MARCHES LOCAL SKILLS IMPROVEMENT PLAN

STAGE 1 REPORT

"This Local Skills Improvement Plan

has been approved by the

Secretary of State

in line with the approval criteria

set out in the

[Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022](#)*,*

and in accordance with the

[LSIP statutory guidance](#)*."*

https://www.legislation.gov.uk/en/ukpga/2022/21/contents/enacted

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-skills-improvement-plans

Funded by
UK Government

Marches LSIPs
Local Skills Improvement Plan

Shropshire Chamber of Commerce

Herefordshire & Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce

Contents & Information

Key Abbreviations	Term
Employer Representative Body	ERB
Further / Higher Education	FE / HE
Local Authority	LA
Local Enterprise Partnership	LEP
Local Skills Improvement Fund	LSIF
Local Skills Improvement Plan	LSIP
Skills Advisory Panel	SAP
Small & Medium Enterprises	SME

Foreword

Shropshire Chamber of Commerce was designated as the ERB for the Marches area, which includes Herefordshire, Shropshire, and Telford & Wrekin. Using our specialist knowledge of the business landscape we engaged with many employers, in our four key selected sectors[1], to garner their views on current and future needs for skills and training, as well as looking at the wider issues that can affect recruitment or training provision in our geographic region. Alongside employers, we worked with our Marches LSIP Board, a wide range of additional stakeholders including the Local Authorities and LEP, and diverse types of training provider to understand where the gaps lay, discover innovation that was taking place and how this could be improved or learnt from, going forward.

The Marches is a large geographic LEP based area, the majority rural, except for Telford, which poses challenges for both employers and providers. We worked to understand the impact of those challenges, where impacts have been overcome and where there is room for improvement. The work to date carried out by the Marches LEP and their Skills Advisory Panel gave us a strong foundation to build on. We wanted to avoid any duplication with third party work already complete or in progress, whilst still striving to support our region to achieve. Though the area faces many challenges from its rurality, this has also brought uniqueness in delivery by creating areas of specialism or market leaders for certain disciplines.

Building on this knowledge and collaboration we can continue to use these foundations to further improve the skills available to our employers by working with our stakeholders and providers to keep more workers local, encourage an appropriate range of training and upskilling, which in turn will support increased productivity, as well as better opportunities for the local population and the Marches economy. Increasing the workforce size and diversity will also encourage inward investment into the area. In this final report we explain how we see the collaboration moving forward, the key priorities to work on, and how this leads to a roadmap approach to take us forward to March 2025 whilst producing a legacy that can continue after that date. **Working together to unpack ambition and opportunity.**
Richard Sheehan, Marches LSIPs Project Director.

Local Skills Improvement Plans stem from the Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity & Growth White Paper January 2021 produced by the Department for Education.
"Putting employers at the heart of post-16 skills." [2]

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[1] Engineering/Manufacturing including food/drink manufacture – Construction including environmental technologies – Health & Social Care – Professional Services

[2] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-skills-improvement-plans
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/skills-for-jobs-lifelong-learning-for-opportunity-and-growth

Executive Summary

Working together to unpack ambition and opportunity

The Skills for Jobs White Paper has put employers firmly at the core of the skills agenda for Post 16 education. A stance welcomed by the business world. With productivity sluggish and the economy still damaged by Covid and other world events, it now requires an even greater push to ensure that skills needs are met.

The Marches LSIP project is giving us that extra strength; enabling us to unpack ambition and opportunity, for current employees, prospective employees, and the employers. Employers who's businesses provide wealth, employment, and opportunity to the Marches.

We have a wide range of provision within the Marches already striving to ensure they meet skills shortages. With the strong stakeholder collaborative culture already embedded it allows us to willingly agree to work even more closely, openly, honestly, and productively to embrace the opportunities the LSIP project offers.

Change takes time, but even in Stage 1 we clearly saw the appetite from businesses to get involved, to give their honest opinions and to willingly to work with the LSIP stakeholders to ensure that everyone is focused on the same goal. Many business / provider relationships already exist and work well, LSIP gives us the opportunity to increase those relationships, broaden the voice greatly and strengthen current relationships.

ERB's have been a logical bridge between private and public sectors. This is helping to break down any barriers brought on simply though lack of cultural understanding or process. Barriers that hinder unnecessarily but can easily be removed through a collective willingness.

Our one objective is to ensure that The Marches, grows, prospers, innovates; to achieve that we will ensure, collectively, that we continue to harness the power of the employers voice.

OVERVIEW

As a significant employer and business within North Shropshire it has been a pleasure to be involved in this excellent initiative. There is clearly a gulf between the Providers and Employers, corroborated by the details of the responses. This national initiative is hugely welcomed and hopefully will provide the necessary solutions with employers having a voice. In the business community we are all eager to see the necessary changes be implemented. To see hundreds of businesses taking the time and trouble to complete the survey with the desire to be heard, is very uplifting. Employers need their voice to be heard, this very welcome opportunity has enabled this. We now need to work together with providers to ensure that we offer the people within our area a greater choice to further their education and careers, whilst ensuring the employers have the skilled staff they require.

Neal Hooper – Managing Director of Aico & Member of the Marches LSIP Board

Employer Representative Body - ERB

Shropshire Chamber of Commerce is an accredited member of the British Chambers of Commerce. The Chamber is long established and well-integrated within the business community across the region, with offices in Telford and Shrewsbury.

Shropshire Chamber of Commerce is an impartial, non-political private sector independent member organisation, and through that has gained the respect and trust of the business community. Shropshire Chamber has senior staff representation on many public and private sector boards in both the sub area and the Marches area. The Chamber is also consulted by various bodies with regards to business matters and provides a voice for business, both locally and nationally. Shropshire Chamber has many years of experience in gathering business sentiment on multiple topics, especially through the British Chambers Quarterly Economic Survey. Amongst our members are Local Authorities, Universities and Colleges as well as other stakeholders and providers, not just businesses, though businesses do make up the bulk of membership. Our members cover all sectors and sizes, and though predominantly Shropshire and Telford based in whole or part, we also have members from other areas within the Marches and beyond. Herefordshire & Worcestershire Chamber was engaged to assist, to ensure we had additional geographic coverage in Herefordshire. These strong business relationships allowed us to obtain the business intelligence the providers require to make informed decisions.

Marches Summary

Geography & Economy

Marches Area: 5,957 sq.km **Economy:** GVA: £14.3BN

- **Herefordshire** – Largely rural – population density 86 people per sq.km

- **Shropshire** – Largely rural – population density 102 people per sq.km

- **Telford & Wrekin** – Urban with city & town – population density 640 people sq.km

UK Government Classification 2021 by Local Authority area / ONS population density data 2021. GVA, Marches LEP/ONS data.
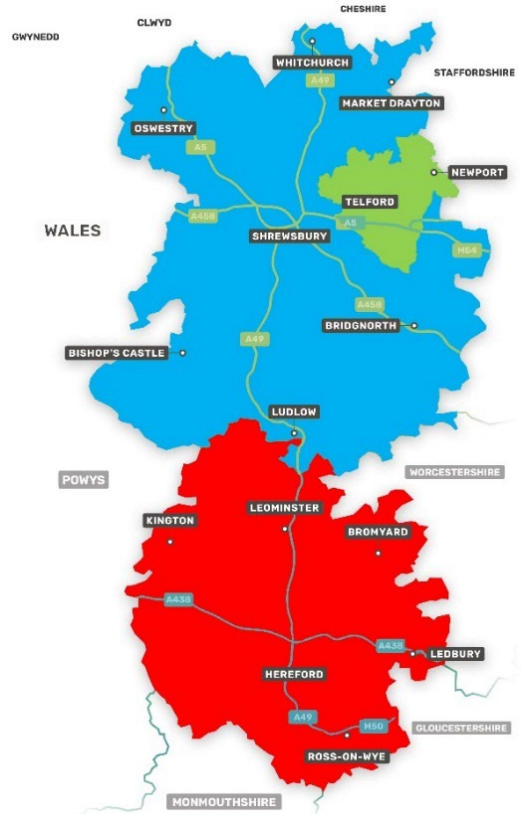
Population

