WEST OF ENGLAND PLUS TRAILBLAZER LOCAL SKILLS IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Social Care Statement

WILTSHIRE

DEVON

DORSET

BusinessWest

LSIP Trailblazer partners:

WEST OF ENGLAND Combined Authority

WEST OF ENGLAND INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

West of England Plus LSIP Trailblazer: Skills in the Social Care Sector

In 2021/2022, the Department for Education has funded eight 'Trailblazer' projects to test a new approach to developing employer-led regional skills strategy, with the intention to roll out a new system of 'Local Skills Improvement Plans' nationally. The Trailblazer Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) for the West of England Plus has been produced by the Bristol Chambers of Commerce, one of eight employer representative bodies testing an employer-led approach to skills planning. It focussed on two sectors: Social Care, and Aerospace and Advanced Engineering.

*This report draws out the **learnings and strategy recommendations for the Social Care sector** that the LSIP process produced. It sits alongside the corresponding [Sector Report for Aerospace and Advanced Engineering.](url)*

The full LSIP Trailblazer report submitted to DfE is also available [here](url) and includes a methodology report, research findings on skills needs across two sectors, and a set of recommendations for changes needed, and actions possible, in driving forward collaborative approaches to skills design and delivery bringing together employers, skills providers and regional strategy bodies. This full report will inform DfE's design of the national roll out. It is also DfE's intention that the employer voice articulated in this plan should help inform the decisions of local skills providers and inform relevant future funding bids.

1   Background and Methodology

What is the Local Skills Improvement Plan Trailblazer?

The focus of the West of England Plus LSIP Trailblazer is 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.

What area did the research cover?

The **West of England Plus LSIP (WoE+ LSIP)** Trailblazer, covering the West of England region and parts of Somerset and Gloucestershire, is geographically aligned with the West of England Institute of Technology **Strategic Development Fund (SDF)** (under the Skills Accelerator remit) ensuring a cohesive approach across the two programmes

The LSIP's geographic and sectoral coverage also aligns with the wider region's recognition as a Functional Economic Market Area (FEMA), as is centred on a critical mass of economic activity and priority sectors.

Who was involved?

The WoE+ LSIP Trailblazer project gathered and reviewed in-depth and current business voice; to translate business needs into an understanding of skills needs. Our methodology was grounded in an in-depth and open-format discussion of business growth and needs, to provide input into how training provision can be designed and delivered.

Between October 2021 and March 2022, we conducted more than 160 in-depth engagements via individual and small group interviews, research-focussed events (including task-and-finish, roundtable, focus group and immersion events). We also ran awareness-raising events and communications, light-touch surveys and benefited from a great deal of partner collaboration.

Who has led the LSIP Trailblazer?

This WoE+ LSIP Trailblazer has been produced by the Bristol Chambers of Commerce, one of eight employer representative bodies testing an employer-led approach to skills planning.

We have worked in close partnership with two further bodies to lead and oversee the LSIP Trailblazer project:

- the West of England Institute of Technology (WEIoT), whose **Strategic Development Fund (SDF)** programme area aligns geographically with the LSIP. The WEIoT represents a collaborative network of seven of the Trailblazer region's colleges and Higher Education Institutes, providing a valuable resource for ongoing collaboration in an effective existing body.
- the West of England Combined Authority, which has acted as the recognised Mayoral Combined Authority for this LSIP Trailblazer and closely supported its development. The LSIP will inform a range of WECA-led strategies and programmes including the ongoing work of the Skills Advisory Panels, as well as imminent skills and economic development

funding plans including the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, the DfE's new Multiply programme (focussed on adult numeracy), amongst others.

We also worked with several important contracted partners including:

- MAS Partners as aerospace sector specialists (not engaged in the social care sector research)
- Western Training Providers Network (WTPN) as leads and navigators within independent training provision and FE
- FutureLeap as a region-wide business network focussed on sustainability and cleantech

Why was the Social Care Sector prioritised?

Across Health and Social care, there are over 3,500 employers in the region with the Adult social care sector alone employing c.24,000 people.
• The opportunity is to catalyse innovation.
• The challenge is attrition, resilience, and skills across all levels.

We knew the Social Care sector is facing increased demand for new people, high levels of unfilled existing posts, and an urgent need for technical upskilling and professionalisation, for potential productivity and efficiency impacts of digitalisation. We wanted the LSIP to support the wider efforts to improve the perception and viability of social care as a long term and rewarding career.

2   The Social Care Sector: overview and current challenges

How big is the Adult Social Care Sector in the South West?

