

Cumbria

Local Skills

Improvement Plan

2026 - 2029



**Funded by
UK Government**

‘This Local Skills Improvement Plan has been approved by the Secretary of State in accordance with the requirements of section 1 of the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022, and the relevant published statutory guidance’

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1.0 INTRODUCTION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 What This LSIP is and Why it Matters

The Cumbria Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) 2026-2029 sets out a clear, employer-led plan to align skills provision with labour market demand, supporting economic growth, productivity and inclusion.

It acts as the skills delivery framework for Cumbria's wider economic priorities, including *Going for Growth*, Team Barrow, and the emerging Combined Authority strategic agenda.

While wider strategies identify priority sectors and growth drivers, the LSIP translates these into coordinated action across careers education, technical education, higher education, and employer-led training. It ensures that skills investment supports workforce renewal, productivity, innovation, and inclusive growth, and aligns with national strategies such as the Industrial Strategy.

The LSIP provides a shared delivery framework for:

- Employers
- Further and higher education providers
- Local authorities and the Combined Authority
- Jobcentre Plus and wider partners

It translates Cumbria's economic priorities into coordinated, measurable actions, ensuring that the local skills system:

- Responds effectively to employer demand
- Supports workforce development
- Improves access to opportunity for residents

1.2 What This Means

For employers this means:

- More responsive, flexible training aligned to business needs
- Improved support to recruit and retain staff

For providers this means:

- Clear priorities for curriculum and investment
- Increased collaboration and demand-led provision

For individuals (learners/residents) this means:

- Clearer pathways into employment
- Improved access to training and support

1.3 Cumbria's Key Skills Challenges

Cumbria faces a structurally tight labour market, characterised by:

- An ageing population and limited workforce growth
- Persistent recruitment difficulties across priority sectors
- Shortages in technical, entry-level and higher-level skills
- Lower levels of higher qualifications compared to the national average

These challenges are constraining economic growth and limiting the ability of employers to:

- Recruit and retain staff
- Increase productivity
- Respond to major investment opportunities

1.4 Priority Sectors

The LSIP focuses on sectors that are critical to Cumbria's economy and aligned to national and local strategies:

- Advanced manufacturing (including defence)
- Construction
- Energy and net zero
- Health and social care
- Land-based industries
- Visitor economy

These sectors reflect both:

- Current economic strengths
- Future growth opportunities

That said, the core challenges and opportunities for improvement sit across not only these sectors but the wider economy so many of the actions identified will have wider benefit.

1.5 Cumbria's Key Skills Priorities (2026-2029)

Based on employer evidence and labour market analysis, the LSIP identifies five core challenges:

- Insufficient supply of Level 2-3 technical and trade skills
- Entry-level workforce shortages across key sectors
- Gaps in higher technical and professional skills (Level 4+)
- Weak progression pathways from entry-level to higher skills
- Underutilised workforce, particularly among disadvantaged groups

These challenges reflect both immediate recruitment pressures and long-term structural issues. They represent the core priorities for the LSIP, with all actions structured beneath them.

Based on employer demand, labour market data, and stakeholder engagement, Cumbria's six cross-cutting key skills priorities have been identified as:

- Increase workforce supply into priority sectors
There is a need to grow the pipeline of individuals entering key sectors, particularly in response to ageing workforce pressures and recruitment challenges.

- Reduce skills gaps in key occupations
Employers report persistent shortages in critical roles, including technical, engineering, construction, care and digital occupations.
- Improve employer engagement and take-up of skills provision
While provision exists, employer utilisation and engagement—particularly among SMEs—needs to increase.
- Align education and training provision to employer need
Curriculum, pathways, and delivery models must better reflect current and future labour market demand.
- Increase participation and inclusion in the labour market
There is a need to support more people into work and training, particularly those facing barriers, including young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs).
- Respond to emerging skills needs (net zero, digital and AI)
Skills systems must adapt to new technologies and the transition to a low-carbon economy.

