

Marches LSIP

Local Skills Improvement Plan

LSIP REPORT 2026

DIGITAL
TRANSFORMATION



CONSTRUCTION



MANUFACTURING
& ENGINEERING



EMPLOYABILITY
SKILLS



HEALTH &
SOCIAL CARE



SHROPSHIRE | TELFORD & WREKIN | HEREFORDSHIRE



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Commerce

‘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’

CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Executive Summary.....	1
1. Strategic and Economic Context	2
2. Local Skills Needs	9
3. Agreed Changes and Actions Needed.....	24
Annex A: Skills Needs	34
Annex B: Agreed Actions.....	38
Annex C: Background and Methodology	45



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Introduction

The Marches Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) 2026–2029 sets out the key current and future skills priorities for Herefordshire, Shropshire, and Telford & Wrekin. It is designed to support employers, education and training providers, local authorities, and partners involved in post-16 technical education, workforce development, and employment support. The Marches LSIP is not designed to cover every sector, but to select a small number of sectors that are important to our area, have unmet, in full or part, skills shortages and are sectors that provide volume employment opportunities and therefore play a key role in the local economy.

Building on the previous LSIP, the plan reflects progress made through the Marches Education Partnership (MEP), including stronger collaboration between employers and providers and strategic investment through the Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF) in facilities and equipment for Manufacturing & Engineering and Construction. However, persistent skills gaps remain in Manufacturing & Engineering, Health & Social Care, and Construction, alongside cross-cutting needs in employability and digital skills, particularly in response to AI and automation.

Developed by the Employer Representative Body (ERB) - Shropshire Chamber of Commerce - in line with Skills England November 2025 guidance. The Marches LSIP draws on labour market data, sector research, and extensive employer and stakeholder engagement. It aligns with local and national economic priorities and has been shaped by a representative Board and wide cross-sector employer input, to ensure strong regional ownership and impact.

Executive Summary

The Marches, comprising Herefordshire, Shropshire, and Telford & Wrekin, has a resilient labour market with high employment and low economic inactivity, as a whole but with geographical pockets and distinct cohorts where unemployment or inactivity is higher than desired. Manufacturing, Health & Social Care, Construction, and Professional Services remain priority sectors, reflecting limited structural change in recent years.

As a predominantly rural area, the Marches faces challenges around access to education, training, and employment. Rising numbers of 16–17-year-olds not in education, employment, or training highlight the need for stronger local pathways. To address the issue, though early days, we already see the introduction of new Youth Hubs & Step Into Courses. The three Local Authorities Get Britain Working Plan is now moving into the actions stage to address these very issues. Skills progression is also a concern, with relatively low attainment at degree level (RQF4+), particularly in Telford & Wrekin. Limited higher education provision contributes to out-migration of young people, creating a risk of long-term skills loss. Continuing to strengthen the Higher Education offer from our local Further Education providers and specialist Higher Education institutions is therefore essential and we are starting to see the offer grow. This has become even more relevant with the recent withdrawal by both Chester & Wolverhampton Universities from the Marches. Very recently we are

seeing course collaborations between our FE colleges and out of area universities; this is a forward step in offering a greater range of courses for local students. Encouragingly, apprenticeship achievement rates are comparatively strong, demonstrating the value of alternative pathways.

The Marches Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) plays a key role in aligning education and training with employer needs, improving access to local opportunities, and reducing skills gaps. Drawing on national, regional, and local evidence, five skills priorities have been identified for the next three years. They focus on Manufacturing & Engineering, Health & Social Care, and Construction, reflecting persistent workforce shortages and their importance to economic resilience. Two cross-cutting priorities—Digital Transformation and Professional Skills—respond to consistent employer demand for workforce-ready capabilities. The LSIP sets out targeted actions focused on areas of greatest skills pressure and growth potential. These actions reflect strategic and economic priorities and map existing provision alongside new activities co-developed with the LSIP Board.

1. Strategic and Economic Context

Economic Overview

Labour Market Analysis

The Marches comprises of the unitary authorities of Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin, with an economy valued at £17.3bn¹. Key sectors include Manufacturing, Wholesale & Retail, and Health & Social Care.

Our population has grown to 720,000, increasing by an average of 0.8% a year over the last decade, largely due to a growth in the those aged 50 and over. In Herefordshire and Shropshire, the working-age population is below 60%. Median age in Herefordshire and Shropshire is 49 years old, the median age in Telford is 40 which is in line with national average. The older age of residents combined with the outflow of school and colleges leavers to universities out of area, creates a unique situation and challenges for the area. Retaining residents and attracting new residents wanting employment is a key priority to support economic growth ambitions.

Much of the Marches is rural, particularly Herefordshire and Shropshire, where over 50% of LSOAs (Lower Layer Super Output Areas) are classed as rural², creating challenges, particularly in terms of

Figure 1 - Map of the Marches



¹ ONS, Regional gross value added (balanced) by industry: local authorities by ITL1 region (2025)

² This is based on data from ONS 2021 Rural Urban Classification. An estimated 17% of LSOAs across England and Wales are classed as rural.

accessibility, where journey times across modes are longer to access education, training and employment opportunities³.

Despite this, employment remains high across the Marches, consistently above both the West Midlands and national employment rates over the last two decades. Across the Marches, 79% of the working age population are estimated to be in employment⁴, above 76% nationally. Within the Marches, employment varies somewhat but all areas have an employment rate above national levels, rising to 80% of the working age population in Shropshire. Economic inactivity is also relatively low at 19% of the working age population across the Marches, reinforcing the strong labour market participation across the sub-region. However, this must not mask sub areas within the region or specific cohorts where in activity or unemployment is higher than it should be and number rising. Also, with a disproportionate older population this can also distort statistics.

We use direct employer feedback coupled with statistical facts from ONS, Lightcast and others to understand the skills gaps, then researching further to understand the validity of the gaps. Gaps can be caused by many things such as an employer's lack of knowledge of the local training offer, no local training available or simply the cost or timing of a course. Besides this are the local factors that might add to the gaps, such as locals inability to access training due to location or financial constraints plus the outmigration of young people.

Figure 2 - The Marches Priority Skills Needs



Qualifications and Occupations

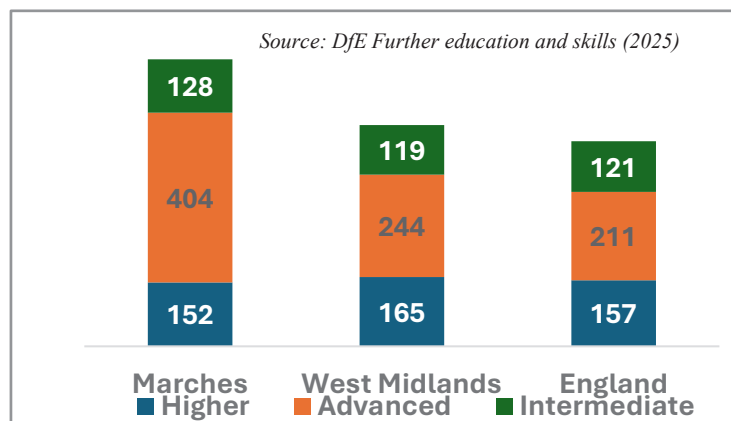
Skills attainment remains an issue in the Marches. In 2024, 41.5% of residents were qualified to RQF4+ (Regulated Qualification Framework), below the 47% of residents nationally. This is more apparent in Telford & Wrekin where only 36% of residents are qualified to degree level or above. Though not as high as hoped, the historic employment having been mainly agriculture, traditional manufacture and mining, may have not provided the need to upskill to higher levels, leaving a legacy to address.

³ DfT Travel time in minutes to the nearest employment site by size and by mode of transport (2022)

⁴ ONS Annual Population Survey (estimates refer to period between October 2024 and September 2025)

With only one established University in Harper Adams University in the Marches⁵ if young people are to access broader university opportunities, they often have to leave the area and are therefore unlikely to return until later in life, presenting a ‘brain drain’ challenge for a rural area such as the Marches. Therefore, it is essential there is support to nurture those locally who do not want to go to university, to ensure they have the skills needed to support local employers.

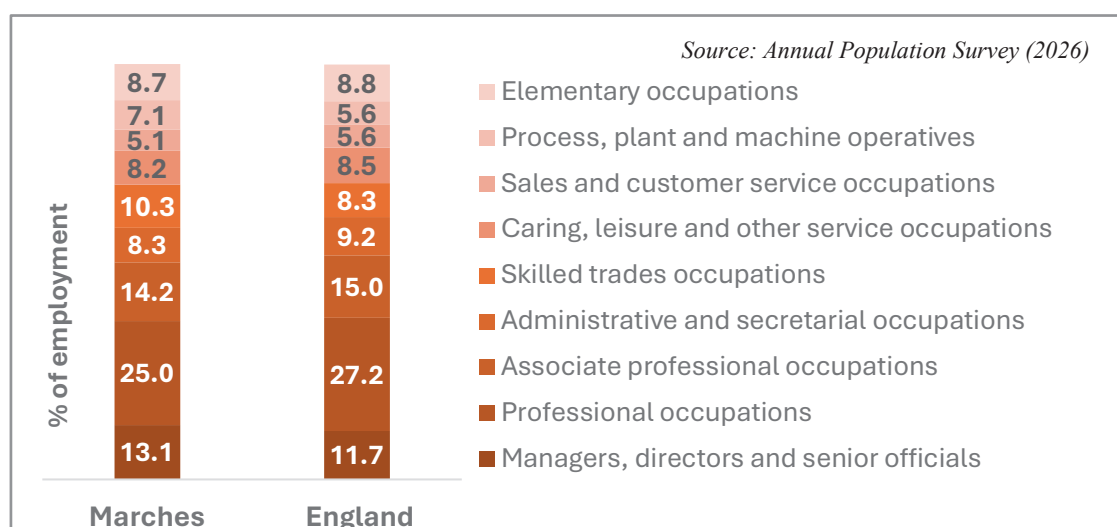
Figure 3 - Apprenticeship achievement rate by level (2023/24) [achievements per 100,000 population]



Encouragingly apprenticeship achievements have been rising over recent years following a Covid impacted decline, highlighting the alternative routes into employment available. Across the Marches, apprenticeship achievements have risen from 630 per 100,000 population in 2019/20 to 685 in 2023/24, above ~500 achievements per 100,000 seen regionally and nationally.

The rise in achievements is largely down to rises in advanced and higher apprenticeships. The Marches has a relatively high number of achievements in advanced apprenticeships and is roughly in line with the regional and national average for higher apprenticeship achievements. There has been a fall in the number of intermediate achievements, reflective of wider regional and national trends.

Figure 4 - Employment by Occupation (Oct 24 - Sep 25)



⁵ The New Model Institute for Technology & Engineering opened in 2021, and Hereford College of Arts provides specialist HE arts, media and design courses

Employment by occupation broadly reflects what is seen nationally, with vacancies by occupation also similar to the split seen nationally.

However, there are concerns about ensuring we are providing enough opportunities for our young people. The number of young people aged 16 or 17 who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) had appeared to be stabilising at around 2.5% in 2023 but has since jumped to 3.7% in 2025. This has been particularly felt in Herefordshire, where the NEET rate has increased to over 5%, and in Telford & Wrekin where the rate has risen to 4%. The Marches Get Britain Working Plan, recently published, was created jointly and will be actioned by the three Local Authorities. It is specifically aimed at tackling the issue of NEETs and economic inactivity amongst other cohorts. This ties in with the aims of the Marches LSIP, in our need to help retain local young adults to bolster the local workforce numbers and to bring other cohorts back into the workforce to benefit from skills already acquired. These actions must be supported by training, refreshing, upskilling and locally focused careers advice. The work of the Local Authority Get Marches Working Plan will help to alleviate the underlying issues prohibiting residents from working or training. The Marches LSIP will help to ensure that stakeholders are creating courses to suit, that careers advice highlights current local sectors and updated view of those sectors. All while continuing to ensure that employers are at the heart of the skills agenda, helping to drive changes to meet their needs.