The Adult Social Care Sector is a critical part of the local economy in the LSIP area, with 1,640 businesses, employing 37,000 people**Error! Bookmark not defined.**, roughly 5% of the workforce regionally (based on Skills for Care Workforce data and ONS Employment Survey data).

As a foundational economic sector, it contributes over £2bn in wages into the local economy (based on Skills for Care Workforce data, looking at the wider Business West region areas) and additionally plays a systemic role in supporting large parts of the rest of the workforce to remain economically active around the care needs of their family members.

What key challenges is it currently facing?

In the South West, similarly to across the UK, the Care Sector has faced a range of structural challenges historically, compounded in the past two years, in its ability to recruit and retain workers, and sustain business models, against a backdrop of a national funding system and structure which is inadequate in its current form to meet current and future care needs in the population.

Within a wider societal context in which social care is hugely undervalued both financially and in terms of social status, the sector has long struggled with pay, progression, and job security. Whereas healthcare is a nationalised public sector system, the social care sector is fragmented across large scale and small-scale independent providers, and statutory providers. This presents huge challenges in terms of business resilience and adaptability, and the balance between private and statutory provision as commissioned through local authorities.

During the past two years of the pandemic, the sector has been on the frontline. This has generated a slight paradigm shift in how the sector is perceived culturally, politically and economically – with greater recognition of the critical role it plays, and the impact on wider society and economy when it is under strain.

Recent regional reports from key regional bodies have echoed these concerns, including the 2022 West of England Annual Skills report[1], the Heart of the South West Local Skills Report 2022-2024[2], and the latest Skills for Care regional 'State of the Sector' report[3]. Key challenge points include:

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[1] ibid

[2] Heart of the South West Local Skills Report 2022-2024 - https://skillslaunchpad.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/2022-Local-Skills-Report-for-Heart-of-the-South-West.pdf

[3] Skills for Care 2021, The State of the Adult Social Care Sector 2021 South West - https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/adult-social-care-workforce-data-old/Workforce-intelligence/documents/Regional-reports/The-State-of-the-Adult-Social-Care-Sector-and-Workforce-2021-South-West.pdf

- Ageing population and the pandemic driving up demands for skills in health and social care, as well as driving up future demand for care and health sector provision
- Recruitment challenges exacerbated by pandemic, with high and rising vacancy rates
- Dramatically high staff turnover rates (30.8% within social care, with some roles higher e.g., support workers (39.5%) and domiciliary roles (43.7%)
- High number of senior staff due to retire in next 15 years
- Low levels of qualifications in sector compared to other sectors
- Urgent need for good quality careers advice, education and training to provide skills needed by employers

3 WECA + LSIP Trailblazer Research Findings

The rich and in-depth insights shared generously with us by employers and skills providers we engaged with can be grouped into five overarching themes.

Primary theme area:
- **Training and Skills** (including three sub-themes: Training content; Training Quality; and Training Delivery Methods.)

Driving forces shaping Training and Skills:
- **Recruitment/ Retention;**
- **Changing demands on sector;**
- **Leadership / Management.**

Underpinning this:
- **Climate change and decarbonisation**

Theme 1: Training and Skills

A range of insights emerged around the need for training provision itself that can:

- Be modular
- Be bespoke
- Be Industry led
- Be certified
- Rapidly adapt to technological shift
- Build ongoing collaborative relationships
- Offer hybrid models for upskilling alongside recruitment
- Evidence retention strategies attached to industry-led upskilling

- Improve recognition of pathways, including those considered vocational, and the perceived benefits
- Deliver wider recognition of benefits to businesses, learners, sector and society
- Professionalise social care and improve retention via pathways to health care

Training Content

Technical

The key technical skills reported to be needed going forward, considering the increasing acuity of health needs in the care client population included:

- Mental health
- Dementia support
- Various acute/complex health needs
- Re-ablement support including physiotherapy and occupational therapy
- Medication management
- Wound dressing
- Hoisting
- Catheterisation
- Phlebotomy

There are a range of learning modules to upskill employees further on specific disabilities and health conditions, which are largely provided through independent providers via a mix of online assessments and on-the-job training. Many of these skills are also covered within more formal training pathways from FE institutions, for example nursing, pharmacy or physiotherapy skills pathways. However, a clear and repeated message from smaller scale providers was that not all Care Workers are able or willing to embark on these longer-term programmes and that if they did, there is a perceived risk that upon qualifying they may choose to leave the Care sector for the NHS anyway.

We heard that larger employers tend to bring in bespoke, on the job, modular training from independent trainers, and/or invest in in-house training teams. This training may or may not be accredited; be able to count towards longer term and more formal qualifications; and is not as portable between employers as it should be.