The population density is low across the Marches; the population being spread out over a wide geographic area. This creates its own issues for businesses and providers, their employees, or students. Telford & Wrekin's population grew by 11.4%, between 2011-2021, above the national average of 6.3% and 6.2% for the West Midlands. Telford's designation as a new town in the late sixties saw housing expansion and the incentive for businesses to take up residence which has continued at pace since and explains the high-density population. *ONS statistics*

Telford & Wrekin grew by 11.4%, whereas Shropshire grew by 5.7% and Herefordshire by just 2%. An aging population reduces available workforce, Herefordshire saw a 24.1% rise, Shropshire 29.5% rise and Telford & Wrekin 35.7% rise in the population aged over 65 between 2011 and 2021. Herefordshire saw a 4.1% decline, Shropshire .01% increase and Telford & Wrekin 7% increase in the working age population aged 15-64yrs between 2011-2021. *ONS statistics*

Population 2021 - *Nomis 2021-2022*	The Marches	Herefordshire	Shropshire	Telford and Wrekin
Population total - all ages by number	698,100	187,600	324,700	185,000
Population aged 16-64 yrs by number	415,600	108,800	190,800	116,000
16-64 yrs as a % of the total population	59.50%	58.80%	58.80%	62.40%
% of 16-64 yrs who are economically active	79.80%	78.90%	82.10%	80.50%

Employment by Occupation Level

The national shortage of employment age citizens at various skill levels is further exacerbated by the rurality and pay rates available across the Marches.

Employment by Occupation – *Nomis 2021-2022*	The Marches (%)	Herefordshire (%)	Shropshire (%)	Telford and Wrekin (%)
Soc 2020 major group 1-3	**47.0**	**44.5**	**48.2**	**43.3**
1 Managers, directors and senior officials	11.3	12.3	13	6.4
2 Professional occupations	22.5	18.5	23.6	20.9
3 Associate professional occupations	13.1	13.7	11.3	15.7
Soc 2020 major group 4-5	**19.5**	**19.3**	**23.1**	**16.4**
4 Administrative & secretarial occupations	9.3	8.9	11.2	8.7
5 Skilled trades occupations	10.1	10.4	11.7	7.6
Soc 2020 major group 6-7	**14.9**	**15.8**	**13.8**	**18.4**
6 Caring, leisure and Other Service occupations	9.0	9.8	6.4	9.7
7 Sales and customer service occs	5.8	5.9	7.3	8.6
Soc 2020 major group 8-9	**18.7**	**20.5**	**14.9**	**21.8**
8 Process plant & machine operatives	7.2	6.3	6.1	6.9
9 Elementary occupations	11.5	14.2	8.7	14.8

Pay Rates

The national average pay rate across the UK for 2022 *(ONS)* is £640 weekly full-time, making the Marches less attractive than urban areas and one reason graduating students often do not return.

Average Pay Rates – *Nomis 2021-2022* Full-time excluding overtime	The Marches £	Herefordshire £	Shropshire £	Telford and Wrekin £
Weekly Pay - Full-time workers	£ 608.40	£ 560.10	£ 637.40	£ 606.60
Hourly Pay - Full-time workers	£ 14.97	£ 13.29	£ 15.49	£ 15.44

Qualifications

Though the Marches has a lower rate of higher qualifications, it reflects the level required for many of the occupations routes available. The employment history of the area created several significant lower skilled sectors seeding this lag in qualification and pay. Only in the recent past has Shropshire or Herefordshire had a university in county creating an exodus of those looking to obtain higher qualifications, who often do not return. The offer is still limited so we still see outward flow of residents.

Qualifications (Jan 2021-Dec 2021) *Nomis* **Qualification of the 16-64yr population** Information not available for all 3 sub sectors	The Marches (%)	Great Britain (%)
NVQ4 and above	39.3	43.6
NVQ3 and above	58.1	61.5
NVQ2 and above	75.1	78.1
NVQ1 and above	85.9	87.5
Other qualifications	8.6	5.9
No qualifications	5.5	6.6

Enterprises

As is the norm in the UK the vast majority of enterprises are small, nationally 74% do not have employees at all and 21.6% between 1-9 employees, totalling 95.6% employing 0-9 staff. Across the Marches 90% employ between 0-9 staff, which is lower than the national average. This high number of non employers or employers with less than 10 staff has an impact, as micro companies tend to have less resource to offer student placements, take apprentices or the ability or finance to take up training. Sole traders are less inclined to take training as it reduces their ability to earn.

Enterprise Type and Count - *Nomis 2022*	The Marches	Herefordshire	Shropshire	Telford and Wrekin
	Number	Number	Number	Number
Micro (0 to 9)	28,965	9,580	14,375	5,010
Small (10 to 49)	2,710	875	1,285	550
Medium (50 to 249)	450	135	200	115
Large (250+)	105	30	40	35
Total	32,230	10,620	15,900	5,710

Administration

Herefordshire, Shropshire, and Telford & Wrekin are all Unitary Authorities and form the geography of The Marches. As such there is no devolved budget for adult skills and provision, limiting the ability of our providers to flex their offers though funding routes which are evaluated to meet the regional need, as seen in neighbouring devolved areas.

Socio-Economic Factors & Drivers

Though vastly different, the urban areas and the rural areas share some common issues. The swing between most deprived and least deprived can be seen in all sub areas.

Herefordshire suffers with contrast, having areas of deprivation, mainly in the county and market towns, but also areas with least deprivation. *Annex 1*

Shropshire is a reasonably affluent county, with over 54% living in the least deprived areas, with 5% deemed as living in deprivation, mainly in the county and market towns. *Annex 2*

Telford & Wrekin is the most ethnically diverse area of the three sub areas and has some areas of deprivation that are comparable with inner cities. *Annex 3*
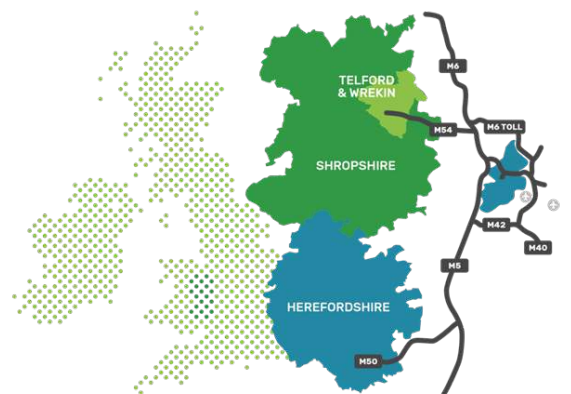
Scattered settlements in the more rural parts offer less opportunities to the residents and much smaller pools of potential employees to incentivise businesses to locate or expand. The road and rail networks are limited, with only two short lengths of motorway on the eastern fringes of the Marches. Travel distances are great and public transport poor in parts of the Marches.

Bordering on Wales, who have different systems and funding, does not always mean cross border provision can happen, even if available. This makes it difficult both for employers and students. The proximity to urban centres on the eastern flank of the Marches, where wages may exceed those locally, is a drain on skills. It is harder to draw workers from urban centres beyond the Marches as they have a wider array of opportunities in their own locations, especially in times of low unemployment.

LSIP Stage 1 Context

Each sub area of the Marches has its own uniqueness in the makeup of the private sector businesses. For Stage 1 of the LSIP we needed to investigate specific sectors, which had relevance across all three sub regions. Sectors that had strong longevity and employ a good percentage of the population. The sectors selected after research and reference to other stakeholders were:

- Engineering/Manufacturing including food and drink manufacture
- Construction including environmental technology
- Health & Social Care
- Professional Services

The Marches LSIP Board came into being in September 2022, and contained 15 of the 21 organisations represented on the LEP Skills Advisory Panel. *Annex 4* The Chair is CEO of a large private sector business. The LSIP Board is also attended by the CEO of Herefordshire & Worcestershire Chamber and the then Deputy CEO, now CEO, of Shropshire Chamber along with LSIP Governance and Project Management staff. The makeup was to ensure that providers were heavily represented along with local authorities during Stage 1. More employers will be involved in Governance in Stage 2.

To understand the four sectors fully, allowing us to create a meaningful question set for employers, we did desk research, field research and live question testing. We worked with multiple organisations public and private, sector support bodies such as the CITB and other ERB's. We worked with organisations to understand national and West Midlands issues facing our sectors.