Despite strong apprenticeship achievement rates, we need to ensure that young people can access the provision needed to pursue their desired career opportunities, with the overall Further Education (FE) achievement rate standing at 3,200 per 100,000 people, below the national rate of 3,660.

Business

Across the Marches, there are 32,360 businesses⁶, the vast majority of which are small or micro-sized enterprises. Approximately 90% employ between 0 and 9 staff, with a further 8.5% classified as small businesses employing between 10 and 49 people.

Nationally, the number of businesses declined by 1.3% between 2022 and 2025, with a sharper fall of 2.4% across the West Midlands. While rising costs and uncertainty have driven a decline nationally, the Marches has remained resilient, with business numbers increasing by 0.4% overall and nearly 3% in Telford & Wrekin.

However, this resilience should not overshadow the significant challenges currently being faced by local employers. Wage pressures and increased taxation continue to create operational difficulties, with around 80% of businesses participating in the most recent Shropshire Chamber of Commerce Quarterly Economic Survey reporting impacts from pay settlements and staffing costs⁷. This has

⁶ ONS Business Counts (2025)

⁷ Shropshire Chamber of Commerce Quarterly Economic Survey 2026 Q1

now been exacerbated by global issues. Consequently, employers are feeling cautious about recruitment; among those who are trying to recruit, around 70% reported experiencing difficulties in recruiting⁸.

Strategic Overview

The Marches three Local Authorities share a strong focus on inclusive growth, infrastructure, and skills as foundations for a resilient economy. All prioritise retaining and upskilling the local workforce and improving alignment between education, training, and employer needs.

Inclusive economic growth is a central theme, with a shared commitment to supporting residents furthest from the labour market.

Figure 5 - Overview of local economic strategies



The three Local Authorities' combined Get Marches Working Plan provides a coordinated framework to reduce economic inactivity through integrated employment, skills, and health support, targeting disadvantaged young people, disabled adults, those with long-term health conditions, and carers.

The Plan also aims to strengthen the region's skills infrastructure in line with employer demand and the LSIP. Initiatives include Youth Employment Hubs offering one-to-one support and Connect to Work, a voluntary programme for those unemployed for six months or more, whose strong early uptake demonstrates the region's commitment to improving equality of opportunity.

⁸ Shropshire Chamber of Commerce Quarterly Economic Survey 2025 Q4

Sector Summary

The Marches has a diverse economic base, with Manufacturing, Health & Social Care, Construction, and Professional Services remaining key priority sectors. ONS data shows no significant change in the area's economic structure over the past three years, and stakeholder engagement confirms these sectors continue to underpin the sub-regional economy.

Alignment to the Industrial Strategy

Figure 6 - Overview of key sectors

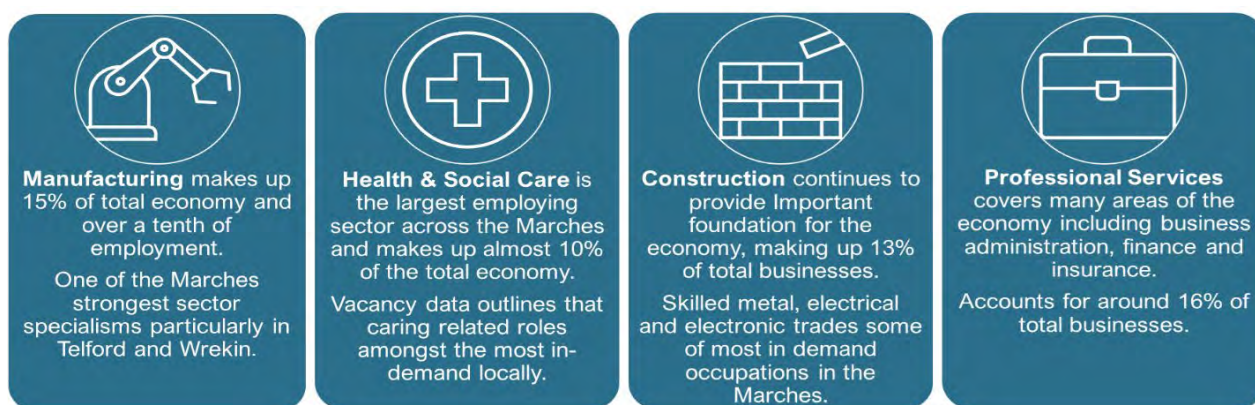


Figure 7 following sets out the total number in employment and businesses across the eight priority sectors (IS-8) identified in the National Industrial Strategy as core to leveraging growth nationally. The IS-8 sectors make a slightly less pronounced contribution in the Marches than nationally but nonetheless remain important locally.

Figure 7 - Scale of the IS-8 sectors in the Marches

Sector		Employment (2024)	Businesses (2024)	LQ (2024)
Defence		700 (0.2%)	0 (0.0%)	3.40
Advanced Manufacturing		9,000 (2.8%)	350 (1.1%)	1.28
Professional & Business Services		33,000 (10.1%)	5,115 (15.8%)	0.72
Financial Services		3,500 (1.1%)	415 (1.3%)	0.62
Digital and Technologies		14,000 (4.3%)	2,260 (7.0%)	0.61
Creative Industries		8,500 (2.6%)	1,935 (6.0%)	0.55
Life Sciences		160 (0.0%)	25 (0.1%)	0.52
Clean Energy Industries		15,730 (5.0%)	870 (2.7%)	

Notes: Sector definitions from the Industrial Strategy Sector Definitions List. DBT do not provide a definition for clean energy. We have used estimates produced by Midlands Net Zero Hub for the Clean Energy Industries. As these are regional estimates which use a methodology produced by kMatrix, we cannot calculate an LQ comparing to national figures.

Sources: ONS Business Register and Employment Survey (2025); ONS Business Counts (2025)

Professional & Business Services is the largest of these sectors in terms of employment and businesses. The sectors which display the most significant specialism locally are Defence and Advanced Manufacturing (which also covers the sub-regions strengths in Agri Tech), both of which have a Location Quotient (LQ)⁹ 1.25 or above, signifying strong local specialism as compared to nationally. Defence displays by far the biggest specialism locally but is linked strongly to Advanced Manufacturing given the definition used in the Industrial Strategy for Defence covers the manufacture of weapons, ammunition and military fighting vehicles.

Clean Energy industries represent a growing source of employment over recent years. Employment has grown by an average of 5% a year to just under 16,000 across the Marches¹⁰. Current activity underway to support wider net zero ambitions include:

- The Marches Energy Grant offers free advice, energy assessments and grants for energy efficiency and renewable energy measures to SMEs from all sectors in the region. This includes grants worth up to £60,000 for eligible businesses, and matched (75%) funding grants of up to £100,000 for businesses wanting to install energy efficiency measures
- The Marches region, particularly Shropshire, is increasingly utilising anaerobic digestion (AD) technology to manage agricultural waste and generate renewable energy
- Marches Energy Agency is a long-standing organisation focusing on the delivery of renewable energy and energy efficiency programmes. They supported over 11,000 people in fuel poverty in 2023/24

The LSIP will continue to support the skills needed to work towards clean power and net zero ambitions. This includes £1.2 million invested in the Herefordshire Low Carbon Technology Centre which will develop industry-led training in green construction skills. The Centre supports local businesses, the construction industry, and homeowners by providing comprehensive training for professionals. Training opportunities are initially focused on heat pumps and Solar PV installation. However, long-term plans include expansion into areas such as battery storage, EV charging and retrofit solutions.

⁹ Location Quotients (LQs) help to proxy how specialised a sector is compared to nationally by comparing the proportion of employment the sector makes up of the total economy compared to nationally. An LQ of 1 means that the sector makes up the same proportion of employment compared to nationally. An LQ of 1.25 or above signifies the sector makes a larger contribution locally and therefore displays a relative specialism.

¹⁰ This uses as data from the Midlands Net Zero Hub, who provide estimates for the Low Carbon Environmental Goods and Services sector across local areas in the Midlands.

2. Local Skills Needs

This section outlines current and emerging skills needs across the Marches, based on robust labour market evidence and employer engagement. It identifies areas of acute skills pressure, anticipated medium-term demand, and priority sectors reflecting their strategic and economic importance.

Evidence draws on ONS data, national and regional workforce assessments (including Skills England), sector research, employer and stakeholder consultations, and Lightcast analysis.

Manufacturing and Engineering, Health and Social Care, Construction, and Business and Professional Services remain central to the local economy, supporting significant employment and offering strong potential for high-value growth.

Higher Education in the Marches

The Marches is unusual in having no single broad-subject university. Many residents therefore leave to study elsewhere, and long distances plus rural transport links make commuting to a broad-subject university difficult, even within the wider West Midlands. HESA 2024/25 data shows 15,820 Marches residents took up HE, and of those 64% left the West Midlands to access HE. From the data for state-funded mainstream Marches schools and colleges for 2022/23 leavers 31% progressed to HE within or outside the Marches, below the West Midlands average (37%) and the national rate (38%).

However, degree and post graduate qualifications can still be studied locally through three specialist providers: Harper Adams University, a leading agriculture institution with strengths that translate into food manufacture, construction and digital; Hereford College of Arts, producing creative graduates with transferable skills (including games design); and NMITE, a progressive new provider offering a hands-on, business-led model for engineering, construction and defence.

The main FE colleges and key private providers also offer HE programmes and continue to expand their offer, as do those offering degrees within the Marches. We must continue to ensure careers advisers and other influencers promote not only the local HE offer, but also how these courses have been designed around the needs of local industries, therefore offering good realistic employment opportunities to those who stay local. Promotion has so far been weaker than it could be; working to address this with the stakeholders responsible for careers advice is a key element of the LSIP remit.

The three large general FE colleges have already increased their HE provision further to meet the need, the vast majority being Level 4 courses. We also see a rise in Level 5 and above, though still small in number, these course choices are growing. For example, new courses include a Level 5 in Leadership & Management at Shrewsbury College, Level 5 Nursing Associate Apprenticeship at Telford College in collaboration with Keele University, and HLNSC offer a L5 in Health & Social Care – Leader in Adult Care. To further access to training the colleges have all embraced modular, part-time, hybrid and other models to allow the greatest numbers to access the courses, especially supporting those upskilling or reskilling. September 2026, 2027, and 2028 will see additional HE

courses, currently in development, and new or changed course content become available, increasing the offer, whilst also enabling the embedding of AI and other advancements.

Overview of Skills Challenges

Ongoing employer engagement, including the Marches LSIP additional Employer’s Voice Reports, highlight common skills gaps across sectors. Employers consistently report shortages in core employability skills—such as communication, punctuality, reliability, and workplace discipline—particularly among candidates under 25 years.

Digital skills gaps are widespread, ranging from basic digital literacy (e.g. spreadsheets and Microsoft Office) to specialist roles such as software developers, IT technicians, digital marketing and cyber specialists. Skills to effectively use AI and automation tools are also increasingly needed.

Employers also report shortages in technical and trade roles, including engineering (mechanical, electrical, maintenance, design, process and CNC), construction trades, and health and social care roles such as care assistants, social workers and SEN specialists.

Figure 8 - The Marches Priority Skills Needs



Identified Skills Priorities

Based on local and national evidence, three skills priorities have been identified in Manufacturing & Engineering, Health & Social Care, and Construction, reflecting persistent workforce shortages and their importance to the Marches’ long-term economic resilience.

Alongside sector-specific priorities, employers from all sectors consistently highlight digital capability and professional skills as essential for workforce readiness, particularly amid ongoing digital transformation and automation.

In the previous LSIP, Professional & Business Services had been identified as a key sector contributing to the development of skills priorities. While the sector continues to play an important role in the local economy, establishing a focused and deliverable set of priorities for this LSIP has required careful consideration of areas where skills needs overlap. Many of the skills associated with the Professional & Business Services sector align closely with the priority skills needs identified in digital capabilities and professional skills. As such, these priority areas will help address the gaps identified through employer engagement. The following provides a detailed overview of the key skills needs identified across the Marches priority sectors of Manufacturing & Engineering, Health & Social Care, and Construction, as well as the cross-cutting themes of Digital and Employability Skills.

