Automotive

Q: “How does the LSIP differ to government funded research that has been done before?”

A: LSIPs from government-funded research in that they are local, employer-led plans that focus on identifying and addressing the specific skills needs of a particular region or area. LSIPs are developed at a more granular level, with input from local employers, training providers, and other stakeholders to ensure that they are tailored to the needs of the local economy. LSIPs are different to previous skills plans in that they give employers, through designated ERBs, a clear and strengthened role in shaping local skills provision.

Who is the LSIP for?

Q: “Who can get involved in the LSIP?”

A: Anyone who has an interest in the sectors and themes we are focusing on, including those providing education, training and services to our three regions (Gloucestershire, Swindon and Wiltshire and the West of England). If you are unsure whether you are eligible to get involved, please reach out to us at LSIP@businesswest.co.uk.

Q: “How will LSIPs help learners?”

A: The LSIP aims to ensure that those in work and those entering work will have access to training that better suits industry needs, helping close the gap between learning and being prepared for work. LSIPs are designed to help employers recognise their own needs and the changing landscape of employment nationally.



Q: “How will LSIPs help businesses?”

A: LSIPs help businesses by supporting them to identify the people and skills they need, alleviating some of the issues in the labour market that are blockers for many employers and helping new and existing employees expand their capabilities. In addition, LSIPs provide opportunities for businesses to network and discuss the business environment with like-minded employers, contributing to a supportive and collaborative local business community.

Q: “How will Business West ensure the LSIPs represent the needs of all businesses of all shapes and sizes?”

A: We encourage everyone to get involved; LSIP engagement is open to all and we're working with (and planning work with) numerous other bodies to ensure the greatest possible reach - we will engage flexibly in the way that suits you. If you have any questions or suggestions on how we can better reach or work with you, please get in touch at LSIP@businesswest.co.uk.

Q: “How will LSIPs help colleges, training providers and other skills educators?”

A: Our LSIP research identifies local skills needs as well as opportunities for partnerships with local employers and networks. We publish all of our findings from the three LSIPs, ensuring that they are freely available to anyone who can benefit from them. We have incorporated education and training providers into our research development from the outset, working as equal partners to ensure we all benefit from the voice of industry and to help improve the reputation and competitiveness of local provision, contributing to the long-term growth of the local economy.

Q: “Do you have any planned events that I can attend?”

A: We host various events throughout the duration of the project to engage with employers, training providers, colleges, and other stakeholders. These events include industry-specific workshops and webinars, networking events, focus groups and co-design sessions. We also host larger events that are open to all, such as report launch events and business forums. You can find an up to date list of events that Business West is hosting here - <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/business-west-lsip-71057654963>

LSIP for Businesses

Q: “How many businesses would you like to speak with in each region?”

A: As many as possible! The more research we gather, the better.



Q: “Will engaging with the LSIP give me access to any extra support for my business?”

A: Business West offers a wide range of business support services to help businesses to start, grow, and thrive in the South West of England, with chamber locations in Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and the West of England. By engaging with Business West, we can help you find the right support for your business by connecting you with our network of staff and partners working across a variety of services from access to funding and financial support, export documentation to resilience skills.

Q: “Who have you worked with for the LSIPs?”

A: The LSIP is focussed on “engaging the unengaged” and ensuring our findings are representative of the widest business communities’ needs. We are working with SME audiences as much as we can but are also happy to talk to any sized business, from sole traders to multinationals and enterprise.

LSIP Stakeholders

Q: “Do you work with the other LSIPs nationwide?”

A: We regularly catch up with the other ERBs running Local Skills Improvement Plans in monthly and regular catch ups and by attending Department for Education events. We plan to work more closely with other similar and nearby LSIPs nationwide moving forward in phase two of the research to share best practice and align methodologies where relevant and appropriate.

Q: “I’m an independent training provider, how do I get involved?”

A: We believe that the most reliable findings can only be achieved by engaging with training providers and other sectoral bodies alongside businesses, and as such, we have incorporated engaging with providers throughout the project to ensure we can include all perspectives. If you are an independent training provider or other sectoral body and you think you have something to add to the LSIPs, please get in touch and we would be delighted to work with you – LSIP@businesswest.co.uk.