To understand the vast range of stakeholders and providers Shropshire Chamber has engaged with during the Marches LSIPs Project Stage 1 work please see *Annex 4*

To ensure good understanding of the employers need at a strategic level, in advance of deep dives required in Stage 2, we carried out 463 employer interviews, as well as focus groups and other events. In sectors hard to reach, such as the multitude of small businesses that make up the social care sector, we also worked with their supporting and training bodies, such as West Midlands Care Association to ensure we had a good understanding of the needs and the barriers.

Marches LEP Skills Advisory Panel Report 2022

The Marches LEP Skills Advisory Panel report 2022 was written in the light of the January 2021 "Skills for Jobs" white paper and alongside the LSIP trailblazer projects. Though looking at a wider range of sectors, the synergies with the LSIP Stage 1 report are clear. *Annex 5*

To ensure no duplication of work whilst moving to the LSIP Stage 2 process of deep dives, the work previously carried out by the Marches LEP SAP deep dives will be referenced, assessed for current relevance, and used, where prudent, as a foundation to ensure the best use of Government resources. [3]

The Employers Voice Report Marches LSIP Stage 1

463 employer interviews were carried out, with all sizes of employing companies and across the Marches area. The strong emphasis was on gathering solid expansive data to ensure that the providers and other stakeholders had meaningful evidence to work from.

The ERB ensured that any work carried out with employers was not onerous for the employers but supportive, informative, and relevant. It also managed expectations to allow for good long-term engagement to fuel the understanding required for the ongoing LSIP and the stakeholders it relates to. All interviews were, and remain, confidential to give the businesses the confidence to speak out freely. This put employers at the heart of the LSIP process.

From a market research perspective, there was a need to ensure that the employers questions were not ambiguous and managed expectation. Important too that both the interviewers and the question set did not lead in any way. The evidence gathered must be the raw thoughts and views of the businesses directly, in their own language. The research allowed for a far greater understanding of any misconception businesses have with regards to skills and training provision. Focus groups were also business only events, to ensure they felt able to speak out freely about training.

Language and perception; from this research, it was clearly shown that both can cause issues. The language of the employers and the language of the providers is often mismatched causing issues in understanding and dissatisfaction. Perceptions were found at times to be incorrect and understanding of the makeup of the diverse business cohort by sector, type & size, their finances, availability of time, staff and resources is sometimes lacking. Likewise, in the reverse, employers are not always conversant with the provision offer, are confused by terminology, and can have misguided expectations, especially in relation to bespoke courses availability, course content flex or funded training. Employers express their needs in a totally different way to the providers, using much more generalisation when highlighting skills needs. Language

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[3] https://www.marcheslep.org.uk/priorities/skills/skills-advisory-panel/ & https://www.marcheslep.org.uk/priorities/data-research/

also is an issue between public and private sectors, such as understanding the Levy, the paperwork involved and how it can be utilised. This is an area we address later in this document.

Stage 2 and the relationships already built will give us the opportunity to deep dive into a sector and the specific skills requirements of that sector or sub sector. Understanding if these needs are of the moment due to the economy or other drivers, or if they are longer deep-seated needs, is crucial. It is important to delve more deeply to ensure that the LSIP does not encourage provision simply for short term shortages, but for those levels and types of skills that will continue to be needed and in sectors in growth not decline. Simply asking businesses at a point in time what skills they are looking for will give some guidance, through volume, to areas with issues that need to be addressed. To further understand this and provide additional sound evidence, over time, to the providers is critical, to ensure the best outcomes for the economy, population and best spend of Government funds.

Small providers can be more agile but as a sizeable proportion of full and part time post 16 education is delivered through FE colleges, who by nature are large institutions, making hasty decisions would be inappropriate or impossible. The FE sector is especially bound by strict regulations, funding limitations and set course content, not something changed overnight.

At stages during the LSIP Stage 1 process the stakeholders were supplied with information on the outcomes of the interviews as they progressed, so that the findings could be discussed and understood and to provide emerging priorities to consider when completing their accountability statements. These findings also support the Local Authorities in their work, as well as smaller providers and other stakeholders.

To understand the full findings from the Employers Voice interviews please see the Employer Voice report detailing all the interview analysis and outcomes.
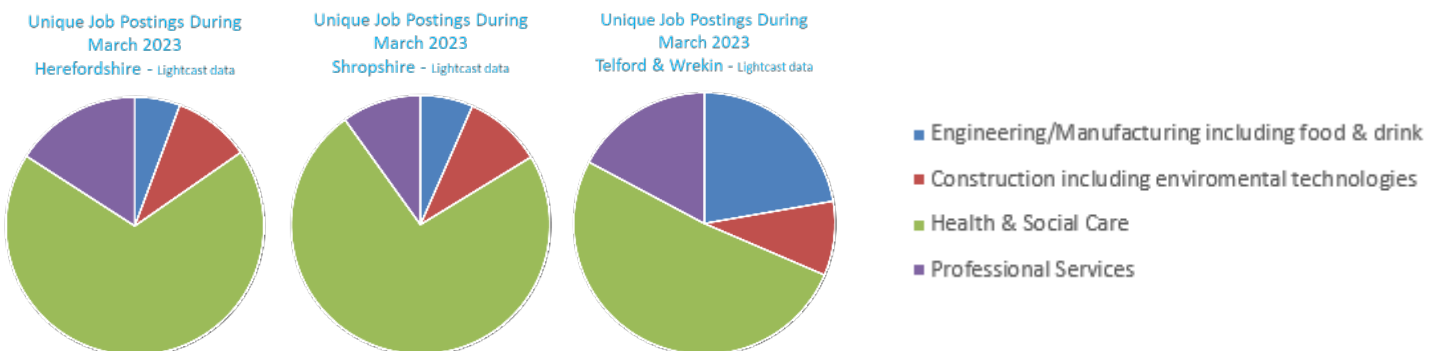*Annex 6*

The Employers Voice – sector information

As previously stated, businesses when interviewed, though asked, tend only to give a generalisation rather than a specific, such as by qualification level. To counteract this, we looked at each interview individually and categorised their responses into logical groupings, to represent our four sectors and commonalities such as administration. We then related the skills shortages identified to local provision and from that understood if provision was available.

Working across the four broad sectors there were commonalities which we will discuss after the sector information.

- Engineering/Manufacturing including food and drink manufacture
- Construction including environmental technology
- Health & Social Care
- Professional Services

KEY - Colour groupings as shown on the skills & training graphs - derived from the analysis of comment data for both questions on skills & training

- Factory Production Basics / Mid / Specialist
- Manufacture / Lean / Machinery / Automation / R&D
- Construction / Heritage / Demolition / Civil / Tools / Trades
- Roofing / Carpentry Site & Factory / Joiners / Flooring / Glazing
- Electricians / Plumbers / Gas Fitters /
- Architecture / Modelling / Surveyors, Project Management / Planners
- Logistics / Warehousing / Transport
- Retrofit & Renewables / EV Charging / Vehicle Maintenance
- Environmental / Net Zero / CSR / Laboratory / Crafts
- Engineering Electrical / Mechanical / Multi Skilled / Traditional
- Fabrication / Welding / Air Con / Heat / Refrigeration
- Sales / Technical Sales / Technical Advisory
- Agri / Agri Equipment / Food Production / Veterinary
- CAD / CAM / CNC / Laser Cutting
- Programming / Software Development / Data Modelling
- IT Support / Specialist Software Understanding / Cyber & GDPR
- Excel / Word / Email etc. Upskill
- Starter IT Skills
- Statutory i.e. H&S / Manual Handling / Working at Heights / FLT etc
- Disability Awareness / Mental Health
- Care / Medical Clinical
- Leisure / Hospitality / Domestic / Retail
- Legal / HR / Procurement
- Management / Leadership / Entrepreneurship
- Insolvency / Insurance / Finance
- Admin / Specialist Clerical / Customer Service / Sales
- ESOL / Skills Training in Foreign Languages / Teaching
- Web / Graphics / Video / PR / Marketing
- Work / Soft Skills

Having gained the views of business we wanted to see how these related to job vacancies. Though not all jobs are advertised, in these times of shortage many more are now publicly advertised, giving a strong indication of which areas are struggling most to recruit staff. It of course varies by sub region due to the nature of the sector employment landscape breakdowns.