Figure 9 - Examples of some of the wide range of skills gaps identified by local employers

Agriculture, Mining, Energy, Utilities		Manufacturing / Engineering - All Types	
Administration Staff	Engineers	Administration Staff	Laboratory Assistants
Agricultural Workers	Farm Managers	Assembly Workers	Lead Engineers
Butchers	Herd Managers	Business Admin Staff	Machine Engineers
Dairy Operatives	Horticultural Workers	Development Managers	Marketing Staff
		CNC Controllers	Mechanical Designers
		Controls Engineers	Mechanical Engineers
		Customer Service Staff	Milling Machine Staff
		Design Engineers	Multi Skilled Operatives
		Draughtspersons	Printing Coordinators
		Electrical Engineers	Production Operatives
		Estimators	Sales Admin Staff
		Fabrication Metal Workers	Sewing Machinists
		Hand Tool Operatives	Technical Sales
		Installation Engineers	Warehouse Staff
Construction & Environmental Technologies			
Accounts Staff	Gas Engineers		
Architectural Assistants	HVAC Technicians		
Contract Managers	Plasterers		
Electricians	Quantity Surveyors		
Erectors	Renderers		
Estimators	Roofers		
Factory Operatives	Utility Searchers		
Finance Managers	Welder Fabricators		
Education - All Settings		Professional Services - All Aspects	
Administration Staff	Maintenance Staff	Administrative Staff	Junior Managers
Care Staff (all levels)	Sports Coaches	Account Managers	Legal Support Staff
HR Staff	Teaching Staff	Accountants & Tax Staff	Lighting Operatives
		Business Growth Managers	Marketing Assistants
		Coding Developers	Marketing Managers
		Customer Service Staff	Negotiators
		Digital Content Creators	PR Specialists
		Digital Designers	Project Managers
		Digital Marketeers	Sales Managers
		Event Managers	Sales Staff
		Facilities Officers	SEO Specialists
		Graphic Designers	SIA Security Staff
		Help Desk Engineers	Solicitors
		IT / Software Designers	Technical Sales
		IT Engineers	Videographers
		IT System Integrators	Web Developers
Retail or Wholesale			
Administration Staff	Sales Assistants		
Customer Service Staff	Service Engineers		
Digital Marketing Staff	Software Specialists		
Drivers	Warehouse Staff		
Health & Social Care			
Administration Staff	Registered Nurses		
Drivers	Senior Care Staff		
Junior Care Assistants	Skilled Care Assistants		
Mental Health Staff	Training Coordinators		
Registered Managers	Volunteer Support Staff		

Manufacturing & Engineering



Manufacturing remains one of the Marches' most significant economic strengths, making up 15% of total economic output, the second largest of all sectors behind real estate, and 11% of total employment, again the second highest behind Health & Social Care.

The sector also exhibits a high degree of local specialisation, demonstrated by a Location Quotient (LQ) of 1.58, indicating that manufacturing activity is more than one-and-a-half times as concentrated in the Marches as it is nationally.

The sector is broad and diverse, with established strengths in food and drink production, supported by major multinational firms such as Müller and Heineken, significant defence manufacturing activity centred in Telford where Rheinmetall BAE Systems Land (RBSL) operates a key production facility

for military vehicles, to electrical components manufacturer Schneider, Agri-Tech milking robotics specialist Fullwood JOZ, and Lowfield Timber who produce off-site wood based precision engineered construction components. Collectively, these capabilities reinforce the Marches contribution to two of the Industrial Strategy's priority sectors: Advanced Manufacturing and Defence and underline the sub-region's capacity to support national economic growth objectives.

Despite its scale and strategic importance, the sector continues to face persistent challenges in recruiting technical and engineering talent. Continued employer engagement highlights significant gaps in engineering skills across Mechanical, Electrical, Maintenance, Design Engineers, Process Engineers, CNC machinists. This builds on the 2025 Employer's Voice Report which identified ongoing shortages across a range of roles, including Assembly Operatives, Controls Engineers, Metal & Tool Operatives, and Mechanical & Electrical Engineers.

National research indicates that ongoing digital transformation will continue to reshape production processes and increase the need for environmentally sustainable approaches. Robotics, advanced materials, additive manufacturing, and Computer Numerical Control (CNC) technologies are already influencing employer demand for skills, altering production methods, and redefining the capabilities required within the workforce, and will continue to redefine the skills required within the workforce.

In the coming years, manufacturing occupations will continue to evolve as firms integrate digital systems, automated production methods, and data driven decision-making into their operations. As a result, employers will require a workforce skilled in emerging technologies, able to adapt to changing production environments, and capable of applying advanced technical, analytical, and digital competencies.

Identifying Skills Priorities

Skills England's Advanced Manufacturing Sector Skills Needs Assessment identifies Metal Machining Setters and Setter Operators, Design and Development Engineers, and Engineering Professionals (not elsewhere classified) as the roles experiencing the most significant current shortages.

This aligns with findings from the 2025 Employer's Voice Report and ongoing stakeholder and employer engagement, which highlight continued recruitment difficulties across a range of engineering and technical occupations, including Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, Skilled Trades, and Machine Operatives.

Drawing on national research, local labour-market intelligence, and evidence on future workforce requirements, the following occupational groups have been identified as critical to ensuring that local provision meets employer needs over the next three years:

❖ Skilled Production & Process Operatives ❖ Engineering Professionals ❖

Skilled Production and Process Operatives

Skilled Production and Process Operatives form the operational core of the Marches Manufacturing & Engineering sector. These roles underpin a wide range of industrial activities including assembly, machining, plant operation, and logistics. Labour market intelligence and employer engagement demonstrate that these occupations represent some of the highest employing and highest demand roles across the sector.

Local employers continue to experience difficulties recruiting for positions such as CNC Machinists, Metalworking Operatives, Assembly Operatives, and Welding & Fabrication Specialists. Lightcast forecasts up to 2030 estimate that Assemblers; Metal Working Production & Maintenance Fitters and Operatives; and those in elementary process plant occupations are projected to account for around 15% of employment across the Marches, underscoring the importance of maintaining a robust pipeline of skilled operatives. This could be an ideal opportunity for those choosing to stay in the area after finishing education with an interest in Manufacturing, as a starting point for a career in the sector, especially given the continued strong demand for these roles.

Although these roles will evolve as firms integrate greater automation and advanced manufacturing technologies, they will remain essential to meeting near-term production requirements across the sector.

The UK Standard Skills Classification helps provide an overview of the specific skills sought by employers in Skilled Trades and Technical Operatives roles, which includes the ability to:

❖ Assemble mechanical and electrical components and equipment ❖ Assemble metal, wood and plastic products ❖ Check production samples against specifications ❖ Apply precision metalworking techniques ❖ Position welding equipment and safety protection ❖ Operate industrial presses ❖ Shape and form metal products ❖ Operate sandblasting equipment ❖ Operate metal forming presses ❖

Engineering Professionals

These roles underpin product development, process optimisation, systems design, and the integration of automation and advanced technologies. Local engagement and national research consistently identify engineering roles, particularly Electrical & Mechanical Engineers, Design Engineers, and Controls or Systems Specialists, as among the most difficult to recruit.

The adoption of robotics, automation, advanced materials, additive manufacturing, and Computer Numerical Control (CNC) technologies is accelerating, reshaping production methods and driving demand for engineers who can apply core engineering principles while also implementing, managing, and optimising new technologies. These developments require engineering professionals with hybrid capabilities spanning mechanical, electrical, software, and digital disciplines.

In addition, as manufacturing continues to become more data-driven, there is also a growing requirement for Programmers, Software Engineers, and Systems Integration Specialists who can

support digital production platforms, interpret real-time data, and configure automated systems to improve productivity and reduce downtime.

Some of the key skills required in engineering professional roles include the ability to:

❖ Operate Computer-Aided Design software ❖ Assemble mechanical components and equipment ❖ Design metal and engineering components ❖ Evaluate and refine engineering designs ❖ Write technical documents and reports ❖ Analyse costs and benefits of proposed designs ❖ Develop technical specifications for systems ❖ Fix code and application bugs ❖

These findings inform the LSIP skills priority for Manufacturing & Engineering to ensure the future workforce is equipped with the skills to support our Manufacturing & Engineering strengths from agri-food to defence, providing the technical and digital skills needed.

Health & Social Care



Health & Social Care is the largest employing sector across the Marches, accounting for 15% of total employment, and remains one of the most significant contributors to the local economy, representing nearly 10% of total economic output. The sector continues to face longstanding challenges in retaining a skilled workforce, evidenced by caring personal service occupations recording the highest number of vacancies locally.

Employer engagement has highlighted persistent gaps in healthcare roles including Care Assistants (Levels 2-3) and Higher-level Care/Support Workers, Social Workers, Occupational Therapists and Clinicians, and those in caring for those with Special Needs. Employers often highlighted difficulty finding staff with resilience, patience, and communication skills for demanding care roles.

Demand for services is expected to rise further due to the ageing population, with both Herefordshire and Shropshire reporting median ages significantly above the national average. This will place additional pressure on the sector to meet growing levels of complex and long-term health conditions while maintaining resilient local health and care infrastructure.

Skills England's Assessment of Priority Skills to 2030 forecasts that Care Workers and Home Carers will experience the greatest rise in employment across the IS-8(+2) Industrial Strategy sectors. This highlights the need for a resilient, well-trained workforce capable of responding to increasing and increasingly complex care requirements.

The NHS 10-Year Plan emphasises the need for the sector to adapt to several long-term shifts, including the expansion of community-based care and the adoption of digital tools to enhance care delivery and case management. These developments underline the importance of ensuring that the workforce possesses both strong technical capabilities and the broader professional and digital skills required to operate effectively in modern care settings.

Identifying Skills Priorities

Caring occupations stand out as key skills gaps nationally and locally. Skills for Care estimate there are 25,000 Adult Social Care posts across the Marches, with 1,500 of these currently vacant. Three quarters of the workforce across England are estimated to provide direct care, but there is an increasing need for managerial and regulating professionals, which make up around 12% of the total workforce¹¹.

There remains a need to develop a robust pipeline of Nurses and Health Professionals capable of meeting the increasing care needs of the Marches' ageing population. The NHS 10 Year Plan highlights the importance of expanding community-based care and adopting digital tools to support care delivery, case management, and service efficiency. This shift reinforces the need for additional community nurses and healthcare support workers, ensuring that local services can respond effectively to rising levels of demand and growing clinical complexity.

Drawing together evidence on current skills gaps and future workforce requirements, two occupational groups have been identified as critical to ensuring that local provision can meet employer needs:

❖ Caring and Nursing Professionals ❖ Senior Care Workers ❖

Caring and Nursing Professionals

Caring and Nursing Professionals form the core of the Marches' Health & Social Care workforce, providing essential support to older residents, individuals with long-term conditions, and those with complex needs. These roles involve the provision of personal care, health monitoring, medication administration, and both emotional and practical support across residential, domiciliary, community and hospital settings.

Future demand for these occupations is expected to increase substantially, particularly in specialist areas such as dementia care. Skills England's sector skills needs assessment indicates that shortages in specialist caring capability are already evident nationally and will require targeted action to address.

Lightcast projections indicate that Care Workers and Home Carers alone are expected to account for 16% of total sector employment by 2030, while Nursing Auxiliaries, Registered Nurses, and Specialist Nurses are projected to represent around one-fifth of the workforce. This trend underscores the importance of ensuring a sustainable, well-trained pipeline of Caring and Nursing Professionals across the Marches in meeting the needs of local residents. There is also the need to consider the long-term shift towards community-based models of care, increasing the demand for Community Nurses and Support Staff able to deliver services outside traditional hospital settings.