Q: “How can I provide you with feedback on your work on the LSIPs so far?”

A: We strongly believe the success of the LSIPs depends on collaboration and communication. As such, we encourage you to get in touch to discuss the findings and the wider report contents and suggestions. If you’d like to speak to us, please get in touch with us to arrange a slot with Matt Tudge, Head of Skills Planning at LSIP@businesswest.co.uk.



Q: “How will the LSIPs collaborate and cooperate with existing stakeholders who are already identifying and developing future skills in the region?”

A: The core principle of the Business West LSIPs is to provide our granular and current intelligence to all who could benefit, and ensure it is made freely available. We aim to add value to existing understanding and not replace it, nor ‘reinvent the wheel’. We are uniquely placed to undertake in-depth interviews and reviews and as such, we are open to discussing how we can align our activities with others looking at skills needs too.

Q: “Will Business West be actioning any of the LSIP outcomes and priorities?”

A: Our LSIP roadmaps will identify how the whole region can play a part in improving provision, employer awareness and the system. Business West will be hosting events and activities to ensure we can support businesses and stakeholders to have meaningful dialogue to continue to improve on an ongoing basis, and we will be feeding our LSIP priorities into regional strategy and planning.

Q: “How do you plan on bringing businesses and further education providers together to make these changes?”

A: We have created a set of collaborative co-design events and forums with businesses, providers and regional stakeholders integrated to directly discuss needs and solutions for the regional skills landscape now and moving forward.

LSIP Timelines

Q: “How long does the LSIP last?”

A: The LSIP research runs until April 2023 in the first phase of the project. During the summer of 2023, the LSIP foci will be refined and refreshed with additions of newer deep-five themes and thereafter business research will continue longer term until March 2025.

The objective of stage 2 of the LSIP is to embed the LSIP process in the local skills system. We will galvanise collaborative action with employers, providers and local stakeholders to support the delivery of the actionable priorities and the roadmap that we have set out in our report.

We are refreshing and resubmitting our report annually on LSIP progress between now and 2025 with milestones in the diary to ensure they are regularly reviewed. This will help to achieve better alignment of the local skills system with employers’ needs and help to sustain the alignment in the longer-term.

We will be continuing with similar activities that we hosted in phase one of the LSIP, including 40-minute 1-2-1 interviews and small focus groups on specific topics and



themes within our sectoral foci, as well as larger business forum style events where we cover wider topics and themes in our sectors.

We will also continue to host co-design collaborative forums to translate business needs gathered in our research with local Further Education providers, as well as regular regional roadmap events to plan and keep track of our actionable priorities with our engaged businesses, stakeholders and providers.

Q: “Will you be updating and refreshing your work on the LSIP to ensure it is kept up to date?”

A: We will be continuing our research in the West of England, Gloucestershire, and Swindon & Wiltshire as part of a national rollout until 2025. Unlike the Trailblazer, the national rollout of LSIPs is longer term with an initial reporting milestone of Summer 2023 and subsequently further deep dives and investigation into highlighted skills gaps until March 2025. We will be refreshing and resubmitting our report, roadmap and preliminary findings annually but we will continue to share updates frequently throughout.

Q: “How will LSIPs track and adapt to ongoing and changing needs of businesses as they arise?”

A: Our ongoing business research aims to focus on changes and needs highlighted by industry. Throughout the stages of the LSIP, as well as engaging with new businesses, we will re-engage with businesses we have already engaged with to understand if their needs have changed and to hear updates from their industry.

Q: “Will the sectors you are researching change throughout the project?”

A: We will be conducting deep dives and refinements on our sectoral foci according to reported needs from industry, as well as updating and amending our 1-2-1 question route from the first phase of the project into the second stage to ensure we are asking the right questions to gain the intelligence we need. In addition to the refined and specific themes, we are researching into a number of themes that are relevant to all businesses and we are happy to speak to anyone who wants to engage on these. Please get in touch at LSIP@businesswest.co.uk to find out more.

Q: “How are you planning on monitoring the impact of the LSIP?”