However, smaller scale employers, without the resource to commission bespoke training of this kind, rely either on workers having already received similar training elsewhere, or on their ability to develop skills over time through experience and peer support.

It can work very well for workers to be 'trained up' by more senior colleagues, who are often able to provide a much more tailored and hands-on quality of knowledge transfer than through a training course. But this system is also fragile and increasingly under pressure in times of acute staff shortage – when there is far less time available to dedicate to training new staff on the job, and those retiring or leaving the sector outnumber those coming in at entry level.

There is demand for a more modular, but equally high quality, accredited and standardised versions of these training areas, which can upskill care workers to deliver the parts of these services that are urgently needed by clients they are supporting with increasing health needs, to support them out of hospital.

Digital skills and general IT knowledge were equally identified as an area of skills need amongst the current workforce regionally, as many employees in social care are older. Smaller social care businesses reported a much slower take-up of apps for recording data on residents or work rotas, etc.

Softer Skills

We heard a clear and consistent reflection of the fundamental and critical role that relationship skills play in the functioning of the care sector overall. This was felt by all participating employers, without exception, to be the most important skillset in any new recruit – over and above any technical skills.

However, whilst values-based recruitment is well embedded in the sector, the majority felt that people management, leadership and workforce / skills planning capabilities, were severely underrepresented within the care sector workforce.

Whilst some larger employers have capacity and infrastructure to offer internal CPD to develop these skills formally, many of the smaller organisations do not have formal training provisions in place for these skills to be developed as they are reliant on external provision – which they currently are not accessing in a consistent way, or at all, across the sector.

Alongside this, employers reported a significant gap in foundational and core skills (including numeracy, and confidence with maths) which is a barrier for staff accessing more formal apprenticeship pathways.

Training Quality

Whilst some employers worked very closely with independent training providers and were very satisfied with the quality of the relationship and of the training, others cited a poor experience with trying to support staff to access skills and training; their expectations weren't met regarding the timing of delivery, content covered, or the extent of the burden placed on the employer to backfill staff time. The majority who actively engaged with training providers felt that training quality was high, however, the issue is that smaller employers do not feel able to access appropriate training provision for their needs in the first place.

We encountered a consistent strong desire for a more accessible and standardised accreditation system, so that skills and training in the care sector can be accredited in a way that is recognised and trusted by different employers within the sector, and, critically, by NHS colleagues with whom they work closely.

During group discussion, the perspective of local government care commissioning was raised. Because of the pressures that care commissioners are under, a 'drag' in the system against

investing in accreditation can occur due to 'retrospective' accreditation initiatives not delivering further change in outcomes or pay, but rather correcting an anomaly in the system and enabling the individual to potentially progress. We believe this provides a greater argument for the need of industry-led and skills provider-led investment in skills and training design within the social care sector.

Training Delivery Models

The consistent message that training courses requiring inflexible blocks of attendance (either within classroom-based learning, or in placements away from the employer) are simply impractical, given the current acute and extraordinary pressures the sector has faced with recruitment and staffing during the period of this LSIP research.

However, it was equally clear there is no 'one size fits all' training delivery method: different training providers and institutions offer various models, and often employers work with several training providers to allow for a combination of different learning methods. Whilst online learning is flexible both in terms of timing and location, it is not equally accessible to all learners, and in-person training is more beneficial for those with limited digital access. The travel to work area for employers is also a factor in working with FE colleges who may not be easy for some employers' workforce to physically access, particularly if relying on public transport and trying to combine college visits with domiciliary care shifts.

Theme 2: Recruitment and Retention

Sector Brand / Reputation

Employers spoke passionately of their despondency about how negatively the care sector has been portrayed, as 'a horrible place to work' and 'a sector in crisis' – when in fact, despite all the challenges around pay, progression, and the intensity of the work, care was felt to be such a potentially enormously rewarding, stimulating and long-term values driven career. A large part of the problem was the persistently negative portrayal of care as a dead-end, low paid job which was off-putting to people who might in fact thrive in the sector. Whilst there was also plenty of discussion (expanded below) about the very real challenges these issues constitute in the sector, and the need for them to change systemically, there is a huge interest in how to also invest in changing the 'image' of the sector, and the value and esteem in which the wider public holds it. Employers suggested that skills providers, namely colleges, could support this image shift, through pitching the sector as a place to build a career, and to expand people's baseline understanding of the range of skills involved in care.

A lot of good work is clearly already underway to drive this shift, including the 'Proud to Care' campaign, as well as a range of more locally driven programmes to support care sector to recruit and market their roles more effectively, not to mention work with DWP on sector-based Work Academies. It's clear that the longer-term job of investing in the skills and training provision for the care sector will be closely bound up in overall work to shift the value and status and perception of the sector as a whole.