Collectively, these trends highlight the need to ensure a sustainable pipeline of skilled workers capable of supporting the Marches growing Health & Social Care requirements. The UK Standard

¹¹ Skills for Care The state of the adult social care sector and workforce in England (2025)

Skills Classification helps provide an overview of the specific skills sought by employers within core care and nursing roles. This includes the ability to:

- ❖ Support people with daily living activities
- ❖ Provide palliative care
- ❖ Support people with physical disabilities
- ❖ Produce and maintain patient records
- ❖ Establish supportive relationships with patients and social care users
- ❖

Senior Care Workers

Local engagement has highlighted persistent challenges in filling senior care roles. Nationally, vacancies remain significant, with a 7% vacancy rate across all adult social care roles¹². Although Senior Care Worker vacancies are slightly lower at 4.3%, Registered Manager positions face much higher vacancy rates of around 11%. These pressures are reinforced by the Adult Social Care Workforce Survey, which shows that 57% of providers in the Midlands experience staff retention challenges, particularly within domiciliary care services.

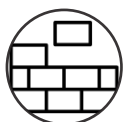
These challenges underscore the importance of promoting clear, structured pathways for progression within the Social Care sector, which will help to maintain a resilient workforce, ensuring that Senior Care Workers can develop the additional knowledge and capabilities required to undertake their responsibilities effectively. Already we see our colleges looking to ensure that those doing Level 1 and 2 can now progress to Level 3 and are aware of those options.

Senior Care Workers require additional capabilities, including the ability to:

- ❖ Create care plans for vulnerable people
- ❖ Manage staff recruitment
- ❖ Inspect facilities to ensure compliance with safety regulations
- ❖ Coordinate holistic care plans
- ❖ Administer medication to control pain
- ❖ Provide advice on social care provision
- ❖ Supervise residential care staff
- ❖ Mentor colleagues and staff
- ❖

Collectively, these findings inform the LSIP priority for Health & Social Care to ensure local provision can help to meet the health and care needs of our population, whilst looking at logical progression routes to expand opportunities in Social Care and health delivery. Working with both the Social Care Sector and the NHS to map out the routes most suited to their needs within the practicalities of delivering the training local, which can at times, be addressed by collaboration with out of area universities or support from organisations such as Skills for Care.

Construction – including Green Skills



Construction is an essential part of the Marches economy, underpinning housing delivery and infrastructure development. The sector accounts for around 13% of all businesses and remains an important source of employment.

¹² Skills for Care The state of the adult social care sector and workforce in England (2025)

However, the sector is experiencing a persistent labour shortfall, both locally and regionally. Analysis from the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) indicates that the West Midlands will require an additional 7,000 workers annually to meet projected demand to 2028. Demand for construction skills is expected to intensify further over the coming years, driven by large-scale national and regional priorities, including the Government's commitment to deliver 1.5 million new homes by the end of Parliament and the increasing need for low-carbon infrastructure to support clean power and net-zero ambitions. Locally, housing delivery in the Marches will need to increase to 4,214 homes annually to contribute its share in achieving national house building ambitions.

The sector is also undergoing significant transformation due to the growing emphasis on sustainability and the wider adoption of Modern Methods of Construction (MMC). These shifts are reshaping both the skills profile and the technical requirements of the workforce. Professionals and managers now require a deeper understanding of digitally enabled construction methods and environmentally responsible development. While construction trades workers and installers increasingly need the capability to implement low-carbon solutions such as solar panels and air source or ground source heat pumps to help in the aim of lowering domestic carbon emissions. Demand for these skills will likely rise as updates to the Future Homes Standard will require most newly built homes to be equipped with solar panels and heat pumps from 2028¹³.

Identifying Skills Priorities

National research has indicated that some of the most acute skills shortages currently lie within housebuilding trades (this includes Bricklayers, Glaziers and Fitters, Carpenters and Joiners), as well as in professional roles including Architects and Civil Engineers¹⁴. This aligns with findings from local employer engagement which report gaps across Construction Trades (Electricians, Plumbers, Joiners, Bricklayers, Carpenters, Plasterers, Roofers, Groundworkers), and those in professional roles (Architectural Assistants, Quantity Surveyors and Estimators).

Skills England's Assessment of Priority Skills to 2030 highlights a range of housebuilding trades (Carpenters and Joiners; Construction and Building Trades n.e.c; Electricians and Electrical Fitters) and construction professionals (Production Managers & Directors in Construction; and Civil Engineers) as among the top 20 occupations across the economy¹⁵ projected to see the greatest additional rise in employment. In addition, CITB regional research for the West Midlands¹⁶ projects there will be strong demand across a range of roles including trades/site-based roles; construction professionals including Site Engineers and Surveyors; and supporting roles in finance and business development.

¹³ Department for Energy Security and Net Zero Government to make "plug-in solar" available within months [24 March 2026]

¹⁴ Skills England Sector Skills Needs Assessments Construction (2025)

¹⁵ The assessment of priority skills includes the IS-8 sectors of Advanced Manufacturing; Clean Energy Industries; Defence; Digital and Technologies; Financial Services; Life Sciences; and Professional Businesses Services, along with Health & Social Care and Construction.

¹⁶ CITB Focusing on the Skills Construction Needs, Labour Market Intelligence Report 2024-2028

Bringing together evidence on current skills gaps along with research into the future needs in Construction, the following occupational groups have been identified as critical for ensuring that local provision can meet the needs of local employers over the next three years:

❖ Trades Based Roles ❖ Construction Managers ❖ Construction Professionals ❖

Trades Based Roles

Demand for Trades Based roles such as Carpenters, Joiners, Plumbers, Electricians, Bricklayers, Roofers, Plasterers, and General Site Operatives, is consistently high, as evidenced nationally and locally through the Employer's Voice Report and continued engagement. These occupations already make up a large proportion of construction employment across the Marches and are forecast to grow due to national housebuilding and clean energy ambitions, pressing the need to build more homes and energy supporting infrastructure.

There will be a need for retrofit solutions to the existing housing stock, which in itself presents a unique set of needs given the existing stock of traditional properties across the Marches. Historic England Skills for Working on Traditionally Constructed Buildings sets out that across the Marches, there will be an estimated need for an additional 1,280 workers per year to help meet net zero requirements and associated upturn in demand for retrofitting skills¹⁷, Heritage skills will therefore need to be understood alongside modern methods of construction and green skills

Given the pressing need for construction skills, particularly in relation to housebuilding targets, it is crucial that the Marches has a skilled workforce that has the ability to play its part in hitting these targets. Lightcast projections indicate that construction trades will account for around a quarter of all employment in the sector by 2030.

The UK Standard Skills Classification highlights core technical competencies commonly required across these roles. Given the breadth of trades involved in supporting construction activity, these requirements are diverse, however, the following provides an overview of the core technical skill needs commonly associated with these roles:

❖ Lay bricks and block ❖ Build, cover and maintain roofs ❖ Install building fixtures ❖ Install, maintain and repair plumbing systems ❖ Service domestic boilers ❖ Install wall and floor units ❖ Install electrical power system ❖ Lay carpets & floor tiles ❖ Operate coating and painting equipment ❖ Perform repairs to plastered surfaces ❖ Install plasterboard and linings ❖

Construction Managers

Local employer engagement and national evidence highlight persistent gaps in the availability of Construction Managers and supervisory personnel. These roles are becoming increasingly important as the sub-region prepares for substantial housing delivery, large-scale infrastructure projects, and the transition towards clean energy.

¹⁷ Historic England Heritage and Carbon Delivering Net Zero for England's Historic Buildings

These gaps are being amplified by developments in MMC, retrofit, and low-carbon technologies, which demand managers who understand both traditional construction processes and newer, digitally enabled methods. As the sector becomes more reliant on off-site manufacture, precision installation, and evolving environmental standards, the need for management and supervisory staff with broader technical, digital and regulatory knowledge will continue to grow.

Occupations this covers includes Production Managers and Directors in Construction, which are forecast to be the highest employing role within Construction in the Marches by 2030; Construction and Building Trades Supervisors; and Construction Project Managers & Related Professionals. Collectively, these occupations are projected to account for around 11% of employment in the sector across the Marches by 2030. Therefore, it is crucial to continue further development and promotion of provision that is available locally, which can and is starting to provide a pathway through into management roles within Construction.

The UK Standard Skills Classifications outlines the skills associated with these roles, including the ability to:

- ❖ Apply health and safety policies in construction
- ❖ Develop specifications for building projects
- ❖ Manage construction projects
- ❖ Apply cost control measures
- ❖ Develop project schedules
- ❖ Estimate project costs
- ❖ Provide advice on construction

Construction Professionals

Shortages are also evident across professional roles, with national and local intelligence outlining gaps relating to Civil Engineers and Quantity Surveyors. Looking ahead, Skills England's Assessment of Priority Skills to 2030 has highlighted Chartered Architectural Technologists & Planning Officers, and Civil Engineers as two of the top 20 occupations projected to see the greatest rise in employment nationally.

Although these roles make up a smaller share of overall employment, they are central to delivering housing and infrastructure and will be increasingly important as MMC expands and environmental considerations become more stringent.

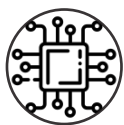
Skills required for these roles typically require the ability to:

- ❖ Assess structural condition of buildings
- ❖ Apply mathematical principles to civil engineering projects
- ❖ Collect and analyse data for engineering designs
- ❖ Operate CAD
- ❖ Conduct construction site surveys
- ❖ Define technical project requirements
- ❖ Interpret technical drawings and plans

Collectively these insights help to inform our skills needs priorities in relation to construction to continue to develop our skilled construction workforce, ensuring there is a progression route from entry level through to higher-level professional roles. This includes provision in relation to modern methods of construction, green construction skills and heritage skills. Progression routes and needs

being mapped through strengthened employer/provider collaborations.

Digital Transformation



Digital transformation is already reshaping skills requirements across the economy, as reflected in the 2025 Marches LSIP Progress Report. This shift is being driven by the rapid acceleration of artificial intelligence (AI), automation, and wider technological change. National research, including analysis undertaken by the National Foundation for Educational Research¹⁸, indicates that AI and automation will continue to disrupt the labour market, with mid- and lower-skilled roles already in decline and growth projected in professional, technical, and caring occupations. Local employer feedback reflects these trends, emphasising that competence in using digital systems is now essential across almost all sectors, and ensuring that leaders and managers have the skills to oversee and control the use of these tools by their workforce.

AI and automation tools are becoming increasingly embedded within workplace processes, with adoption expected to accelerate further as firms seek to enhance productivity and streamline operations. Demand for AI related skills is forecast to grow significantly with national forecasts estimating that roles involving core AI activities could represent approximately 12% of the workforce, around 3.9 million jobs by 2035, with a further 9.7 million jobs expected to incorporate AI adjacent responsibilities¹⁹. This underscores the need for learners to understand emerging technologies and for managers and business leaders to develop the capability to adopt and integrate these tools effectively.

Local engagement also shows a rising need for advanced technical capabilities including the need for Software Developers, IT Technicians, Cyber Specialists, and Digital Marketers. This aligns with national forecasts from Skills England as part of their assessment of priority skills to 2030, which identify Programmers, Software Development Professionals, IT Business Analysts, and IT Managers among the top five occupations projected to experience the highest growth in employment across the Government's IS-8(+2) Industrial Strategy sectors.

While digital transformation is often framed around software, data and automation tools, most workplace technologies still ultimately depend on physical infrastructure. Employers therefore continue to value practical hardware understanding alongside software competence especially in roles that involve deploying, maintaining, integrating or securing automated systems.

Reliability and productivity depend on resilient infrastructure: downtime is frequently caused by connectivity, power, devices, cabling, firmware or configuration issues, so employers need people who can diagnose end-to-end systems. For the LSIP, this means that a strong focus on software and automation should be complemented by clear training pathways in hardware adjacent areas.

¹⁸ NFER The Skills Imperative 2035

¹⁹ UK Government AI Skills for Life and Work: summary report (2026)

Digital compliance and cybersecurity are a growing area of concern with the increasing need for businesses to have an online presence. The importance of digital security is increasing, particularly given the average economic costs this can have, as well as the potential reputational damage which can ensue. Cyber-attacks cost an estimated £195,000, with half of all small businesses suffering a cyber-attack in the last 12 months²⁰, emphasising the need for cyber security knowledge.