1.6 Priority Actions Aligned to Skills Priorities (2026-2027 focus)

To address these challenges, the LSIP prioritises the following actions in the initial phase:

- Increase skills supply in priority sectors
 - Grow apprenticeship volumes and employer participation
 - Align Adult Skills Fund (ASF) and Skills Bootcamps to priority occupations
- Address workforce shortages
 - Target key occupations in construction, manufacturing, energy and care
 - Expand entry routes and transitions into employment
- Strengthen progression pathways (Level 2-8)
 - Improve routes from FE to apprenticeships and HE
 - Expand higher technical and degree-level provision
- Strengthen employer engagement
 - Develop employer-led skills networks
 - Increase co-design of training provision
- Increase participation and inclusion
 - Deliver a coordinated NEET reduction strategy
 - Align with Jobcentre Plus and Work & Health programmes

These represent the core delivery priorities for 2026-2027, with further development over the LSIP period.

1.7 Delivering Impact: the LSIP Framework

The LSIP is underpinned by a structured delivery and monitoring framework, ensuring a clear line of sight from:

Skills needs → Actions → Outputs → Outcomes → Impact

Each action:

- Responds directly to identified skills gaps
- Includes measurable outputs
- Contributes to defined outcomes

1.8 Outcomes (2026-2029)

The LSIP will deliver six core outcomes:

- O1: Increased supply of skills aligned to employer demand
- O2: Reduction in skills gaps in the workforce
- O3: Increased employer engagement in the skills system
- O4: Improved alignment and responsiveness of provision (Entry to Level 8)
- O5: Increased participation and inclusion, particularly among disadvantaged groups
- O6: Improved targeting of funding and investment

1.9 How Success Will be Measured

Progress will be tracked through a consistent set of metrics, including:

- Apprenticeship starts and completions
- Participation in FE, ASF, Skills Bootcamps and HE provision
- Employer engagement levels
- Vacancy levels in priority occupations
- NEET rates and workforce participation
- Progression into employment or further training

These measures use existing data sources and are applied consistently across the LSIP.

1.10 Delivery Timeline

The LSIP will be delivered in three phases:

- Year 1 (2026-2027): Establish
Programmes and infrastructure in place, baseline metrics established
- Year 2 (2027-2028): Scale
Increased participation and employer engagement, provision refined
- Year 3 (2028-2029): Deliver impact
Sustained increases in skills supply and measurable reduction in skills gaps

1.11 A System-Wide Approach

Delivery of the LSIP is co-owned across the local skills system, including:

- Employers and the Employer Representative Body (Cumbria Chamber of Commerce)
- FE and HE providers
- Local authorities and the Combined Authority
- Jobcentre Plus and Work & Health partners

This ensures:

- Coordinated action across education, skills and employment
- Alignment with programmes such as Get Cumbria Working
- Effective use of funding and resources

1.12 Role of the Employer Representative Body (ERB)

The Employer Representative Body (ERB) leads the delivery, coordination, and performance management of the LSIP. It convenes employers and partners, ensures that employer demand drives priorities, and holds partners to account for delivery. For Cumbria the ERB is Cumbria Chamber of Commerce.

The ERB will monitor progress against agreed metrics and provide annual public reporting on LSIP delivery and impact.

1.13 Working Together

Cumbria's 2026 LSIP is a genuine partnership initiative. More than a document, it is a real commitment to working together on an ongoing basis to address Cumbria's key skills challenges and support growth, productivity and an inclusive economy with opportunities for all.

We believe it is fundamental that the range of relevant stakeholders - employers, providers, the public sector and others - are actively engaged in this approach, bringing their issues, challenges, opportunities, knowledge, expertise and resources. So that it is genuinely a shared endeavour for and by Cumbria.

As part of this we will deliver the LSIP working with aligned place-based programmes and bodies such as the Work & Health Board, Connect to Work, Combined Authority, Skills Bootcamps, Careers Hub, etc ensuring a system wide approach to careers, skills and employment.

This LSIP builds on both the 2022 Trailblazer and subsequent 2023 LSIP reports and activities to deliver them, which have already delivered significant impact.

The new guidance strengthens existing practice in Cumbria around broad stakeholder involvement and introduces several key requirements. These include closer alignment with local authority priorities, expanded coverage of higher-level skills up to Level 8 with stronger involvement from Higher Education, and clearer links with national and local economic strategies. There is also increased emphasis on clean energy and net zero, as well as on equality of opportunity.

The LSIP is expected to improve the relevance of FE and HE provision, simplify access to skills and training pathways, increase employer involvement and investment in skills and ensure better coordination across the local skills system, including careers services and Jobcentre Plus.

This plan sets out an overview of local economic challenges, priorities and skills gaps alongside key relevant strategies and initiatives. It highlights robust partner and wider stakeholder engagement and a focused set of measurable actions.