Recruitment

Recruitment was a huge and concerning topic; against the backdrop of existing pre-pandemic challenges such as the concurrent dramatic and sudden shrinking of the workforce following Brexit, the pandemic has added huge additional pressures to the intensity of the job, level of pressure, sense of responsibility and legal liability risks when things go wrong. We heard repeatedly of intolerable stress and burnout driving high turnover out of social care, and the challenge of persuading new workers to join the workforce - whether at entry level or mid-career. Although the peak of recruitment shortages has now begun to ease within the South West (in late March we heard reports that vacancy rates were finally starting to come down as more people overall were returning to job hunting post pandemic), it remains a long term and systemic challenge.

Employers suggested this was a compounded set of distinct recruitment problems:

- a shortage of junior / entry level prospective candidates at the younger age of the workforce, causing a dwindling pipeline of people entering the sector;
- a shortage of mid-career workers who have historically been a critical part of the sector, which has the potential to attract people who have some degree of life experience and unpaid care experience, and an interest in a more flexible and rewarding, human centred job after some years in other careers / jobs;
- a shortage of people able to apply for the more senior and skilled roles within the sector such as Registered Managers, Senior Care Workers, and nursing staff – largely due to the departure of experienced but burnt-out workers who could have moved up into these roles at this point in their careers.

Retention

Other retention related challenges include a lack of internal career progression opportunities across the care sector. As it stands, there is still a limited range of roles and seniority levels to match this gradual accumulation of skills and experience.

For those not seeking a nursing career pathway, the roles available in most providers tend to revolve around Care Worker, Senior Care Worker, and Registered Manager. The 'pyramid' of the staffing structure within many business models means there is a limited number of the more senior roles in organisations; countless workers with over 10-15 years worth of experience and a range of excellent skills are still working as a Care Worker on a similar salary as entry-level. Whilst not everyone is keen to progress through a hierarchy, there was widespread agreement that this lack of meaningful status and pay progression was driving many to leave, despite investing substantial time building up experience.

Whilst the sector has the potential to offer quite attractive flexible work options, it can also end up providing a combination of anti-social shift patterns, and un-predictable or even zero hour working patterns which again, causing a retention issue. Challenges in retaining entry level workers within the first 2-3 months of starting – after significant investment in their recruitment

and initial induction – because of the intensity of the role was mentioned as a challenge; the sense that the hours cannot be made to fit easily around other life commitments. There was strong interest in access to HR and management support to encourage leaders to adopt more innovative and creative approaches to time management, fair flexible working, and induction processes to more systemically tackle this challenge.

Theme 3: Changing Demands on Sector

External pressures and changes

Employers see an increasing pressure for higher skilled roles, to support more acute health needs within the ageing population, and as a result pressures on the NHS. There is a huge shift ongoing in thinking within NHS partners, local authority commissioning partners, and CCG / ICS commissioning strategy, which care sector employers are keen to engage in, but are aware that it will significantly shift what the care sector is expected to deliver within the wider health system.

This is a discussion about how to build up a range of skillsets within the care sector that will enable it to meet the rising acuity of health needs in its clients, but also to increase the degree to which it supports people to continue to live independently for longer, including both in how it designs and delivers home based support, and how care technology is deployed innovatively.

Some employers expressed a concern that the pace of this increase and change in needs may already be outstripping the pace of designing and delivering what are often minimum 3–4-year training programmes – this contributed to the desire for shorter, modular, accredited training provision to enable the sector to be more agile and adaptable to change.

Digitalisation

Whilst larger companies and SMEs have now moved entirely to electronic records, some of the smaller SMEs are still using hybrid systems including paper-based records, and keen to accelerate the move to full digitalisation. We heard a consistent concern that a barrier to this is in core digital and IT skills and confidence of particularly older parts of the workforce. Naturally, the pandemic has accelerated use of and confidence with tools e.g., MS Teams/Zoom for client conferences, and greater use of apps in general to record time, medication, communicate with clients' families etc. But there was a consensus that there would be value in investing in support and training around core digital skills.

On a more strategic level, some SME employers engaged in innovative uses and development of new digitally assistive care-tech – recognising that there are huge advantages in effectively building digital tools into and alongside face-to-face care provision (such as digital monitors for clients' homes to monitor patterns of behaviour and identify early health warning signs; through to specific apps to support care workers to monitor blood pressure). Investment in supporting care employers to grow and develop new approaches and tools has the potential to drive further uplifts in the value and skill level associated with different areas of current provision.