At the same time, there is a need to ensure that the workforce has the basic digital skills required by employers. An estimated 7.3 million working adults nationally lack the minimum digital capabilities required for employment²¹. This gap affects productivity and growth, with almost one-third of skills-shortage vacancies linked to insufficient digital skills, and half of those specifically attributable to a lack of basic digital skills²².

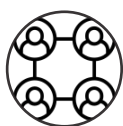
Identifying Skills Priorities

Across the Marches, employers consistently report gaps in foundational digital skills, including the use of Spreadsheets, Microsoft Office applications, and CRM systems. Simultaneously, demand is increasing for more advanced competencies such as programming, systems integration, digital compliance, cloud technologies, data analytics, and cybersecurity. Employers also highlight growing expectations for employees to use AI-enabled and automation tools confidently to support productivity and decision-making.

Ensuring that the workforce possess both foundational and advanced digital capabilities is therefore essential for future resilience, innovation, and economic competitiveness. For this reason, digital proficiency is identified as a core cross-cutting skills priority for the Marches.

In response, the priority for the Marches is to equip learners with emerging digital and AI-related skills whilst upskilling managers and business leaders so they recognise the value of AI and automation; support higher-level digital skills, including programming, software development, hardware/systems engineers and cybersecurity, to meet future labour-market demand; and to work to remove basic digital skills gaps, ensuring that all learners and workers can confidently use fundamental workplace technologies.

Employability Skills



An important foundation of the previous LSIP was the need to develop ‘workforce ready’ skills for learners to ensure a smooth transition to the workplace. This has not changed over the last three years. Feedback gathered through extensive employer engagement across all sectors and business sizes continues to emphasise the importance of essential employability skills, particularly communication, punctuality, reliability, and basic workplace

²⁰ UK Government Businesses urged to “lock the door” on cyber criminals as new Government campaign launches (2026)

²¹ Skills England Sector skills needs assessments Digital and Technologies (2025)

²² UK Government Digital Inclusion Action Plan: First Steps (2025)

discipline. These attributes are viewed as crucial for younger candidates (under 25 years) entering the labour market for the first time.

Although the nature of work is evolving due to advances in AI, automation, and wider digital transformation, the importance of soft skills has not diminished. On the contrary, national research consistently reinforces that these competencies will become even more significant in enabling workers to adapt to new technologies, respond to changing job expectations, and operate effectively in increasingly dynamic and technology-enabled environments.

There is clear alignment between the skills employers in the Marches are seeking from new entrants and the findings of national studies, including those undertaken by Skills England and the National Foundation for Educational Research as part of their Skills Imperative 2035 programme. These capabilities can be grouped into several essential employment skill domains.

Leadership and management capabilities are also persistent cross-sector gaps. Businesses report strong demand for Site and Contract Managers with modern management skills, alongside a growing need for digital confidence among managers in Construction and Engineering.

Several sectors including Health & Social Care, Education, and Digital emphasise gaps in leadership capacity, with employers seeking senior leadership qualifications, stronger conflict management skills, and more effective project and time management. Smaller firms, particularly in Professional Services and Digital Industries, also note difficulties attracting experienced project managers and individuals with the ability to lead teams or mentor junior staff. Ensuring that individuals can develop leadership and management skills capabilities is crucial in supporting their own career development, but also to provide guidance and support to staff members they manage, so they can continue to develop in their careers.

The need for workforce planning capabilities continues to emerge amongst the business base. There are of course time and capacity constraints, particularly for SMEs. Nonetheless, the need for those with skills to be able to plan for what skills they will need from their workforce in the coming years is apparent, to help ensure that provision can be less reactive to employer needs and therefore aligning more closely to the needs of the employer.

Overall, the findings show that management capability, leadership readiness, and the soft skills that underpin effective supervision are critical workforce gaps that continue to constrain growth and productivity across the region. In response, the Marches LSIP will prioritise, ensuring that learners and young people develop the core skills and competencies required to enter the workforce with confidence, whilst working to nurture leadership and management capabilities to help strengthen the local workforce.



Figure 10 - Essential Employment Skills



Communication

This is the ability to express ideas clearly and interpret the meaning of others with accuracy. It involves speaking, listening, writing and presenting in ways that avoid misunderstanding. Communication will remain indispensable: it is the channel through which knowledge is shared, trust is built, and complex work is coordinated.



Collaboration

This refers to working with others in ways that create enduring relationships and achieve shared goals. It is not just dividing tasks, but weaving together diverse perspectives, skills and motivations into a common endeavour. Collaboration will be a defining skill: those who can nurture long-term cooperation will enable innovation, resilience and shared success.



Information Literacy

This is the ability to find, evaluate and use information to make sound decisions. It requires weighing evidence, testing arguments, and judging credibility in a world where data and opinions are abundant but not always reliable. As artificial intelligence generates ever more information, the capacity to question, filter and validate will be crucial.



Planning & Prioritising

It involves setting clear goals, designing workable plans, and sequencing tasks so that objectives are met on time and within constraints, and coordinating efforts of others. When work is likely to be more fluid, fast-paced and project-based, those who can organise, plan and prioritise effectively will provide the structure that enables progress.



Problem Solving

This involves identifying and understanding challenges, generating options, and selecting the best course of action under conditions that are often uncertain. It requires logic and creativity, evidence and judgement, and the ability to balance short-term needs with long-term goals.



Creative Thinking

This is the capacity to generate fresh ideas and apply them in ways that add value. It involves looking at challenges from new angles and combining perspectives to create something original. Those who can think differently will drive innovation, adapt to change, and unlock opportunities that others may overlook.



3. Agreed Changes and Actions Needed

This section outlines agreed actions informed by evidence, engagement, and identified priority skills needs, set within the economic, labour market, and strategic context.

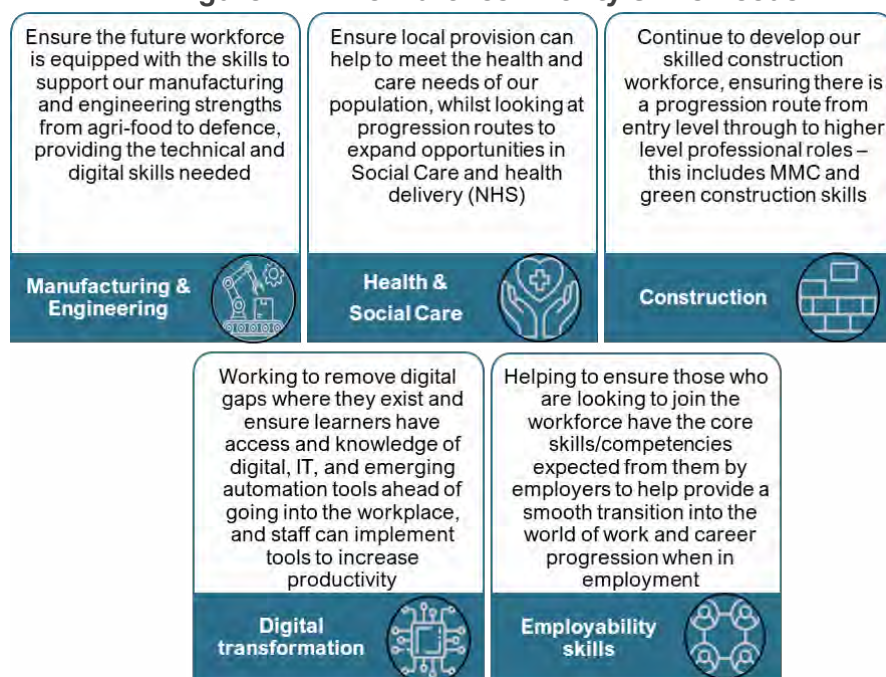
The actions do not constitute a comprehensive skills strategy for the whole economy; instead, they focus on areas where skills shortages and growth opportunities would most benefit from intervention. These priorities reflect acute skills pressures, expected medium-term demand, and their strategic and economic importance to the Marches.

All three of the LSIP priority sectors offer not only progression routes but also excellent entry level opportunities for those starting, returning to or changing their career. Progression routes have been helped by our providers upgrading their website information but still there is much to do in the careers advice area. The local careers advice services do excellent work to highlight and explain career opportunities, as do local employers. However, consistent employer feedback from our three priority sectors shows they want more emphasis on promoting local sectors and the career paths they offer. They also articulate that there are prevalent outdated views of their industries and this is masking the excellent career paths and opportunities they offer to every level of candidate.

Reflecting upon the region's geography, demographics, and identified labour and skills needs, provision is focused on Levels 1–4, with a limited number of targeted higher-level courses. Delivery spans Harper Adams University, Hereford College of Arts (HCA), Herefordshire, Ludlow and North Shropshire College (HLNSC), Independent Training Providers (ITPs), the New Model Institute for Technology and Engineering (NMITE), Shrewsbury College, and Telford College.

For each priority skills need, we set out a selection of existing provision, planned activity, and new actions co-developed with the LSIP Board.

Figure 11 - The Marches Priority Skills Needs



Manufacturing & Engineering



There is a strong Manufacturing & Engineering offer further developed through the first LSIP and the formation of the Marches Education Partnership (MEP). The MEP has brought together education providers specifically to address staff and skills shortages in the Manufacturing & Engineering sectors, including food and drink, using funding available from the Strategic Development Fund and Local Skills Improvement Fund. Telford College's new Engineering Centre, with access to cutting-edge technology and state-of-the-art automation cell to recreate a real-world manufacturing line at In-Comm Training's Telford Technical Academy, showcase the work underway to help bridge these gaps.

Our FE colleges and ITPs offer entry level courses up to Level 5 provision in Electrical and Mechanical Engineering, with T-level and apprenticeship routes available including Engineering Maintenance and Engineering Manufacturing Technician Apprenticeships at Telford College. In-Comm and Herefordshire & Worcestershire Group Training Association (HWGTA) also offer a range of engineering courses that cover the high demand for Robotics, Mechatronics, Fitter / Operative training, and Welding. Shrewsbury College has recently received approval from the National Skills Academy as one of only six national providers recognised and approved for delivering Food and Drink Engineering apprenticeships, alongside new investment in facilities to enhance the training and apprenticeship offer. There is increased demand across electrical courses and additional links into industry placements and career enrichment programmes, including at Telford and Donnington. Providers are targeting additional recruitment to staff these growing courses. Hereford, Ludlow & North Shropshire College (HLNSC) are investing in equipment relevant to modern manufacturing including 3D printing, materials testing equipment, robotics and wind tunnels. Telford College is partnering with Lincoln College, who are a Tech Excellence lead for defence, very relevant to the growing amount of defence manufacturing in Telford.

There is higher-level provision at Harper Adams University, including a foundational degree in Robotics, Automation & Mechatronic Engineering through to undergraduate degrees in Agricultural Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, and master's degree in Automotive, Engineering and Mechanical Engineering. Expanding courses have been supported by LSIF funding. In-Comm are partnering with Harper Adams University to expand expert and commercial specialised provision in these areas. NMITE in Hereford offer a foundation year for those interested in engineering, through to undergraduate degrees in Integrated Engineering and master's degree in Engineering and Mechanical Engineering.

The next two-part diagram sets out a summary of the provision already underway and planned activities, along with new actions which have been co-developed with the LSIP board to help work towards our Manufacturing & Engineering priority skills need.



Figure 12 - Manufacturing & Engineering Change/Actions



Health & Social Care



Our FE colleges provide Levels 1 – 3 in Health & Social Care including T-level provision; T-level foundation programme in Health, and T-levels in Midwifery and Supporting the Adult Nursing Team. Telford College also partners with Keele University to offer higher-level Healthcare Professions HNC/HND courses onsite. HLNSC also offer HNC Health & Social Care Practice (HNC/HND) and Leader in Adult Care provision.

Shrewsbury College offers distance learning in care planning, dementia care, infection control, advocacy, and medication handling, while Telford College provides a Step into Health & Social Care course for those returning to work.