Unique Job Postings During March 2023 Herefordshire - Lightcast data

Unique Job Postings During March 2023 Shropshire - Lightcast data

Unique Job Postings During March 2023 Telford & Wrekin - Lightcast data

- Engineering/Manufacturing including food & drink
- Construction including enviromental technologies
- Health & Social Care
- Professional Services

Engineering/Manufacturing including food and drink manufacture

There is a wide range of engineering and manufacturing across The Marches, ranging from field to fork food production, precision engineering for the motor industry, to large scale manufacture of components and plastic extrusion. There is an increase in the cross over from construction as we see the growth in off-site prefabrication, both for house construction and commercial, such as large agricultural buildings. Where we see skills move off site and into factory production there is a need for upskilling to match the changes required in the skill set. Clarification must be sought from employers as even though it may be called by the same name, such as carpenter, the actual skill set requirements are varied depending on the application. Hence where deeper dives will be invaluable, to map the skills set needs correctly, as well as the rate of transition and growth to factory build. The need to upskill IT skills was key for manufacturers as automation and machine advancement requires deeper understanding of technology.

Construction including environmental technology

As with national trends, construction has been, and still is, a booming sector for this area. Construction is one of the key areas that suffers from the drain out of area to larger projects or higher wages, a historic issue that has always heightened during periods of expansion in the sector. There is already good provision locally to produce the needed trades and shortages are tending to being met. Due to this contraction and expansion, it is vital that the employers voice and intelligence is kept current, to aid our providers to flex accordingly. Environmental technology is a growing sector within the Marches with providers already responding well to that growing demand. Retrofit and renewable training and upskilling is a growing need as the Country moves to net zero. Small but growing is the environmental consultancy sector, which is helpful when understanding the wider environmental picture and how this relates to courses being provided.

Health & Social Care

There are two very different sides to this sector and some peculiarities within the Marches. The NHS has vast recruitment needs, as well as upskilling requirements. Work is already happening to support this requirement, using provision that can be provided locally. Attracting senior clinical staff is much more about the rurality of the area. Social care, from care homes to domiciliary is very different, apart from a few larger housing associations and care providers, much of this sector is SME, often one-unit providers. There is a 9% vacancies rate, caused by many things: rurality, low pay, pull to NHS, and perception of the sector. This poses a challenge for provision, but provision that is much needed and requires innovation to deliver.

Professional Services

Covering a wide range of occupation from legal to accountancy, many of the skills required are regulatory and often obtained through the University route. This creates an issue for employers, with students not returning to the area post university or for those from out of area not finding the rural lifestyle an attractive offer. However, those skills that can be taught locally and with a viable cohort are well catered for. New routes into law, for example, offer future opportunities for Marches providers to start offering those courses to try to encourage more to stay local.

Commonalities, soft and work skills

A common theme across all sectors, sizes and locations are the issues around soft and work ready skills. Even though there is the Covid lag and behaviours already built into courses, the employers clearly stated that they hoped to see more work, provision and understanding around soft skills to help counteract a situation they feel is worsening. The issues related not only to younger recruits, but to graduates and general workforce, although they were felt to be worse in the under 30 age group.

Administration skills were also found to be lacking across all sectors, with communication skills a major part of the issue. IT skills from the most basic to the level of having the ability to use Microsoft Excel, Word, PowerPoint, and other common software packages effectively was clearly highlighted by employers as a weakness hindering business.

Employers acknowledged that they need to train new recruits to meet expected standards but wished to see a greater emphasis of these skills woven into all schooling and careers advice, as it is easier to influence at an early age than in early twenties. The Employers Voice highlighted a willingness to actively support careers education but employers have not always found the process easy.

Barriers to Employment & Training

Rurality of course featured highly in the issues facing employers, both for recruitment and training. Transport and communication infrastructure hampered recruitment, especially for the younger recruits and lower paid. This also makes it harder for providers to find suitable placements for students.

The requirement for certain levels of maths blocked some from upskilling and demotivated others, especially in careers where a lower level of maths attainment would be acceptable to the employer. Work sector relevant maths tuition was felt more appropriate. However, for English it was business communication skills that employers want to see improved.

The drain of those leaving for university is at a high and those students rarely return after university, which makes it hard to fill skilled positions or lower and mid-level management roles.

Employers found understanding provision difficult, larger employers are overwhelmed by multiple providers contacting them, others lacked understanding of where to access courses or were unaware of local provision. The Levy is a mystery to many, found hard to understand, and larger companies hope for future change to allow a more relaxed approach to how their Levy could be used to upskill and train.

The Marches offers a rich variety of educational opportunities….

As well as our three large well established FE colleges offering a wide array of courses and levels, students also have access to a range of other Marches provision.

Though it is hard to retain or attract staff into the rural areas, the wide and growing training offer available across the Marches is an incentive both to stay local and to entice others in, who may then remain post education. Having unique institutions, such as one of the very few specialist Arts Colleges in the UK, offering FE to post graduate courses, brings creatives into the heart of the Marches; creativity was clearly highlighted by employers as lacking in the modern workforce.

World leading research and teaching at Harper Adams University gives the area global coverage and respect. Field to fork is a vital part of the Marches economy and the University helps ensure that innovation and understanding is at the heart of that extensive supply chain.

The opening of University Centre in Shrewsbury and NMITE in Hereford gave both counties university status, something lacking previously. NMITE has been warmly welcomed by employers through NMITE's training model and offer, creating valued and multi-disciplined engineers of the future. Shrewsbury University's varied offer includes much needed degrees in medical science but also niche subjects relating to heritage. Heritage across the Marches includes a UNESCO world heritage site, AONB, SSI's and a vast array of heritage buildings including the grandparent of skyscrapers, the Flaxmill Maltings; hence heritage skills are vital to maintain our lucrative visitor economy and unique history. Telford has long had University of Wolverhampton in its midst, a university with a strong engineering and automotive heritage, ideal for the density of engineering and manufacturing businesses surrounding the campus, and the many businesses across the Marches who are part of the automotive supply chain.

The Marches also boasts a wide variety of private training providers covering many sectors and areas. Further reading to understand the unique innovative educational offer within the Marches and how this supports business please see *Annex 7, Annex 8, Annex 9, Annex 10*

Understanding Current Business Engagement… a snapshot

There are many examples of how Marches providers, public and private, large, and small, already work with employers to support the need for skills and productivity, giving LSIP every opportunity to build on this.

- **The Marches Education Partnership**. The three FE Colleges and private training provider SBC Training formed a partnership to deliver SDF1 and SDF2 projects. SDF1 was bespoke training for the NHS and SDF2 was renewable construction, a fast-growing new sector. *Annex 11*

- **Hereford Ludlow and North Shropshire College** – Employers shaping the curriculum. *Annex 12*

- **Shrewsbury Colleges Group** – Building partnerships to enhance the curriculum. *Annex 13*

- **Telford College** – has created Strategic Growth Hubs to work closely with employers. *Annex 14*

- **University Centre Shrewsbury (UCS),** part of the University of Chester, received funding from the Institute of Coding to develop a postgraduate programme in Data Science. As part of the development work UCS worked with a consortium of Shropshire employers whose input contributed to some of the key programme content requirements and the attributes graduates would need to have. *Annex 15*

- **In-Comm Training** an IOT, based in the heart of Telford and rated Outstanding by OFSTED. Annually they carry out a Training Barometer survey of employers to understand need, barriers and from that they amend their offer and support. The Telford Marches Centre of Manufacturing & Technology (MCMT) is an employer-led response creating industry-ready apprenticeships and delivering the best upskilling opportunities.

- **Hereford Arts College** using creativity to benefit a wider business audience. The college is increasingly looking beyond the creative industries for its partners, demonstrating the impact creative skills can make in many different contexts. For example, Performing Arts students have been working with SEPAR International Hereford which specialises in training professionals for challenging environments and locations. *Annex 16*

- **Harper Adams University** is leading the way in agricultural technology, though industry and academic partnerships. The agriculture sector makes up 77.2% of the land across the Marches. Within the University there is the Crop and Environment Research Centre (CERC) which is a self-sufficient, independent trials company, with clients including the government, farmer-funded bodies, and private organisations.