Internal pressures and changes

The low levels of wages across all roles in comparison with the health sector is an underlying challenge structural in the sector. This problem is deeply entrenched and connected with a much wider societal issue with the valuation of care, whether unpaid or paid, and whether in the social care sector, or other care sectors such as childcare, mental health, etc.

The pressure on frontline and care delivery workforce members to absorb administration and IT function and for managerial staff to have to absorb significant amounts of frontline delivery is another specifically structural challenge. Whilst larger employers tend to be better able to maintain separate HR and IT functions, many of the smaller providers find these roles merging; and even in larger employers the current acuteness of staffing shortage has still resulted in managerial staff having to undertake frontline duties.

Theme 4: Leadership, Management and Workforce Planning

Employers must have the fundamental capacity for high quality leadership, management and workforce planning to plan and logistically manage the development and delivery of training across their workforce. This skillset is critical to the high functioning of the wider sector and an area in which industry would like to see more investment and provision. There are two core areas of business and skills development that would benefit from an increase in skills and capacity around leadership and workforce planning:

- **Workforce Planning and Capacity / Succession Planning**
  It is essential the sector has capacity to tackle the rapid changing pressures on the sector in terms of skills needs, combined with the acute challenges around recruitment and retention, through a much more robust and sustainable workforce planning capacity both within the sector, and across the care and health sectors collaboratively.

- **Business Growth and Development**
  The employers are aware of the shifting landscape around them which may fundamentally impact on their business models – they urgently need support to tackle this head on. Commissioning models are already shifting away from contracts based on a set of predictable number of care packages per year, and towards more outcomes based, re-ablement focussed and flexible support provision. There is also a sense of a shift away from residential care and towards home-based care in general, but in the short term also huge backlog in NHS discharging, meaning that residential care providers are looking at moving towards more nursing-based homecare. There are clearly huge opportunities for the care sector in working much more closely with health sector partners, and – with an increased skill and accreditation level in the care sector – being able to bid for, and take on, a greater range of service provision contracts as well as evolving models of support for privately funded clients.

  At the same time, national changes in care funding models present their own challenges to pre-existing care sector business models that, along with the continued downward pressure on local authority commissioning budgets (Social Care precept notwithstanding) present

significant threats to many employers' medium- and long-term resilience. Against this backdrop, we heard from the smaller care employers that they have urgently need high quality business development, business growth and business planning / business model strategy support, and internal capacity. Already, it's clear that managers are struggling with the burden of paperwork, bid writing, form-filling involved in generating grants, investment, internships and apprentices, to keep at 'status quo' levels of income and staffing – let alone engaging in the investment of time and resource to grow and move to more innovative models of delivery.

Theme 5: Sustainability, Climate Change and Decarbonisation

Managing Impact of Climate Change on Operations

Amongst those engaged there was some awareness of sustainability - particularly in the homecare sector - where buildings management is a core part of operations and some good practice is already underway, with individual employers working with dedicated decarbonisation specialists to carbon and waste reduction plans. One of these programmes shared in more detail involved plans for adapting day-to-day operations in areas such as food waste, meat vs plant-based catering, heating and energy management. Overall, even with those companies not specifically engaging in this kind of dedicated programme, we found a general live concern within homecare employers about the poor insulation and heating /cooling systems within much of their housing stock.

There was a limited capacity and awareness of decarbonisation strategies, with only a handful of employers having allocated a dedicated staff member to this role.

For domiciliary care providers, there was real concern around fuel cost increase. Employers shared mainly a concern that they had no real sense of how they might tackle decarbonisation in the medium and long term – in terms of the skills and knowledge base required; the energy and time to undertake strategy and planning; or the financial resources to invest in, for example, transitioning to electric vehicles or building up their own fleet in the first place (which by no means most domiciliary care providers currently have, relying instead on workers to drive their own cars to home visits.)

Managing Impact of Climate Change on Nature of Product / Service

It was noticeable that there is an absence of capacity and engagement with this issue. Some employers had given some thought to the impending impact of weather change on older people's care needs (superfluous seasonal deaths in summer and deaths in winter directly attributable to extreme weather conditions, for example). However, it was clear that without some support and investment into the time, capacity and access to technical expertise and knowledge, the care sector will struggle to plan ahead for these wider changes, in the face of the huge array of even more immediate challenges.

4   What Needs to Change and Why

It's clear that focusing on skills development within industry at a systemic level, offers potential long-term and systemic solutions to these wider issues.

What would 'good' look like?