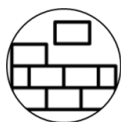
The next two-part diagram sets out a summary of the provision already underway and planned activities, along with new actions to help work towards our Health & Social Care priority skills need.

Figure 13 - Health & Social Care Change/Actions



© Telford College

Construction



There is strong Level 1–3 courses in trades provision across the Marches covering Bricklaying, Carpentry & Joinery, Plumbing, Electrical Installation, Painting & Decorating, and general Construction skills. This includes apprenticeship provision across our FE colleges and plans for T-level provision at Shrewsbury College in Design, Surveying and Planning for Construction: Surveying and Design for Construction later this year. HLNSC also have leading strengths in Blacksmithing with courses covering Levels 2-3 and introductory short courses available. All our FE colleges have applied for Construction Skills Capacity funding to help ensure that the Marches core trades provision can be expanded to cater to growing demand.

The MEP has also focused on developing the Construction offer across the Marches, with a focus on environmental technologies. As we look ahead to the next three years, it will become increasingly important that we equip our workforce with the green construction skills needed to help work towards net zero ambitions through retrofitting measures. The Herefordshire Low Carbon Technology Centre at HLNSC is developing industry-lead training initially focused on heat pumps and Solar PV installation, with longer-term plans to expand provision into areas such as battery storage, EV charging and additional retrofit solutions. HLNSC has partnered with Dudley College, who are the areas lead Construction Excellence College. Alongside this HLNSC are growing delivery in MMC, heritage & green skills through their own Low Carbon Technology Centre, giving learners access to specialist training and facilities, alongside more traditional construction skills, which can help provide crucial retrofit skills.

There are higher-level courses available in the Marches to help provide a progression pathway within Construction, however it is an area which is currently under review to ensure there are enough opportunities locally. Currently, there are higher-level courses at our FE colleges covering in MMC at both (Shrewsbury and HLNSC) and Construction Management (Shrewsbury). Our HE institutions have Construction provision including BSc Construction Management at NMITE.

CIOB Contribution to the Marches LSIP Project

The Marches LSIP has established a strategic partnership with the Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB) to enhance the quality and coherence of construction education across the region. The partnership provides FE and post-16 providers with access to nationally recognised resources that strengthen learner progression from entry-level training to higher-level technical and professional pathways.

By broadening provision beyond traditional wet trades, the CIOB offer supports the LSIP's objective to develop a workforce with a stronger understanding of project structures, build complexity, and career progression. This improves learner readiness for employment while complementing existing technical provision.

From September 2026, providers will report termly on engagement and impact, enabling the LSIP to monitor outcomes and ensure continuous alignment with employer demand. The partnership with CIOB will continue alongside the LSIP's established relationship with CITB, ensuring a balanced approach to professional and trade-based skills development.

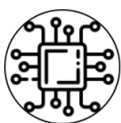
Construction remains a priority sector for the Marches economy, and the expansion of construction provision by regional colleges reflects the importance of coordinated, high-quality partnerships in delivering long-term skills priorities.

The next two-part diagram sets out a summary of the provision already underway and planned activities, along with new actions to help work towards our Construction priority skills need.

Figure 14 - Construction Changes/Actions



Digital Transformation

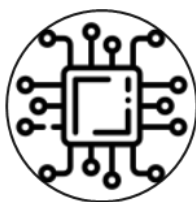
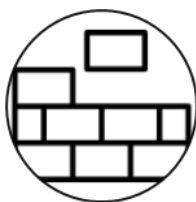


Training provision across the Marches looks to ensure learners can develop the digital skills needed to equip them at the start of their future careers, irrespective of what sector they choose to work in rather than primarily being delivered via standalone courses. However, there are standalone digital courses extending from introductory level through to high-level specialist technology pathways such as Software Development or Cyber Security.

Introductory courses such as Step Into Digital at Telford College are designed to help those looking to start a technology career through a four-week course, primarily targeted at people aged 19 and over who are currently unemployed, and providing a work placement opportunity at Capgemini's offices in Telford. There are also pathways focusing on practical digital communication technologies and how they are used in business and IT, such as Foundation Studies Business & Digital Skills at HLNSC at Level 1, with pathways into Level 2 qualifications in Computing. Shrewsbury College offer a T Level Foundation Programme in Digital. Shropshire Chamber also run various introductory courses including Microsoft Excel and introduction to AI and using Microsoft 365 Copilot within applications. The three Local Authority Growth Hubs also support digital learning, especially for small businesses.

All our FE colleges provide digital T-level provision for example Computing (Infrastructure and Cyber Security) at HLNSC; Digital Software Development & Digital Support and Security at Shrewsbury College; and Digital Support Services, Digital Business Services, Digital Production, Design & Development, Media Broadcast & Production at Telford College. There are also higher-level pathways and apprenticeships in Cyber Security Technologists at Telford College and Computing at HLNSC.

Our HE providers also have digital courses available for students including Applied Data Science at Harper Adams University and a range of specialist further and higher education digital courses at HCA (Hereford College of Arts) including undergraduate degrees in Digital Content Creation; Games Design; and Graphic & Media Design. HCA have also recently opened a Digital Skills Centre to support delivery and are exploring development of short courses focused on digital tools, creative software, and digital confidence to support adult learners and those seeking to upskill.



The next two-part diagram sets out a summary of the provision already underway and planned activities, along with new actions to help work towards our Digital Transformation priority skills need.

Figure 15 - Digital Transformation Change/Actions



Employability Skills



Training providers are increasingly embedding employability skills into their courses rather than offering them mainly as a standalone provision, making it clear that learners develop transferable skills and behaviours alongside technical skills. Standalone

Leadership and Management courses continue to support progression, with provision ranging from short Team Leading courses at Telford College and T-levels in Management and Administration at Shrewsbury and HLNSC, to higher-level Leadership and Management qualifications (HNC/HND/HTQ) across all FE colleges. Our HE institutions and ITPs also run L & M courses, in a variety of formats. Shropshire Chamber also delivers short courses and bespoke business, leadership and management training, including one-day “Manage with Confidence” workshops. Other local business training suited to elements of L&M can be found through the Local Authority Growth Hubs.

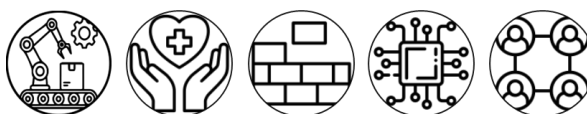
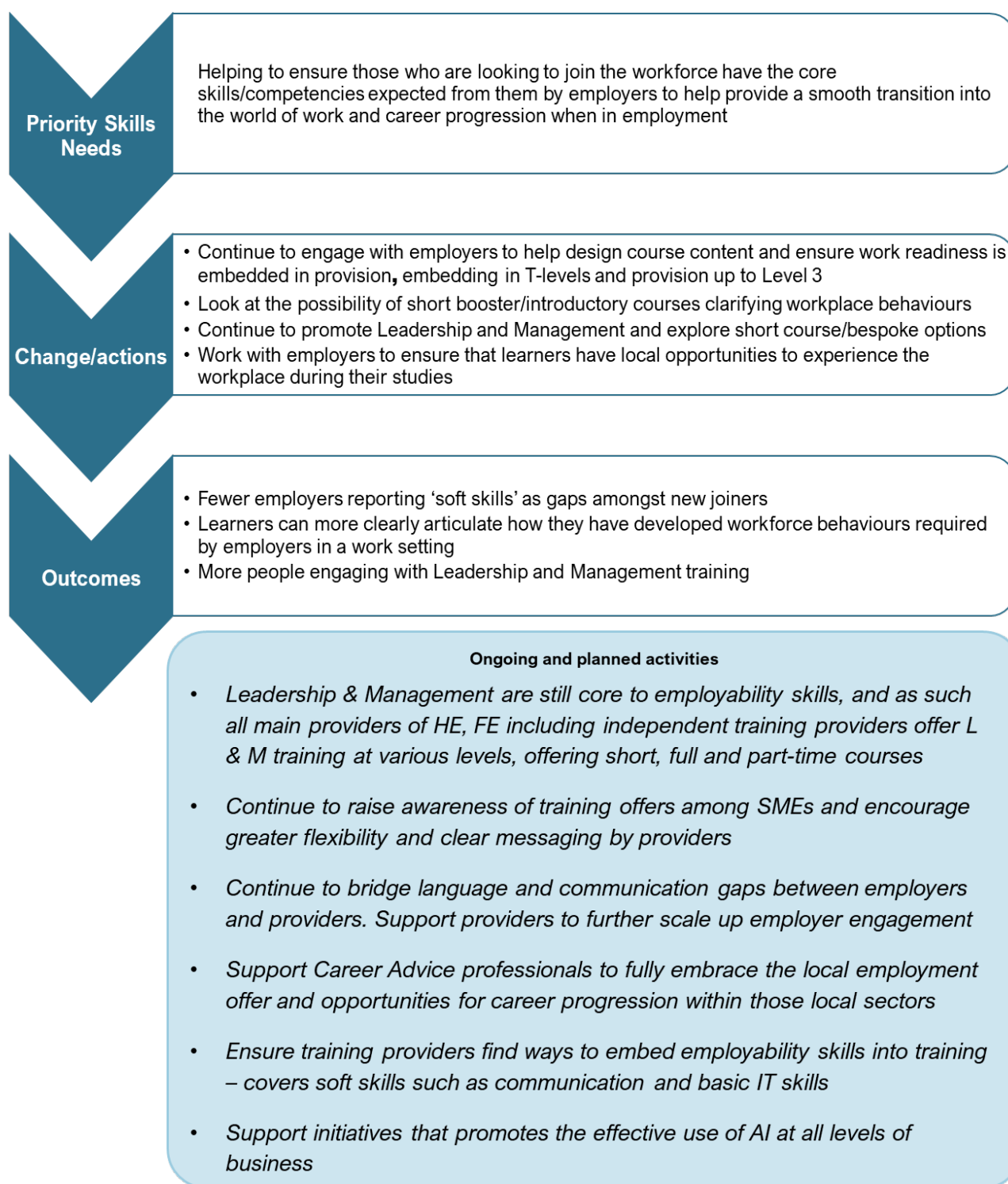
Providers are also strengthening employer engagement to help learners understand local career opportunities. For example, Shrewsbury College’s Routes2Careers Shropshire and Mid Wales pilot event enabled students, from Year 9 to college level, to explore local careers and routes into work, while allowing employers to promote their industries. Continuing such activity will help deepen employer-provider relationships and give learners clearer insight into local opportunities and progression routes.

Hereford College of Arts (HCA) – The Empower Programme

HCA has recently developed a personal and professional initiative called HCA Empower. In stages, this is being embedded into courses across both the FE and HE areas of the College. Embedded to ensure students develop personal and professional skills that will increase their employability or give them suitable entrepreneurial skills. Alongside the course elements, there are industry-led briefings, mock interviews and workplace visits. Added to this there will be instruction on the use of social media for their sector, finance awareness, time management, understanding diversity & inclusion and other relevant topics.

The next two-part diagram (Figure 16) sets out the changes and actions which can help work towards our priority skills need of ensuring learners have the skills they need from employers as they transition from education, and to help those to progress in their career.

Figure 16 - Employability Skills Change/Actions



Annex A: Skills Needs

This annex provides additional information about the skills needs identified in the LSIP, defining the key occupations and industries that are being targeted and map them to the most relevant SOC and SIC codes. The table focuses on three skill needs priorities relating to Manufacturing & Engineering, Health & Social Care, and Construction, where it is possible to use SOC codes to identify key occupations.

Figure 17- The Marches Priority Skills Needs



Our priority skills needs of Digital Transformation and Employability Skills are far more difficult to identify SOC codes for, particularly in relation to Employability Skills, given their cross-cutting requirements which relate to all sectors and types of roles. There are some digital skill needs identified including Software Developers, Programmers, Systems Engineers and Cyber Security experts, where relevant SOC codes have been identified. Whereas more basic competencies within the Digital Transformation priority covering the use of Spreadsheets, Microsoft Office applications, and CRM systems are too broad ranging to identify relevant SOC codes as they sit across many different occupations.