- **NMITE** – New Model Institute for Technology and Engineering. NMITE's 'Manufacturing Systems Optimisation' module offers students the valuable opportunity to cultivate professional behaviours by immersing themselves in on-site visits to a manufacturing facility, where they actively engage with industry processes as integral members of their respective teams. *Annex 17*

- **SBC Training** – working with specialist NHS and care sector to create a scalable training model. *Annex 18*

- **CITB** – worked with the LSIP throughout to ensure we had relevant data and quality interactions with employers. Their report confirmed the LSIP Employers Voice findings. CITB's training models highlight new possibilities and ways of working, that could be extended into other sectors. *Annex 19*

- **Telford & Wrekin Council** – Delivers a Skills for Growth Programme to support businesses. *Annex 20*

Emerging Skills Priorities & Actions for LSIP Stage 2

The emerging priorities provides us with list of skills requirements, this is not exhaustive but representative of some of the most common requests by employers as shown by our extensive Employer Voice research. *Annex 6* This is also backed up by other evidence of shortages, such as the latest CITB report *Annex 19* Shortages come at every level and for multiple reasons. Stage 2 will give us the opportunity to deep dive so that the root causes can be better understood, as some subjects have ample provision but skills shortages remain. Suggestions below will be reliant on funding, capacity building or improved information. As FE providers have already created their curriculums for year 2023/24, we must look to 2024/25 & 2025/26 for the more involved change and ensure success through the quick wins in the shorter term. We have focused on L4 and below as above often involves university and that, as explained earlier, brings its own issue, in the out flow of students leaving for out of area universities and not returning, and the area not suiting the under 35's as a lifestyle choice. However, our universities do offer an expanding and reactive range of courses, but much of the intake is from out of area or overseas and therefore less likely to remain.

See *Annex 21* which lists the courses currently run by the main providers of training in the Marches, the location of those courses and mapped to the IfATE pathways those relate to. This valuable resource, gained from the Marches Skills Provider Network, but would benefit from expansion to include more providers as is not fully inclusive. Please see Quick Wins, at a later stage in this document, to see how this tool could be expanded and become a more valuable tool for employers.

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Added into this selection of priorities highlighted by the Marches LSIP's Employer Voice research is additional detail provided by the three main FE providers on 16.5.2023. The information provided by them is supported by their precursor statement - Actions to address identified employer need.

Actions to address identified employer need

"The region's three main providers of general further education skills training have begun the process of building on existing provision by reviewing and renewing curriculum to support identified employer, business, and the region's economic needs.

The business cycle of further education providers means that whilst some of the actions are achievable in the short term, others are developmental and will take more time to establish.

It should be noted that the list of actions included in the table below is not exhaustive. Each organisation will continue to respond to emerging local needs and demands. Although not yet published, many of the actions will be included in each institutions' accountability statements."

Statement provided by Telford College, Shrewsbury Colleges Group & Hereford Ludlow and North Shropshire College.

Examples provided by the three FE main colleges of their ongoing work to meet skills needs	
Manufacturing & Engineering including food and drink production	**Telford College** • **Introduction of L2 Maintenance Engineering pathway** • **Introduction of Engineering Manufacturing Technician L4 Apprenticeship** • **Introduction of Lead Engineering Maintenance Technician L4 Apprenticeship** **Shrewsbury Colleges Group** • **Introduction of T Levels in Design and Development for Engineering: Electrical Engineering pathway and Mechanical Engineering Pathway** **Herefordshire Ludlow and North Shropshire College** • **Development of T Levels in Engineering (Electrical and Mechanical engineering)** • **Develop L4/5 modular offer for employees of engineering and manufacturing businesses.**

Employer Voice Research – below skills priorities highlighted (selected 3 per sector to focus on)

Sector	Shortages	Actions	Current Provision
Manufacturing & Engineering including food and drink production	Factory and manufacturing production base skills.	Introduction to factory production and manufacture to provide prospective employees with a clearer understanding of the ways of working in this sector and some base technical skills. Though many of the technical skills will be taught in house, understanding the environment will increase the retention rate of starters, a current issue, and heighten career awareness. Stage 2 actions: Work with employers to shape understanding to create meaningful information to promote role reality. Boot camps would enable this understanding to be delivered to those looking for change of career or unemployed seeking employment. This would also help to eradicate some of the non-attendance at interview stage or fall out within first working week, which is an issue many employers raised which hampers productivity.	Engineering L1 Return to Work - Engineering Skills L1 Foundation Course in Engineering (Pre-Apprenticeship Course) L1 Engineering L1 IfATE inward Routes: Manufacturing and process operative or technician Plant operative or technician Manufacturing operative
Manufacturing & Engineering including food and drink production	Fabrication and welding	With the growth in this sector a shortage of welders, or welders with full skills range has been identified. Growth in prefabrication, changing technologies and changing materials use is putting a greater demand on this skill. Laser cutting was a specific skill required. Metals are often specified in construction due to their low maintenance and structural integrity. Aluminium for example is the second most used metal in buildings after steel. This opens up a wider range of skill requirements right across all areas of the construction industry and its supply chain. Creating new opportunities for training and varied skill sets.	Introduction to Welding and Fabrication N/A Welding for Professionals L1 Introduction to Welding L1 Introductory Welding L1 Fabrication and Welding L2 Welding for Professionals L2 Welding Skills L2 General welder L2 General Welder (Arc Processes) L2 Advanced Welding Skills L3 Fabrication and Welding L3 Metal Fabricator L3

		Stage 2 actions: Work with the providers (deep dive) and employers to understand if it is the content of the provision, location, or a lack of understanding of the courses content that is the issue. Work with providers to look at realigning. Understand if employers training provision awareness is poor or lacking.	IfATE inward Routes: Fabrication and welding operative or technician Fabrication and welding technologist Metal and steel operative
Manufacturing & Engineering including food and drink production	Manufacturing Maintenance Engineers	With advances in technology, automation to improve productivity and ease skills shortages, the requirement for maintenance engineers has grown. With regards to specific pieces of machinery this is often taught by the machine manufacture. The need for in house maintenance is crucial to keep production flowing. Building on the knowledge manufacturers supply and having the ability to repair a wide array of machines or equipment was seen as crucial. Also, the ability to train machine operatives to maintain their own machines etc. Stage 2 actions: Work with both employers and providers to understand if there is sufficient provision and if not look at how this provision can be grown. Is there sufficient take up on courses or is it not a popular career route. If that is the case then work with careers advisors and other stakeholders to ensure the career route is sufficiently promoted.	Engineering Maintenance L3 Food and Drink Maintenance Engineer L3 Maintenance and Operations Engineering Technician L3 IfATE inward Routes: Service, repair and or overhaul operative or technician Installation, service, repair and or overhaul advanced technician Installation and service engineer Manufacturing or process maintenance operative or technician Manufacturing or process maintenance advanced technician Manufacturing or process maintenance engineer

Examples provided by the three FE main colleges of their ongoing work to meet skills needs	
Construction including environmental technologies	**Telford College** • **Introduction of Environment Technologies Centre** • **Introduction of L3 Award in Installation and Maintenance of Small-Scale Photovoltaic Systems** • **Introduction of L3 Award in Design, Installation and Commissioning of Electrical Energy Storage Systems** • **Introduction of L3 Award in Installation and Commissioning of Electric Vehicle Charging Equipment** **Shrewsbury Colleges Group** • **Introduction of L3 Sustainable Construction qualifications in Electrical Battery Storage, EV Charging, Solar and Installation and Maintenance of Air Source Heat Pumps** • **Introduction of T Level in Design, Surveying and Planning Construction** • **Introduction of HTQ in Modern Methods of Construction** • **Introduction of L2 Maintenance Operative Apprenticeship** • **Development of Renewable Construction Centre** **Herefordshire Ludlow and North Shropshire College** • **Completion of the Low Carbon Technology Training Centre** • **Introduction of MCS / BPEC accredited training for industry professionals in Solar PV and Air Source Heat Pump Installation** • **Development of T Level in Modern Methods of Construction** • **Development of HTQ in Modern Methods of Construction**

- **Increase capacity to deliver and increase intake in Plumbing and Electrotechnical in Oswestry**
- **To increase the number of students accessing the T Level in Building Services Engineering (Electrical Installations)**

Employer Voice Research – below skills priorities highlighted (selected 3 per sector to focus on)