A: Throughout the LSIP, we are facilitating ongoing engagement with businesses, providers and stakeholders to ensure we receive as much input as possible to keep the LSIP led by industry and provision. We frequently attend meetings, events and host co-design sessions with providers to ensure we are monitoring provision, to support our work in aligning supply and demand of skills in the region, and to stay updated and input into the Local Skills Improvement Fund, providers’ Accountability Statements



and the curriculum. We also have been meeting with Ofsted to feed into providers' reviews.

Q: “The Stage Two guidance (Section 3.2 Potential Activities) for the LSIPs suggests a number of projects and activities that may help. How have you identified on what already exists and what do you intend on doing from this?”

A: We are aware that there are already many existing projects, initiatives and activities taking place in the region for skills development that relates to some activities outlined in the stage two LSIP guidance. We are asking our providers, businesses and stakeholders to help with our awareness of all pre-existing schemes so we can ensure we are amplifying what is already existing and signpost to initiatives that can support employers. We do not want to reinvent the wheel or add to the noise in the skills landscape, we want to promote the fantastic activities that are already out there – please get in touch at LSIP@businesswest.co.uk if there's a scheme, activity, project or initiative you think we should be made aware of.

Outcomes of the LSIP

Q: “How will the LSIPs aim to help skills provision become more accessible?”

A: As part of the roadmap of actionable priorities that we are creating and collating for the LSIP, we are looking at how the system can be simplified and how to ensure employers have access to the right information. There is so much information already existing in the ether, and we want to help simplify the process for businesses to access this by working with providers and stakeholders on a collaborative and multi-agency plan.

Q: “How will the LSIPs improve demand for skills?”

A: As well as highlighting reported skills needs in our annual report and roadmap, through our ongoing employer engagement, awareness events and partnership activities, we aim for employers to receive more information on how to identify skills needs and solutions via our team, engaged providers and stakeholders.

Q: “What will I start to see happening as the result of LSIP findings in my local area?”

A: Colleges and ITPs in partnership will be responding directly to our LSIP findings via the Local Skills Improvement Fund, alongside a duty to reflect these needs in their provision. As part of the West of England Plus LSIP Trailblazer, Business West helped establish Hydrogen South West and the skills consortium as one of the primary areas established as having ongoing needs, as well as a number of other identified priority areas.



Q: “What will the LSIP reports include? And where do the report findings go?”

A: The LSIP report will be split into three sections: ‘LSIP Priorities’, ‘Taking the LSIP Priorities Forward’, and ‘Delivering the LSIP Priorities’. The first section explains what the LSIP aims to achieve and why this is important, as well as the current climate around those priorities and how the LSIP and its stakeholders can help drive change. The second section sets out the key outcomes that employers have reported they want, along with specific skills and training requirements and priority changes that are needed in provision. The third section summarises the key programmes, provision and providers currently delivering against the LSIP priorities and what needs to happen to bring about the changes identified in the LSIP research, as well as what specific actions and processes need to take place.

For the Preliminary Findings, we used a standardised structure primarily to summarise our priority findings per sector and LSIP geography, drawing out areas where the findings differed within a single sector across more than one geography, or were common between sectors or geographies. However, we aimed to ensure that we were not too prescriptive in our findings. We hope this was particularly valuable to providers planning provision and evaluating their current offer pan sector or across our 3 LSIP geographical boundaries. Within our business intelligence summaries we split these into the following themes: Critical Workplace, Core and Transferable skills; Core Digital Skills; Sector Specific Skills, Technological Change and Digitalisation Skills Needs; Decarbonisation, Sustainability and Alignment to the UK’s Net Zero Strategy Skills Needs and; Systemic/Labour Market/Other reported needs. Each finding was linked through to the institute of Apprenticeships occupational maps. We also suggested the funding route we thought would be most appropriate for each finding.

Key Topics

Q: “How will the LSIP relate to and support Net Zero, climate change and green skills?”

A: Green skills and the UK's Net Zero strategy are core facets of the national LSIP rollout and we aim to report continuously on these themes. We have ensured that all businesses are asked about their understanding of these themes, along with decarbonisation and climate change as a whole throughout our question routes and events.

Q: “How does the LSIP relate to the Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF)?”

A: The Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF) is a direct response to the LSIP findings; the Local Skills Improvement Plan findings will therefore wholly shape the LSIF proposals. Business West will work throughout the project with the LSIF delivery



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partners to continue to refine, raise awareness and drive further change via our two projects.