Three key areas of change are clearly needed:

1) A New Approach to Skills Training Design

- Fundamental change in how technical and further education is designed to enable **modularity** and **portability**.
- Significant change in how the majority of **existing pathways** are **designed and delivered**, how apprenticeship pathways are designed and funded
- **Employers being able to work creatively with training providers to design bespoke and tailored pathways** (in terms of the modules required, the length of overall training, the intensity of time commitment of the individual employee / learner);
- A **far greater standardisation of portability of qualifications** both across employers, but also across accredited programmes (enabling someone to cumulatively undertake a variety of modules spread out over time, and end up being able to 'top up' into an accredited diploma or degree programme if desired at a later stage)
- **Funding flexibility** so that all employers can develop training in this way, not just those with resources to directly commission it themselves through independent training providers
- **Speed and agility –** so that training providers can identify and design new skills and training as fast as the technology develops to be more reactive to changing sector needs
- **Greater flexibility of training delivery methods** including more on the job training, and flexible delivery around both learner and business needs
- **Commissioning, NHS and ICS** - With the opportunities presented by the new Integrated Care System to join up much more effectively across workforce development between NHS and Care Sector partners, there needs to be a rapid change in how both the Care Sector employers *and* commissioning partners in local government and NHS, can directly influence and inform the design and content of Care Sector focussed skills and training - to ensure that this training aligns with standards, is portable between, and enables close dovetailing between workforce across, NHS and Care sector partners.

2) System Approaches to Workforce Planning

- Improved capacity, time and confidence within employers (especially SMEs) to undertake workforce planning, and align day to day business model with the direct and indirect costs of training
- Culture change in the industry around its own role in leading on workforce planning, as a sector and at individual business level

- Delivery of 'just in case' pipelines of skills, not only 'just in time' – i.e. sector able to work together to make sure training pathways cover skills that are not currently needed by industry, but will be soon
- Bolstered capacity for strategic workforce planning jointly across health and care sectors

2. How can these changes come about?

Three foundational steps will be needed to make these shifts possible.

- **Leadership and Management Skills:** improving the quality and confidence of leadership and management within small businesses to facilitate and unlock the support and vision required to encourage wider parts of the workforce to undertake further professional development, and to bring younger workers into work environments that are focussed on consistent career progression.

- **Shifting Reputations, Driving up Recruitment:** to unlock the pipeline into the sector, and retain staff long enough to sustain career progression routes through the sector

- **Changing the Paradigm: a Career Not a Job:** bringing together the idea of entering into a job, with the idea of progressing through a career pathway, requires a step change in treating recruitment as advertising 'a career' not 'a job'. This is a joint task for training providers and employers to coordinate recruitment to training pathways with recruitment to immediate vacancies, which are less attractive as a stand-alone job but much more attractive as a starting stepping-stone on a longer career pathway.

How can industry drive all of this in practice?

This can only happen with a strong infrastructure in place to bring employers together across the sector; to ensure SMEs and micro-providers are able to engage; and to create partnerships and long term relationships with the range of training providers.

For SMEs, there is a huge gap in the presence and strength of industry led networks that can coordinate, convene, and advocate at sector level for employers. Existing care sector networks / sector bodies are already working hard to do this but are under-resourced and with a varied level of connection into strategic planning at regional level. Resourcing the infrastructure needed to bring employers together effectively and create mechanisms for training providers and employers to collaborate, is critical.

How does this all fit with central and regional government strategy?

There is a range of existing activity and infrastructure in place within the region already which can underpin, facilitate, and amplify the suggested new and strengthened activities of the LSIP going forward.

- The Digital Skills Investment Programme can support investment in SMEs in the care sector around care technology and skills;
- Digital Bootcamps also present an opportunity to drive skill and innovation across all sectors in this area, just as the Workforce for the Future Clean Skills for Growth, and Green Boot camp delivery can support the evident need for an urgent increase in capacity across industry to tackle climate change and decarbonisation.
- The Good Employment Charter, a newly launched initiative within WECA, includes a pillar on supporting employers with recruitment and retention, and of course can offer a useful channel through which to embed a range of best practice and innovation the LSIP may support employers and providers to develop.
- Workforce for the Future (WfTF) is a tool to build on in developing the bespoke recursive capacity to undertake workforce development and skills planning within industry which we heard repeatedly was a top priority across all SMEs.
- The Careers Hub and Growth Hub are already institutions through which the key LSIP partners collaborate actively, and through which new initiatives and programmes the LSIP stimulates could be delivered.

Further information on these programmes can be found at www.westofengland-ca.gov.uk.