LSIP Occupation name	Definition within the LSIP report	Relevant SOC Code(s)	LSIP sector name	Relevant SIC Code(s)	Mapping Limitations / Further Information
Skilled Production & Process Operatives	These roles form the operational core of manufacturing activity. They are primarily responsible for assembly, machining, inspection, plant operation, and logistics functions.	8142; 8120; 8141; 5213; 9139; 5223	Manufacturing & Engineering	25.61; 25.62; 27.90; 28.41; 33.12	Production and operative roles sit across Manufacturing Sector (SIC codes 10-33). The identified SIC codes identify examples aligning to operative and fitter roles.
Engineering Professionals	These roles involve technical expertise in designing, developing, and overseeing the manufacturing processes, equipment, and systems.	2122; 2125; 2134; 3113	Manufacturing & Engineering	62.01; 62.02; 71.12/1; 71.12/9; 71.20; 74.90	Broad engineering and software development role identified. Again, lots of engineering activity will sit within SIC codes 10-33.
Caring and Nursing Professions	These roles involve providing hands-on care, assistance with daily activities, and social support.	2221; 2232; 2233; 2237; 6131; 6135	Health & Social Care	86.10; 86.20; 86.90; 87.10; 87.20; 87.30; 88.10; 88.90	Covers those providing front line healthcare provision both in Health & Social Care settings.

LSIP Occupation name	Definition within the LSIP report	Relevant SOC Code(s)	LSIP sector name	Relevant SIC Code(s)	Mapping Limitations / Further Information
Senior Care Workers	Leadership and supervisory roles within a Healthcare setting.	1232; 6136	Health & Social Care	87.10; 87.20; 87.30; 88.10; 88.90	Focuses on senior roles in Social Care to reflect the need to provide a progression pathway to help improve retention of talent.
Trades Based Construction	These roles involve direct on-site construction, installation, and finishing work.	5241; 5313; 5314; 5315; 5316; 5319/01; 5321; 5322; 5323; 8159; 9129	Construction	41.20/1; 41.20/2; 43.21; 43.22; 43.31; 43.32; 43.33, 43.34/1, 43.91	Covers both housebuilding/home improvements trades and site workers.
Construction Managers	These roles involve overseeing and managing construction projects.	1122; 2455; 5330	Construction	41.20/1, 41.20/2; 42.1; 43.12; 70.22/9; 71.11/1	Focuses on leadership roles in Construction given priority to ensure there is higher-level provision to encourage progression within Construction.

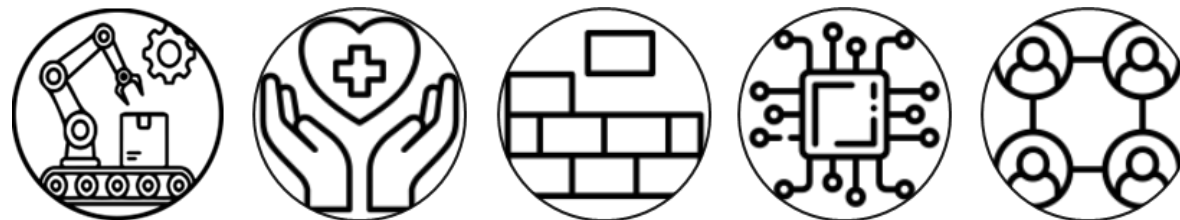
LSIP Occupation name	Definition within the LSIP report	Relevant SOC Code(s)	LSIP sector name	Relevant SIC Code(s)	Mapping Limitations / Further Information
Construction Professionals	These roles require advanced technical expertise in construction-related surveying.	2121; 2129/99; 2451; 2453;	Construction	42; 43.13; 71.11/2; 71.12/2, 71.20, 74.10	These roles will be in greater demand to support house building and infrastructure projects including feasibility of sites.
Software Developers	Software developers design, program, build, deploy and maintain software using many different skills and tools.	2134/03; 2134/04; 2134/99	Digital Transformation	62.01	These roles will be required across sectors, including Manufacturing & Engineering, but most relevant SIC (2007) codes identified relate directly to the IT sector.
Cyber Security Professionals	Cyber security professionals design, implement, test and maintain cyber security systems.	2135/01	Digital Transformation	62.02; 62.09	Cyber security knowledge, a need across all sectors as more and more businesses develop an online presence so needed across sectors, but most relevant SIC (2007) codes identified relate to the IT sector.
IT Network Professionals	IT network professionals design, set up and maintain computer networks, support the network users and fix problems.	2136; 2137	Digital Transformation	62.03; 62.09; 63.11	The need for practical hardware knowledge to be able to fix IT systems are needed across sectors, but the most relevant SIC (2007) codes identified relate to the IT sector.

Annex B: Agreed Actions

The following pages list the planned actions, these of course may flex, alter or have additions as the work progresses and needs arise.

Lead providers or stakeholders; due to the very nature of the Marches area our colleges and local authorities have very distinctive sub regional needs and cohorts, therefore, to always create a lead partner is not always possible. For example, all three broad subject FE colleges may carry out the same action or provide the same course, one not being responsible for the others and it is not risking duplication either, due to the vast geography of the Marches. However, we have seen and do see collaborations at times, such as the Marches Education Partnership. That was a collaboration between six public/private providers across the Marches, working together on two specific projects, bringing new courses and facilities forward in direct response to employer feedback and the 2023 LSIP priorities. The collaboration helped to make the best use of their collective knowledge, statistical intelligence, employer advice and maximise the benefit of the funds available, while still tailoring the activities to suit their individual institution. In these instances, usually a lead has to be designated to allow the application for the funding.

It must not be overlooked that a great deal of work has already been carried out by the providers and other stakeholders during the previous LSIP cycle. This has seen improvements, additions and innovative ways of working. This has also seen the acquisition of a mobile classroom, growth of online training to reach those who cannot access training easily, modular training, courses specifically designed to match employer need, new initiatives to improve employability skills, taster courses and so much more; this work continues with this new refreshed Marches LSIP.



Priority 1: Manufacturing & Engineering - Ensure the future workforce is equipped with the skills to support our Manufacturing and Engineering strengths from Agri-Food to Defence, covering all aspects including Fabrication, Standard Manufacture and Advanced Manufacturing, providing the technical and digital skills needed.

Activity	Lead	Partners Involved	Timescales & Milestones	Expected output(s)	Monitoring & Measurement
Continue to build on provision and joint offer through Marches Education Partnership.	MEP	Providers, Employers	LSIP period 2026-2029	Increase in Manufacturing and Engineering starts and achievements (Levels 2-7).	LSIP Board oversight and collaboration. Regular meetings with relevant stakeholders. Annual update reports and interim Skills England meetings.
Continue to offer flexibility in delivery including evening/short courses.	FE Colleges & Local University Offer	Providers, Employers	Initial testing 2026-2027	Increased interest from employers to pursue upskilling/reskilling opportunities.	
Promote investment made in equipment and technology, and opportunities for expanding facilities, in emerging technologies covering robotics, modern manufacturing techniques such as 3D printers, materials testing and kit, wind tunnels.	FE Colleges & Local University Offer	FE Colleges, Local HE Providers & LSIP Team, Local Authorities	LSIP period 2026-2029	More learners and companies using providers equipment and technology.	
Improve young people's understanding of the sector's local offer and what the modern workplace is like within this sector.	Careers Advisors Youth Hubs	FE Providers LSIP Team	LSIP period 2026-2029	More looking to stay local or train locally to be able to enter the local workforce	

Priority 2: Health & Social Care - Ensure local provision can help to meet the health and care needs of our population, whilst looking at progression routes to expand opportunities in Social Care and health delivery (NHS). Additionally offering entry routes to careers for new entrants, careers changers, ex forces personnel and those furthest from employment.

Activity	Lead	Partners Involved	Timescales & Milestones	Expected output(s)	Monitoring & Measurement
Ensure provision is available to support more people to enter Social Care, including modular based delivery, particularly for adults looking to reskill.	FE colleges	Local Authorities, Care Employers, NHS, Universities & DWP. ITPs, Skills for Care & Partners in Care	Initial testing 2026-2027	More people participating in Health & Care related training.	LSIP Board oversight and collaboration. Regular meetings with relevant stakeholders. Annual update reports and interim Skills England meetings.
Clear pathways for those looking to progress in Health & Social Care.	FE colleges	Local Authorities, Care Employers, NHS, Careers & Enterprise Co	Initial testing 2026-2027	Consolidated/growing higher-level to grow uptake in higher-level Social Care courses.	
Assess higher-level provision relating to Social Care.	FE colleges, University Collaborations	Local Authorities, Care Employers, Skills for Care, Partners in Care	Initial testing 2026-2027		
Continue to collaborate with ICBs & NHS Trusts covering the Marches area.	FE colleges	NHS ICBs Specialist University/FE collaborations	LSIP period 2026-2029	Developing relationships with ICB and NHS provide clarity on skills needs and placements.	
Improve young people's understanding of the sector's local offer and what the modern workplace is like within this sector.	Careers Advisors Youth Hubs	FE Providers LSIP Team	LSIP period 2026-2029	More looking to stay local or train locally to be able to enter the local workforce	

Priority 3: Construction - Continue to develop our skilled Construction workforce, ensuring there is a progression route from entry level through to higher-level professional roles – this includes MMC, green construction skills and heritage skills. As well as progression, ensuring training that provides opportunities for new entrants and career changers, offering a very broad spectrum of career pathways.

Activity	Lead	Partners Involved	Timescales & Milestones	Expected output(s)	Monitoring & Measurement
Ensure provision meets demand across Levels 1-3 to support site level/trades-based roles.	FE colleges, ITPs	Employers, Local Authorities, CIOB, CITB	LSIP period 2026-2029	Growing numbers accessing Levels 1-3 provision.	LSIP Board oversight and collaboration.
Develop higher-level provision to encourage a clear progression path to develop Construction careers.	FE colleges, ITPs & HE Providers	Employers, CIOB, CITB	Initial testing 2026-2027	Grow uptake in higher-level Construction courses.	Regular meetings with relevant stakeholders.
Continue to promote and expand low carbon provision including at NMITE through offer at Centre of Advanced Timber Technology & Low Carbon Centre (HLNSC).	FE colleges, ITPs, HE Provision	Employers, Local Authorities	LSIP period 2026-2029	More people engaged in reskilling/upskilling opportunities such as short courses in heat pump installation.	Annual update reports and interim Skills England meetings.
Continue to work with CIOB and employer representatives to help inform provision and deepen knowledge.	FE colleges, ITPs, HE Provision	LSIP Team	LSIP period 2026-2029		
Improve young people's understanding of the sector's local offer and what the modern workplace is like within this sector.	Careers Advisors Youth Hubs	FE Providers LSIP Team	LSIP period 2026-2029	More looking to stay local or train locally to be able to enter the local workforce	

Priority 4: Digital Transformation - Working to remove digital gaps where they exist and ensure learners have access and knowledge of digital, IT, and emerging automation tools ahead of going into the workplace, and staff can implement tools to increase productivity.

Activity	Lead	Partners Involved	Timescales & Milestones	Expected output(s)	Monitoring & Measurement
Continue to promote T-level provision in digital related courses Digital Support Services, Digital Business Services, Digital Production, Design & Development.	FE colleges	Employers, Careers & Enterprise Company	LSIP period 2026-2029	More people accessing digital training provision including T-levels and apprenticeships.	LSIP Board oversight and collaboration. Regular meetings with relevant stakeholders. Annual update reports and interim Skills England meetings.
Introduction/evening courses to help upskill, particularly in core digital competencies, but also taster courses in emerging technologies including AI and automation tools.	FE colleges, ITPs	Employers, Local Authorities, Growth & Youth Hubs, Charity Orgs	Initial testing 2026-2027	A reduction in employees citing digital competencies as skills gaps.	
Encourage routes in both hardware and software to cover the full spectrum of employer needs.	FE colleges, ITPs, Local University Offer	Employers, Local Authorities, Growth & Youth Hubs, Careers & Enterprise Co	LSIP period 2026-2029	Increased skills in technology adoption for business growth.	