Sector	Shortages	Actions	Current Provision
Construction including environmental technologies	Plumbers	Employers identified a shortage of plumbers. Others identified part qualified plumbers who required extra training and exams to be legal after they had completed apprenticeships. Stage 2 actions: Work with providers and employers to understand the limitation of courses and what employers feel is not included but should be. Work to see if capacity to add additional or different professional qualifications into courses. Are all providers at capacity for their courses or is there a need to promote the career choice. Plumbing also lends itself to upskilling into environmental technology such as ground source heat pump installation. The Marches already provides training opportunities in environmental technology. Work with providers to fully understand the upskilling opportunities for employers and ensure that employers are aware of this growing provision. Ensure career advice practitioners are aware of the extended career opportunities for construction trade route careers.	Introduction to Plumbing N/A Unvented Hot Water Systems N/A Water Regulations N/A Plumbing L1 Plumbing Studies L1 Plumbing L2 Plumbing NVQ L2 Plumbing Studies L2 Heating and Ventilating Installer (Industrial and Commercial) L2 Plumbing and Domestic Heating Technician L3 Plumbing and Domestic Heating Technician - Environmental technologies L3 Plumbing and Domestic Heating Technician - Natural Gas L3 Plumbing Studies L3 IfATE inward Routes: Plumber Domestic Heating Engineer Domestic Heating Installer Plumbing and Domestic Heating Installer Plumbing and Domestic Heating Engineer Utilities installation and maintenance operative or technician Utilities installation and maintenance advanced technician
Construction including environmental technologies	On Site Construction Site Supervisors	Due to the building boom taking place site supervisors are still in high demand. Though many go up through the ranks there is a demand for newly trained or upskilling current construction workers to supervisor level. Due to the length of the apprenticeship construction companies cannot always provide a project lasting the	Leadership and Management Practice for the Construction and Built Environment Sector L3 Construction Site Supervisor L4

		length required. CITB do have a shared apprenticeship scheme, called Evolve, which could support the transition between employers. Stage 2 actions: Work with employers to help them understand how they could upskill staff to supervisory level and what routes and courses are open to them. Stage 2 deep dive and reviewing to ensure that if house building slows there is not oversupply of supervisory staff. Map out with providers where cross over into other occupations would benefit from this type of supervisory staff, to ensure if there is oversupply in time, that those staff are not lost but rerouted to other opportunities, in other sectors. Look to see if the courses could have more applicants if there are acknowledged similarities with other professions needs. Can capacity accommodate greater student numbers?	IfATE inward Routes: Construction site supervisor Construction professional Construction operative or supervisor Facilities manager Facilities management professional
Construction including environmental technologies	Carpentry	Employers use very loose terms for those using wood in construction. There are many differing skills and work environments related to the word 'carpentry'. Though there is a great deal of provision it can be confusing for the employers and there is inappropriate course content for others as current courses are not designed for changing needs such as factory modular build. There is an aging population amongst bench joiners, yet a skill required. Stage 2 actions: Work with employers large and small, modern and heritage to understand in more depth the actual detailed needs. Work with providers to marry the detailed need to current supply. Research in greater detail the rate of growth of the off-site element of construction. Ensure clear understanding of the multitude of routes carpentry can be associated with. Ensure that with the support of employers and organisations like the CITB this is mapped out far more clearly, to help careers advisors promote the sector and how it could have a wider appeal to more students, such as creative students moving into heritage wood skills.	Wood Occupations L1 Carpentry and Joinery L1 Site Carpentry L2 Wood Occupations L2 Wood Occupations NVQ L2 Carpentry and Joinery L2 Wood Occupations L3 Site Carpentry L3 Carpentry and Joinery L3 Bench Joinery L3 IfATE inward Routes: Core building tradesperson Manufacturing and process operative or technician Manufacturing operative

Examples provided by the three FE main colleges of their ongoing work to meet skills needs	
Health & Social Care	**Telford College** • **Introduction of pre-employment courses** • **Introduction of T Level in Health (Adult Nursing, Midwifery and Mental Health pathways)** • **Introduction of HTQ / HND Healthcare Professions** **Shrewsbury Colleges Group** • **Introduction of T Level in supporting Adult Nursing Team** • **Introduce project search to provide supported internships in partnership with SaTH** **Herefordshire Ludlow and North Shropshire College** • **Continue to develop bespoke programmes and delivery methods for the Wye Valley NHS Trust.**

- **Increase the number of in-work adult learners studying L3 Health and Social Care through the National Skills Fund (Herefordshire and Shropshire)**
- **Develop the T Level in Supporting Health Care – Supporting the Adult Nursing Team (Herefordshire and Shropshire)**
- **Increase the number of students who access introductory courses through the Health and Social Care Boot Camps (Herefordshire).**

Employer Voice Research – below skills priorities highlighted (selected 3 per sector to focus on)

Sector	Sector	Sector	Sector
Health & Social Care	Entry level Social Care Staff	Rurality is one issue for this non-NHS sector, along with low wages, poor perception of the career path and the NHS drawing staff away as seen as better pay and clear career paths. One recurring theme from care managers was that staff normally come into the industry as they have an empathy for care. That asset is key over skill set. They often enter with little or no qualifications, many grow organically and rise through the ranks and so the career path is not always clear for new entrants. Due to shortages of staff, low wages, poor transport, and low IT skills for some it means that accessing training can be very difficult. Also highlighted was the need for English and Maths to take many courses creating a barrier for some. Stage 2 actions: Due to the fragmented nature of this sector, the difficulty in releasing staff and the low skill base of entrants, there needs to be an emphasis on two things. Firstly, ensuring the career paths are clear and that Social Care is not seen as second-class care to NHS. Secondly, work on innovative ways to deliver training, upskilling over full time training, delivered in a way that works for the vast array of small employers and those very rurally based. Build on the current good practice and knowledge of the sector support organisations. Work with all size of provider and the representative bodies to find solutions.	Childcare and Health & Social Care L1 Health & Social Care L1 Preparing to Work in Adult Social Care L2 Level 2 Diploma in Health & Social Care L2 Health & Social Care L2 Health, Social Care, Children and Young People L2 Healthcare Support Worker L2 Preparing to Work in Adult Social Adult Care Worker L2 IfATE inward Routes: Children, young people, and families worker Care services professional Adult care worker
Health & Social Care	Healthcare cleaning and hygiene technicians	NHS highlighted the importance of this role, but difficulty in attracting and upskilling. The role is as key as other health roles, as good hygiene is vital. Attracting, as the role is not highly paid the NHS compete with others, such as supermarkets, for staff to fill these roles. Often applicants have very low IT skills, if any at all and with many being older, if they have qualifications they are dated or from overseas often blocking upskilling. Stage 2 actions: Continue to work with the NHS and the key providers who, through SDF1 and ongoing, deliver training into the NHS. Look for reasoning behind older qualifications not being understood blocking progression.	No specific courses available IfATE Routes: Healthcare cleaning and hygiene operatives

		Enhanced mapping of the career path and possibilities to make the role more attractive. IT upskilling, delivery to suit shift and non-IT literate is a key priority.	
Health & Social Care	Health Care Assistants	This was identified as a key priority and SDF 1 projects acknowledged this and it was responded to by the FE Colleges. However, the need is still great, and competition with retail and hospitality a drain. The step to nursing qualification and move to university means a drain away of people with skills, hence why this pipeline is so vital. Stage 2 actions: Colleges are continuing to address these skills shortages issues for the NHS. Work with providers to understand how the provision has evolved, the lessons learnt and what good practice can be taken forward to ensure an ongoing stream of applicants Look for reasoning behind older qualification not being understood and blocking progression. Ensure that the career path is clear to all and well emphasised. How could those not wishing to go to university progress and could there be a clear path into the streams within social care if not staying in the NHS.	Health & Social Care L1 Level 2 Diploma in Health & Social Care L2 Healthcare Support Worker L2 Healthcare Support Services L2 Health & Social Care L2 Clinical Healthcare Support L2 IfATE Routes: Health assistant Health Practitioner

Examples provided by the three FE main colleges of their ongoing work to meet skills needs	
Professional Services	**Telford College** • **Introduction of HND/C Business** • **Introduction of L1 Access to Accounting** **Shrewsbury Colleges Group** • **Introduction of T Level in Business Administration** **Herefordshire Ludlow and North Shropshire College** • **Introduce bespoke short-course business administration programmes for the health sector (Herefordshire)** • **Develop the T Level in Business Administration (Herefordshire and Shropshire)**