However, there are also significant challenges that industry partners, training providers and local and regional government face in doing this work:

- **Funding -** industry partners neither control nor even shape the design and deployment of existing skills funding; while training providers have consistently reflected a struggle they face in the middle between the content, design and delivery methods that are being requested by employers, versus the parameters within which they have to work, imposed by how funding is designed. Enabling industry and skill sector partners to have a stronger voice in shaping the central design of these schemes, or devolving much more of the conditionality around them, would be interesting to explore.
- **Connecting different funding streams -** regional and local funding available for economic development and for skills is spread across different funding streams (adult education budget (AEB), levelling up funding, various specific skills and training programmes, job brokerage and unemployment programmes, apprenticeship levies, and sector specific investment and workforce development funding etc) - these funding streams sit across stakeholders including local government, combined authority, LEPs, sector bodies, and DWP, just to name a few. Joining these funding streams up strategically behind a consistent and joined up set of goals at regional and sub-regional level would make a huge difference in how investment into skills and training could be undertaken in line with industry needs, and with wider economic development strategies.
- **Training provider business model pressures -** FE institutions face a conflict between the drive to maximise uptake of course that are attractive to students based on their existing

knowledge of industries, versus the drive to meet emerging new skills needs from industry and jobs that do not yet exist.

5 Roadmap: recommendations and next steps

We have focussed our report back to DfE on three priorities we recommend they consider within future LSIP funding rounds:

Issue	Steps needed
Capacity and resource within skills sector: Colleges and independent training providers need to have both clear **mandate and responsibility**, but also the **necessary funding and infrastructure** in place to facilitate the level of engagement, co-design, and coordination across local industry partners	*There is an existing starting point within the IOT, and excellent existing good individual relationships between providers and industry partners. The Combined Authority can play a central role in ensuring engagement, design and delivery links into the wider skills ecosystem and adds value rather than duplicating or destabilising existing successful delivery. Additionally, the Careers Hub and individual programme delivery can help to link employers with the next generation of workers and to address skills leakage out of the sector.*
Capacity and culture within Industry: Employers – in particular SMEs, who make up the most significant proportion of both the sectors under review for this LSIP, and the regional business base more broadly – have the confidence, capability and culture to do **high quality consistent workforce planning**; and the **necessary infrastructure** itself (networks, industry voice etc) to **effectively coordinate with wider stakeholders** to drive how they support and deliver elements of that workforce development.	*We are keen to support **the growth and strengthening of existing networks** e.g. Care Support West, as well as new specific forums / working groups, and build on the existing provision through Workforce for the Future, the Growth Hub programmes, Digital Skills Investment Programme (DSIP), and a range of other strategic business programmes and support coordinated by the Combined Authority which Business West also already plays a core part in delivering.*
Infrastructure that connects stakeholders: not just ensuring the right forums, networks, working groups are in place; also ensuring that the right **agreements are in place to give mandate** to key stakeholders to lead and represent; and to clarify exactly how **commissioning / strategy setting relationships** connect with each other.	*Collaborating with the Combined Authority and other regional stakeholders includes making sure the LSIP can amplify and support wider regional structures such as the Skills Advisory Panels, providing a conduit into industry to inform policy making. The granular intelligence gathered as part of the LSIP directly inform the West of England Combined Authority economic and skills priorities and plans, including shaping funding priorities. This will ensure there is a robust system in place to ensure economic and skills priorities are in part informed by, and align with, industry needs to effectively skills funding and economic development programmes.*

What happens next?

Next steps at sector level

Business West will be investing in the development of stronger infrastructure for the sector, working with a range of key stakeholders likely to include [Care & Support West](#) and other employer networks, as well as local and national bodies including Skills for Care, Local Government Commissioners, existing partnerships between care employers and skills partners, etc. Business West is keen to support the sector to be able to engage and innovate much more systemically with both FE / Training providers, but also with NHS and local gov partners via ICS. Ultimately, we are conscious of the need to identify where the lead role best sits for this sector, in terms of for driving employer/ skills provider engagement. There are three areas Business West will focus on through the next phase of LSIP work:

1. **Supporting the growth of a strong care sector voice**, through supporting Care and Support West and other key employer networks with resources and time to help build up capacity of care provider network (convening)

2. **Direct capacity building for SMEs within the Care sector:** Direct training and support to develop workforce and skills planning and development capacity, either through direct provision (building on Workforce for the Future model) and/ or working with partners to develop and deliver programmes for SME sector; supporting coordination of SMEs to participate in larger scale programmes through building cohorts across SMEs; and work to support SMEs both to convene and to be better represented on existing forums and networks

3. **Brokerage to generate and support new initiatives, models and relationships**: Support the development of some specific pilots and interventions which bring together skills providers with SME and larger care sector employers, as well as NHS partners where appropriate, to develop and test out new approaches to career pathways and recruitment into these; Proactively work with sector to develop constructive relationship with ICS as it evolves as new coordinating vehicle for integration between health and social care in the region

Examples of New Approaches to Course Design

With further resources to strengthen joint working across industry and training providers, future LSIP work could support practical collaborations to generate a range of employer driven careers pathways.