Priority 5: Employability Skills - Helping to ensure those who are looking to join the workforce have the core skills/competencies expected from them by employers to help provide a smooth transition into the world of work and career progression when in employment. To support those already in employment to enhance their employability skills (soft skills) to increase productivity and increase their chances of career progression.

Activity	Lead	Partners Involved	Timescales & Milestones	Expected output(s)	Monitoring & Measurement
Continue to engage with employers to help design course content and ensure work readiness is embedded in provision, embedding in T-levels and provision up to Level 3.	FE colleges, ITPs	Employers, DWP, Charity Sector, Local Authorities, Youth Hubs	LSIP period – 2026-2029	Fewer employers reporting ‘soft skills’ as gaps amongst new joiners.	LSIP Board oversight and collaboration. Regular meetings with relevant stakeholders.
Look at the possibility of short booster/introductory courses clarifying workplace behaviours.	FE colleges, ITPs	Employers, Local Authorities, Growth & Youth Hubs	Initial testing 2026-2027	Learners can more clearly articulate how they have developed workforce behaviours required by employers in a work setting.	Annual update reports and interim Skills England meetings.
Continue to promote Leadership and Management and explore short course/bespoke options.	FE colleges, ITPs, Local University Offer	Employers, Local Authorities, Growth Hubs	LSIP period 2026-2029	More people engaging with Leadership and Management training.	

Monitoring, Review and Reporting

Delivery of the Marches Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) will be overseen by the LSIP Board, with responsibility for monitoring progress against the agreed priorities and actions set out in this Plan. Progress will be reviewed on a regular basis, drawing on information provided by delivery partners, including education and training providers, employers, local authorities and other stakeholders.

The LSIP will be kept under review throughout the 2026–2029 period in line with statutory guidance. This will include an annual review of progress to assess whether the identified skills priorities remain relevant and whether agreed actions are having the intended impact. Where required, priorities and actions will be refreshed to reflect changes in labour market conditions, employer demand, or national policy direction.

The designated Employer Representative Body (ERB) Shropshire Chamber of Commerce will coordinate monitoring and review activity, and will report on progress through established governance arrangements, including engagement with Skills England, local partners, and stakeholders. The annual update report will be submitted to Skills England as required.



Annex C: Background and Methodology

Evidence Base

The priority skill needs identified here are derived from a combination of publicly available labour market data from the ONS (Office for National Statistics) ; national and regional research and current and future skills needs including Skills England publications; sector body research and engagement; employer and stakeholder engagement; SIC/SOC analysis; and Lightcast data. (SIC = Standard Industrial Classification & SOC = Standard Occupational Classification)

- Publicly available labour market data: ONS sources have been used to inform which sectors should form the skills needs priorities including Business Register and Employment Survey; Business Counts; Regional gross value added (balanced) by industry: local authorities by ITL1 region. (ITL 1= regional level data – 9 regions across England)
- National and regional research: this includes Skills England Assessment of priority skills to 2030, and sector skills needs assessments for the IS-8(+2) (Industrial Strategy) sectors; and sector body research including Skills for Care, Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) and Make UK to outline research on current skills gaps and future demand for skills.
- Megatrends: national research has identified megatrends which will impact what employers will need from the workforce in the coming years. This includes widespread adopting of AI and automation tools, the drive for net zero and climate resilience and continued ageing of the population.
- SIC/SOC analysis: using ONS estimates of employment by 4-digit Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) and 5-digit Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) and applying this to the Marches LSIP using employment estimates from the ONS Business Register and Employment Survey, we can proxy for the types of roles which are currently the highest employing by sector, and therefore which roles are expected to be most in-demand by sector.
- Lightcast Data: estimates report what roles are estimated to be currently the highest employing and how this is forecast to change in the coming years. We have then used job postings demand, filtering by the highest employing current and future roles, to show the skills most in-demand by employers for these types of roles. (Lightcast is an independent labour market analyst tool).

Alignment with LSIP Guidance

The development and production of the Marches LSIP refresh has adhered to LSIP guidance. This includes forming and co-developing content with an LSIP Board, engaging with providers, employers, local authorities, DWP and other stakeholders, aligning priorities with local economic strategies and Government plans including the Industrial Strategy, and responding to the guided structure of the report's substantive sections:

Section	Content
Strategic and economic context	How the LSIP fits within the broader strategic and economic context for the area, drawing on economic analysis and plans of the local authorities, and identifying which of the Industrial Strategy sectors are important to the local area. A description of how the LSIP supports and feeds into other local plans and strategies, including the local Get Britain Working Plan.
Local Skills Needs	Set out the key current and medium term (three-year) skill needs of the area. It should explain how the evidence, data and insights gathered under Stage 1 have informed these, and any prioritisation that was required. Expectation each area will identify around 4 to 6 overarching priorities.
Agreed changes / actions needed	Clearly outline the agreed changes or actions required to address each of the key skill needs identified in section 1. It should also describe the expected outcomes and impacts, and how they will be measured.

Environmental and Net Zero Goals

The Marches is committed to playing its part in supporting national net zero and clean power ambitions, helping to develop the necessary skills to support learners to access clean energy related opportunities. This includes investment in the Low Carbon Technology Training Centre at Herefordshire, Ludlow and North Shropshire College (HLNSC). The Centre supports local businesses, the construction industry, and homeowners by providing comprehensive training for professionals. Training opportunities will initially focus on heat pumps and Solar PV installation. However, long-term plans include expansion into areas such as battery storage, EV charging and retrofit solutions.

Modern Methods of Construction provision at Shrewsbury and HLNSC is designed to develop learners understanding of construction technologies, and the drivers which will continue to impact the sector, including the need to consider the environmental impact of buildings and how these can be minimised in order to achieve net zero aims.

The Centre for Advanced Timber Technology (CATT) at NMITE is designed to play a role in positioning the UK as a leader in sustainable construction by fostering expertise in modern methods of construction and ensuring access to renewable resources. Provision includes Timber Technology, Engineering and Design short courses and Enhanced Retrofit Fabric

Improvements Training. NMITE is also partnering with the Forestry Commission and Edinburgh Napier University on two research projects looking into how to boost the use of English hardwood forest products across the built environment and a demonstrator exploring the commercial viability of the UK's first homegrown wood fibre insulation manufacturing facility.

Equality of Opportunity

Equality of opportunity has been embedded throughout the Marches LSIP to ensure that all learners, regardless of age, background, or circumstances, can access, progress through, and benefit from the skills system.

Our training providers continue to explore modular and flexible delivery formats, aligned with principles of accessibility and lifelong learning. This includes consideration of short course models designed to support adult returners, NEET learners (NEET=Those not in education, employment, or training) and those seeking to progress or retrain, including in our priority sectors across our FE colleges, Harper Adams University, NMITE and ITPs, and in the case of Hereford College of Arts (HCA), within the creative industries, where a programme of school visits to the HCA Digital Skills Centre are being developed, planned for launch by July 2026, aimed at introducing younger learners to creative digital pathways.

The Get Marches Working Plan, which sets out a collective objective to reduce economic inactivity through the development of an integrated employment, skills, and health support system, displays strong alignment with the aims of LSIP, recognising the importance of strengthening the sub-region's skills infrastructure, ensuring it is responsive to employer needs and able to address identified workforce gaps by ensuring those who are further from the labour market have access to local employment opportunities. This includes disadvantaged young people, disabled adults, individuals with long-term health conditions, and carers.

A number of activities are underway which are looking to break down the barriers for those further from the labour market. This includes Youth Employment Hubs in Herefordshire and Shropshire providing one to one holistic support for young people aged 16 to 24 to assist them into education, employment or training, with plans to continue to expand the offer. Additionally, Telford College offers 'Step into' courses including Health & Social Care, Construction and Digital, aimed primarily at targeting people aged 19 and over who are currently unemployed, and includes work placement opportunities.

Connect to Work is underway, providing a supported employment programme for individuals who have been unemployed for six months or more with target groups including veterans and partners of veterans; care leavers; victims of domestic abuse; those in temporary accommodation; and refugees. There are also plans to support those suffering with musculoskeletal issues, to work with people who have been given their first sick note. This links with work underway on the WorkWell programme pilot which provided early-intervention support for adults aged 16 plus with health conditions, linking coaching, physiotherapy, mental health, and employment support to try to remove barriers for those with health conditions or disabilities to gain or regain employment. Work is underway with Herefordshire and Worcestershire ICB (Integrated Care Board) to secure funding to continue

WorkWell this year in Herefordshire and further work will take place to evidence the need for an extension of the WorkWell programme across the Marches with both Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin, and Herefordshire and Worcestershire ICBs.

LSIP Governance

The Board comprises an equal balance of public- and private-sector representatives, collectively covering a wide range of relevant sectors and organisations.

Public-sector and providers include:

- Senior officers from three Local Authorities (providing direct access to Get Marches Working teams, Connect to Work, the Careers & Enterprise Company, and Growth & Youth Hubs)
- University / HE representation
- FE representation
- ITP representation
- DWP regional lead
- Skills board representatives for the local authorities
- Chamber of Commerce representation

Private sector representation from a range of sectors including Professional Services, Digital, Construction, Media, Social Care, Fabrication and Engineering.

Board members are engaged both collectively and individually. Comprehensive data and evidence are provided to ensure informed decision-making. Meetings are structured using a workshop-based approach to maximise interaction, improve cross-Board understanding, and ensure outcomes align with the Board's priorities, local needs, and national policy direction.

The Board will continue to operate throughout implementation, overseeing progress once the report has been finalised, approved, and delivery of agreed actions has commenced.

The Marches Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) is led by Shropshire Chamber of Commerce, which is the designated Employer Representative Body (ERB) for the Marches LSIP area. In accordance with the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022 and statutory guidance issued by Skills England, the ERB is responsible for leading the development of the LSIP, engaging employers and stakeholders, agreeing priorities, and overseeing delivery of the Plan in partnership with local authorities, education and training providers, and wider partners.



Employer Engagement

Staying true to the meaning and purpose of the LSIP – we ensure employers are at the heart of our work.

The Marches LSIP Team use multiple methods to engage businesses and gather their views, helping them to understand the training offer and opportunities around apprenticeships, placements, upskilling and much more. Helping them work more effectively with our providers, and other stakeholders so that those parties may understand the sectors better, create curriculum to match need and more. The data also allows us to author Marches LSIP Employer's Voice reports at intervals, to help support the providers and stakeholders, as well as the Annual Progress Report.

The Marches Team has seats on the Telford Business Board, The Shropshire Council's Skills Board and the Herefordshire Council's Skills Board, amongst others.

The Marches Team are actively involved in the Further Education Colleges Skills Advisory Panels, all which manifest in different ways but provide a powerful collaboration between industry and the providers, whilst informing the LSIP and allowing the LSIP to add value.

To raise awareness of the project bold marketing has been designed and is regularly displayed at the wide range of events we attend across the Marches. We work with other networks to ensure the widest reach.

The team give update and informative talks at events such as the Careers Ambassador Network or employer events, carry out sector focus groups, and have 1:1 in-depth meetings with individual employers on specific topics, often larger employers where more value can be gained through direct meetings.

The team has a continuous survey running online, some completed without interaction after marketing invites, others through a 1:1 telephone interview. The business making their own choice as to the method preferred. In the past 5 months alone, we have acquired the views of 250 companies through this method.

We also work with many agencies, from CITB and CIOB to Skills for Care and Partners In Care, ECA, RHA and many others to gain the widest knowledge of sectors or sectors that complement our three sectors, such as warehousing covered by the RHA.

Working with stakeholders to understand their offer and their actions, so that we do not duplicate or hinder their work but can work with them or inform others.

We share all our report with employers, providers and other stakeholders as well as all local MP's to ensure that the information gathered is used, valued and this provides reassurance to employers and businesses that their views are valued.

Marches LSIP

Local Skills Improvement Plan

For further information,
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or visit the
Shropshire Chamber website
- see “Policy” section

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