Employer Voice Research – below skills priorities highlighted (selected 3 per sector to focus on)

Sector	Shortages	Actions	Current Provision
Professional Services	Administration	This was highlighted in many sectors, not just professional services. Short supply, a lack of interest in the careers path and quality of candidates were all reasons given for skills shortages. This also went along with reduction in specialist training such as medical or legal secretaries, and specific skills like minute taking or shorthand. Though some skills such as shorthand are reducing in demand, the need for understanding of terminology is still in demand. Communication is a common issue, the level of professionalism of written and spoken English for business is a common theme, both for electronic communication as well as for handwritten documentation and customer interactions. Stage 2 actions:	Foundation in Business (Pre-Apprenticeship Programme) L1 Return to Work - Business Skills L1 Principles of Business Administration L2 Business L2 Business Administration L2 IfATE Routes: Administrator Business Manager

		As this skill cuts across all sectors, it is important to look at further information to establish if the situation is worse in one sector than another and to understand the reasons for any disparities. Working with employers to refine the detail of requirements and the volumes to see if niche or mainstream provision is the best vehicle to move this forward. Work with the providers to see if any course content can be very slightly changed to meet employers needs.* If the skill is generally not attractive then work with careers service and employers to enhance the image and raise awareness of the related career paths. *See cross cutting themes below	Customer service Marketing Legal assistant Financial services administrator
Professional Services	IT Support - In House	Employers had difficulty finding sufficient in-house IT support staff. They wish to be able to have staff on site who can resolve basic issues for staff, train staff on software packages, carry out routine updates and checks, help inform on cyber awareness and GDPR basics, as well as install some hardware and software. Again, this was not specific to just professional services, it was also raised by manufacturing and construction. Stage 2 actions: As many companies use external providers for these support services it needs to be better understood exactly which skills are most required and how these could relate to upskilling staff to address part or all the skills looked for. Work with employers to get this granular detail and match it to short courses available. Understand why they want in house over subcontractor to highlight the main priorities. Taking this knowledge and working with professionals from the IT support industry and academics, to translate the needs in possible upskilling or shorter modules. Some provision more attuned to independent smaller providers to allow for more tailored approach.	IC Technician L3 Information Communications Technician L3 IfATE Routes: IT support and services technician Cyber security technician IT systems technician
Professional Services	Customer Service	Customer service ties in clearly with the desire for employees to have far better communication skills. Once again customer service cuts across most sectors and is as vital in hospitality, tourism, retail, and wholesale supply as it is in Professional Service. Stage 2 actions: Many companies discussed the lack of good people and communication skills, especially in the under 35's, which leads to poor customer service. Full time courses are well catered for locally and would be bolstered by a variety of sector specific upskilling short or modular courses. Courses funded or self-funded by employers need to be aimed at more junior staff but also middle management to ensure that they can instil a culture of excellence in customer service. Good customer service will be productive not only for the businesses but for the Marches economy through the retention of satisfied customers and the building of strong reputations for good service and customer relations.	Introduction to Customer Service E3 Customer Service L1 Customer Service N/A Customer Service L2 Customer Service Practitioner L2 Customer Service Practitioner with sales L2 Customer Services Practitioner L2 Principles of Customer Service L2 Customer Service L3 Customer Service Practitioner L3 Customer Service Specialist L3 Customer Service Specialist with sales L3

		Covid saw brand loyalty diminish greatly and to rebuild that there needs to be exemplary customer service. This is a key focus for Stage 2 as it is a highly transferable skill and also can embrace the more creative students who perhaps do not have the desire for the standard academic route but have the natural people skills brought on through their creative abilities.	*cross over courses* Introduction to Retail Skills E3 Hospitality Services L2 Hospitality L2 Trade Supplier L2 Understanding Excellence in Customer Service for Hospitality L2 IfATE Routes: Customer service Sales and retail Hospitality Administration

Examples provided by the three FE main colleges of their ongoing work to meet skills needs

Cross Cutting Themes	**Telford College**
	• Basic digital communication skills component included in tutorial programmes (All full-time students). *
	Shrewsbury Colleges Group
(*) Programme to be co-designed	• Basic digital communication skills component included in tutorial programmes (All full-time students). *
	Herefordshire Ludlow and North Shropshire College
	• Basic digital communication skills component included in tutorial programmes (All full-time students). *

Quick Wins

There are a significant number of quick wins that can be achieved in Stage 2, to boost upskilling and knowledge sharing. LSIF would be a good source of funding to ensure that some of these activities can take place and that those financial resources are shared across the parties that can create the best outcomes and are not restricted to a single project. Other funding streams or employers self-funding would help support fast and vital upskilling, whilst not requiring current staff to be away from the businesses for long periods. Though the larger employers will have bulk training requirements, there is also a significant number of SME employers and they cannot not always create viable cohorts for larger providers but can be amply served by small providers or innovative delivery methods.

With quick wins it is very important to understand what has gone before, not only in training but through many other routes. Take this best practice, enhance, or update where appropriate and work with employers and stakeholders to support the LSIP project to make quick wins work and have long term value. As the LSIP is focused on 16+ but some employer worries relate to school, the LSIP must use the tools available to disseminate the appropriate careers and employment messages to schools.

Quick Wins   Quick Wins   Quick Wins   Quick Wins

Area	Employers Voice Highlighted	Opportunities
Career Advice	• Lack of promotion for certain sectors • Misunderstanding or weak knowledge of career pathways • Too much emphasis on the university only option. • Apprenticeships deemed as second class to university path	Careers & Enterprise Company: Engage with their employer ambassadors and staff further to understand what materials they have to date, barriers they face to delivering message and how best to change misconceptions both for careers advisors and students. LSIP work with employers to gain a clear understanding, in everyday language, of what the sector is, offers, realities and possible career paths. LSIP work with stakeholders to marry this employer information to training options. Embracing new local innovation to enhance careers advice and raise awareness of career paths and sectors. Using new interactive tools we can create strong messaging, help employers be more involved in building those resources and ensure that the worries businesses have around careers advice can be dispelled. See *Annex 22* which highlights a new resource we will use for Stage 2
Language Bridge	• Providers not always supportive or providing timely information or in a format the business can understand. • Use technology to engage with the businesses and stakeholders to get their views on breaking down barriers. Time effective for all parties.	Work with all stakeholders to break down these barriers and look at ways to find a common language between all parties. Dispel any misconceptions held by either party. Work to resolve any issues of misunderstanding. Enhance the knowledge held by employers and providers to ensure understanding of each other's pressures, restrictions, and way of working to enhance and expand relationships across the business sectors. Work to enhance mutual respect and reduce any arrogance or mistrust. Appreciate that small businesses and providers have very different ways of working, resources and time compared to large employers or providers.
Employer Engagement & Student Benefit	• Employers were willing to help promote their sector, shape the future curriculum and give advice • Where placements are not possible employers are willing to support in other ways	Work with stakeholders and employers to understand both parties need. To understand what can be achieved and accept, after explanation, what cannot. Build on current examples of good practice to show employers the many ways they can become involved without a burdensome commitment or the fear of being on a board or part of a group just to tick a box.
Expansive Geography vs. Collaboration	• The difficulties of collaborating over a large geographical area	Using simple technology to boost the interactions by moving away from just using standard meetings (on or offline) to brainstorm, review or enact. Use technology that allows people to react at times to suit them. Introducing this type of technology will encourage greater interaction, especially with employers and therefore produce better outcomes. Example of the type of technology we are harnessing see *Annex 23*
Terminology & Explanations	• Levy use or transfer • Funding availability and limitations • Curriculum flexibility and limitations • Understanding qualifications	Employers accept there are limitations but ask that explanations are given rather than no response or a straight no. There was a lot of comment around lack of understanding. Bringing the employers and providers (all sizes) together to remove these misunderstandings. Research for useful literature and advice resources. Work with local authority employer engagement teams and providers to understand how they engage, their tools and look to how we can grow or share this. Work with all size of employer to understand how best they would like the information.
Spreading the word	• Making the most of the employers knowledge • Creating clear messaging for recruitment & careers advice	Larger providers often have good resources in the form of digital equipment, coupled with students needing work experience. Creating this marriage to help sectors promote their career paths, the realities of working in certain environments and help poor perceptions of sectors