The LSIP Trailblazer project already began to explore what new programmes could look like, for example around specialist skills, digital skills and SME Leadership and Management.

	Social Care - Health	Modular	Workforce development
Role	*Re-ablement Specialist*	*Digital skills*	*SME Leadership and Management*
Skills	Skills and qualifications to support 'discharge to assess' patients in care homes with no registered nurse, or domiciliary care including physio, medication, diagnostic, wound treatment	Digital skills within care sector, both foundation but also to support digitally assistive care tech; Digital skills within AAE that are rapidly evolving with new technology	Workforce planning, organisational development, HR, business growth, in house learning and development, different approaches to wage systems within business models
Course Type	Degree level apprenticeship; combined on-job and some college based time	Modular, on-the job delivery, portable, standardised, able to function equally as module for longer term programmes or standalone	CPD – modular mix of on job, online, and peer group / 1-2-1 business support led
Funding route	Levy	AEB / industry	AEB / industry. Could feed into longer term business / leadership apprenticeship pathways

Next Steps at Regional Strategic Partnership Level

The LSIP has already generated a range of new forums and momentum across businesses, and between key regional stakeholders. Throughout the current Trailblazer, the regional Skills Advisory Panels provided a regular sounding board and strategic contact point between the LSIPs and wider regional economic and skills strategy.

There are clear current connections between the LSIP findings and recommendations and current strategies and programmes in the region, including:

- **The Workforce for the Future** business support programmes, which provide a useful model for further development of business support and leadership development investment in both sectors to support workforce planning.

- **The development of 'business centres' within FE colleges** through the IOT infrastructure provides a useful model for further development of FE college-based capacity to engage proactively and reactively with industry.

- **Alignment with the work of Western Training Providers Network**, bringing together the unique and often quite innovative offer of independent training providers meaningfully with the wider FE institution-based offer.

- **Various West of England Strategies** have priorities and objectives which link directly across to the LSIP findings such as the Local Industrial Strategy, Employment and Skills Plan and the Recovery Plan.

- **The recently announced new national numeracy programme 'Multiply,'** under which Combined Authorities will be given a regional allocation for activity starting in the 2022/23 academic year, will support individuals (unemployed and employed) who are 19+ and do not already have a Level 2 in maths.

- **Other Combined Authority skills funding and programmes** such as the **Adult Education Budget (AEB)** and **Digital Skills Investment Programme (DSIP),** offer the opportunity to take the LSIP findings and use them to shape future provision.

WECA and Business West will continue to work closely to

- ensure the LSIP links into the forthcoming development of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund investment plans, including the delivery of Multiply;
- work with the IOT on the roll out of the SDF interventions;
- review priorities for Business West in its short- and medium-term investment in sector voice infrastructure, and delivery of business support including through Workforce for the Future.
- Identify opportunities to align and pool funds across the different funding streams and programmes to achieve as much join-up as possible on skills and workforce planning investment

In Summary

Within the current system, the quality of engagement between industry and skill providers contains pockets of excellent and innovative practice. But it does not systematically meet business needs for skills, or skills providers' needs for clear information and engagement, to develop well-functioning and sustainable training provision. The proposals above set out a roadmap to a new system in which industry and skills providers have

- additional engagement mechanisms, complimenting and adding weight to their own pre-engagement activities e.g. Industry Advisory Boards, through which to effectively communicate and collaborate;

- the ability to link into and help shape access to flexible and industry responsive funding mechanisms for training and skills;
- a high level of capacity within industry to undertake workforce and skills planning
- a strong set of links back into regional economic strategy and wider related investment and programmes.

This transition is not without sensitivities and challenges, not least around the relationships and mandates between different sections of industry sectors (larger versus smaller employers), different types of training providers, and the tensions between supply and demand, between learner interests and business needs. It is clear there is a huge appetite across all regional stakeholders to work together towards a transformed system, and there is a clear role for Business West in facilitating and convening the brokerage and business support elements of this effort. There is interest in how LSIPs going forward could support:

- innovation work led by industry and training providers together (such as practical innovation, trials, tests, evaluation and roll-out of new career pathways across diverse sectors). This 'test and learn' approach could link into and help to further shape existing provision;
- the infrastructure, forums, processes set out above to underpin this,
- further resource to research in depth workforce planning and skills needs regularly at sector level to plan training delivery in real time
- further resource to work through system challenges such as how best to integrate college-based provision and business engagement leadership, with innovation and tailored provision within the independent training provision sector, within the new evolved skills landscape