	• Enhancing experience opportunities	be removed would provide quick wins for all. Creating media that can be one to many. Taking the employers voice to the potential employees or those looking at careers. Also creating reality checks for use in boot camp style courses.
Inward Investment & Retention	• Inward investment tools for recruitment • Enhance the reasons for graduates to come, stay and enjoy, to boost recruitment opportunities for employers • Reduce the risk of companies moving out of area due to skill shortages	Working with local authorities and tourist bodies to understand how they promote to their audiences could offer innovative ideas to promote their sub regions as areas with good employment, living and recreation opportunities for the under 35's. Learn also from good work already carried out in Herefordshire around early career graduate retainment.
Training Confusion	• Clear messages • Fewer messengers • Simple terminology • Explain the qualifications • Highlight the practical	Enhance the solid base of the Marches Skills Provider Network. A membership organisation for all size of provider that hosts a website listing courses available by a wide selection of provide, but not all providers list, including some larger ones. The website is student orientated and therefore lacks use for employers who do not see the world through course levels or qualification but want to understand the relevance to their need. Websites alone will never reach the intended audience. Work with the local authorities to investigate ways to reach out to their business communities effectively to highlight training, upskilling and other ways employers could interact to raise awareness of their sectors. Funding would be required to expand the website.
United working	• Rural & smaller companies accessing training	Working with local authorities, local councils, employers, and stakeholders to find ways to support businesses to group together to access affordable short course training. Support the businesses to network together to benefit all. Learn from current best practice.
Specialist Provision for hard-to-reach sectors	• Micro module training • Mobile classroom training	Social care (non-NHS) across the Marches is made up of multiple small providers, in the main. Those providers are short staffed, often rural with staff who have little access to transport, low waged and cannot be spared from the workforce. Vital sector as large employer, vital with an aging population and provide rural career opportunities. Innovative solutions to micro module training already exist in the sector, this good practice by small niche providers could easily be built on with a small amount of funding but providing rapid upskilling to many in a way that suits this sector. Rolling on from SDF1 the Colleges have access to a mobile medical classroom, which though designed primarily for the NHS would be a good tool, dependant on funding, to provide onsite training to the larger social care providers or groups of care providers.
Digital Age issues	• One to many training • Opening doors for more to upskill • Additional simple short upskilling IT courses designed	Digital such as marketing etc. is taught across the Marches and also at some locations IT basics. However, there is still a group of lower paid staff who have no access to technology or no understanding of how to use, which prohibits them doing online training and upskilling. This is a clear barrier to progression. Work with all stakeholders and employers

	to fit around lack of mobility or equipment	in the sectors where this is most relevant such as both health and social care. Look for solutions that do not involve costly or unattainable travel, must work with shift patterns, and not erode worker confidence. Find age and academically appropriate methods to support. There is an urgent need for upskilling as health & social care records are going digital. The easiest method to train small remote groups of staff is via micro modules as shown above and this is often done in live remote session, so ease around IT as well as understanding is vital.
Flexibility	• Flexible or modular	Ensure there is full understanding for all stakeholders of exactly where the opportunities lie with regard to flex with provision, be it curriculum content, method of delivery or other. Businesses highlighted that apprentices doing the same exact apprenticeship but with two different providers would often have differing course content, which they found difficult to navigate but also justifiably questioned why then there is no course content flex when they ask? Ensure with the support of the stakeholders and the DfE full understanding is gained so that we can act as one in a knowledgeable and open way when supporting business understanding. Also learn from the CITB Evolve shared apprentice model and how it adds value.
Employer knowledge share	• Upskilling the trainers	Employers are willing to help keep teaching staff current through CPD at their premises. Trainers being current was an issue raised by employers. Providers have the difficult dilemma of availability to release staff and their natural fear that the staff may decide to leave teaching. Therefore, to allay all fears and not interfere with the daily running of the businesses short CPD sessions with employers would suffice, repeated on a mutually agreed basis. This is mutually beneficial, as employers need the confidence that the training they use, is going to be current and relevant. Training providers can remain competitive, enthuse their teaching staff, and therefore retain them. Quality teaching assured by having staff who are up to date in their understanding. This would also foster stronger bonds between employers and providers, invaluable if employers are to be at the heart of training decisions.

LSIF funding

The LSIF Fund guidance has just been announced. Below is a table of those that could be part of a bid for funding for LSIF. There are four institutions* that could lead the LSIF bid in collaboration with any, or all, of the partners below.

This funding will be vital to allow providers to increase provision in areas of skills shortages, where provision is oversubscribed, facilities are at maximum capacity or totally new provision is needed. There can also be sub bids, through the lead bid, to fund other smaller skills improvement projects, funded from the overall fund.

*Further Education (FE) Colleges	Local Authority providers
*Institutions designated as being part of the further education sector (Designated Institutions (DIs)	16-19 academies
*Institute of Technology (IoT) licensees	Schools with sixth forms
Sixth-form colleges	Higher Education Institutions
Independent Training Providers (ITPs)	University Technology Colleges

https://www.gov.uk/guidance/applying-for-funding-from-the-local-skills-improvement-fund

THE ROADMAP - Looking to the Future

The Aims & Purpose - Stage 2. To ensure **EMPLOYERS ARE AT THE HEART** of the LSIP, LSIF and skills landscape. Achieve this by ensuring:

- The employers voice continues to be gathered, heard, respected, and acted upon

- A wider range of employers are listened to, not only large or ones currently familiar to training providers

- The future prosperity and wellbeing of the Marches is at the forefront of all decision making

- A truly collaborative culture is built and encouraged amongst all stakeholders, not just for specific programmes, but in all skills or careers related activities

- All those advising on careers are supported and encouraged to have the broadest knowledge of careers within the Marches and promote all sectors or career paths equally

- The skills of the current workforce are developed and increased to aid productivity, retention, inward investment & embrace emerging sectors

- That employers have the correct information to make informed choices on training and that it is delivered in a way that works for employers

- Cultural understanding between stakeholders and employers is encouraged to enhance relationships, collaboration and dispel myths

- The sharing of best practice is encouraged, even in competitive environments, and that stakeholders share information that is required to support the workings of the LSIP and LSIP reports

- We work with all stakeholders to look at ways to retain or return graduates and other skilled staff into the local workforce

- Alternative ways to support the unemployed to be employed, and to be satisfactory employees, are considered

- We build on and learn from past good practice, productive partnerships, and employer relationships to ensure cost effective, realistic, and productive outcomes

- Employers have access to and are aware of all Marches LSIP published reports

Measuring Success

Evidencing that the requirements highlighted in the Employers Voice Report have been acted upon, where appropriate and reasonably possible. Map progress of the quick wins as well as the training provider evidence of progression, expansion, and forward plans.

Measured and evidenced by:

- Provider success rates – cohort intake numbers and course success rates for areas of skill shortage. Timely FE updates on which L1-L3 courses being discontinued or any new provision.

- Number and type of new initiatives, programmes or projects being put in place or in place to increase the availability, volume, and range of training

- Collaborations or co-working that has or will increase or created additional skills training or career opportunities

- Monitor LSIF funded projects to ensure they are meeting the outcomes stated in applications

- Continued Employer Voice research, directly with employers, to ensure skills shortages are still relevant, that emerging issues or changes are highlighted and acted on accordingly

- Measure the sentiment of the employers to see if there is improvement in perception or cross-party interaction against Stage 1 report

- Measure the success of employers engaging with stakeholders and training providers

- Using Local Authority understanding, monitor inward investment to highlight any new emerging sectors or large volume employer need and evidence responses

- Evidence any provider support or upskilling given when there are large scale redundancies

- Using various matrix, measure the outcomes of subgroups formed to inform the LSIP project

- Measure how refreshed or increased careers messaging is supporting training providers through increasing numbers of applicants

Governance

- Review the structure, numbers, and representation of the LSIP Board, including the terms of reference, to ensure it is an employer focused, collaborative, positive, working environment which delivers the support required to deliver meaningful results for the Marches Area.

- Create relevant working groups with clear purpose, which report in to the LSIP board via the group lead, this can include sector focus, local representation etc.

MARCHES LOCAL SKILLS IMPROVEMENT PLAN

STAGE 1 REPORT