It is a living document so actions will continue to develop over its life, including identification of additional actions as further research continues. So, we encourage everyone to stay or get engaged - whether an employer, provider or other stakeholder. It is through your active involvement that Cumbria's 2026 LSIP will succeed in making the most impact.

1.14 Conclusion

This LSIP represents a coherent, evidence-based plan to address Cumbria's skills challenges, built on strong employer engagement and aligned with local and national priorities.

By focusing on:

- Increasing skills supply
- Improving pathways
- Strengthening employer engagement
- Widening participation

the LSIP will support:

- Sustainable economic growth
- Improved productivity
- Greater opportunity for Cumbria's residents

2.0 STRATEGIC AND ECONOMIC CONTEXT

2.1 Role of the LSIP

The role of the LSIP as Cumbria's skills delivery framework is outlined in Section 1. This section sets it within the wider strategic and economic context.

2.2 Overview of the Cumbrian Economic Environment

Cumbria is a predominantly rural county in North West England, covering 2,614 square miles, with a population of over 500,000. Cumbria's population in 2024 was estimated at 12,377 (2.5%) higher than 2014, though growth has remained below the national rate of 7.6% over the same period. Population growth accelerated significantly after the pandemic, with Cumbria growing by an average of 3,060 people a year between 2021 and 2024. There are an estimated 225,676 payrolled employees as of March 2026 which is fewer than a year earlier, and approximately 30,400 active businesses. Cumbria's £15bn economy is underpinned by key sectors including advanced manufacturing, clean energy, tourism and land-based industries, set across a varied geography of a heritage city, industrial centres, market towns, three ports, an enterprise zone, two national parks, and 180 miles of coastline. This diversity brings both opportunity and constraints to Cumbria.

The Cumbrian economy has experienced slower than average growth since the pandemic and continues to experience the productivity challenges typically associated with large rural and post-industrial areas. Productivity in Cumbria in 2023 was £55,964 per filled job which is below the national average of £66,402. However, the gap has been narrowing since 2021 with productivity growth in Cumbria outpacing the UK average, growing by 11.3% compared UK growth of 8.4%. Earnings growth has also been strong, with resident full-time weekly pay now exceeding the UK average (up from 94.5% of the UK average in 2015 to 102.6% in 2025), reflecting the influence of high value sectors such as defence and nuclear.

Labour supply continues to be one of the major challenges facing our businesses. While net migration of working age people into the area has been positive since the pandemic, this is only just compensating for other demographic trends. Migration of working age people into Cumbria has increased significantly since the pandemic, with average net migration of 3,500 aged 16-64 per annum between 2021 and 2024. As a result, growth in the overall working age population of 301,800 (2024) - with an economically active working age population of 248,100 (2025) - has not kept pace with growth seen regionally and nationally. Our economic inactivity rate (not working or looking for work) was estimated to be 19% in the year to December 2025 (approximately 55,600 residents) which is lower than the national estimate of 20.9% but within the margins of survey error.

According to the Cumbria Labour Market Briefing - April 2026, the employment rate in Cumbria is higher than the national average with 78.7% of Cumbria's 16-64-year-olds in employment, above the national estimate of 75.5%. A low level of unemployment adds further to the tightness of the local labour market. There were 6,800 Jobseekers Allowance/Universal Credit claimants seeking work in March 2026 with a claimant rate of 2.3%, well below the national figure of 4%, with these figures yet to show the signs of easing seen at national level. There were 9,475 active online job postings, which reflects continued employer demand. Cumbria's overall NEET rate of 3.3% in February 2026 compares favourably to the national rate of 5.4%, the number of 16/17 year olds classed as NEET stood at 358, an increase of 52 on the previous year, and the participation rate for this age group was 90.3%, below the national average of 92.1%.

Despite this, skills levels remain a challenge. Annual estimates of qualification levels for 2025 suggest that 40.2% of working age residents in Cumbria were qualified to level 4 or above, below the national average of 48.4%.

Cumbria's Going for Growth strategy highlights that the economy is held back by an under-representation of high-value sectors and a skills base not fully aligned with demand, poor transport and digital connectivity compound these challenges. There is evidence of a mismatch of skills supply and employer demand, with a need to not only meet that demand but to raise it. Addressing these challenges through attracting and retaining workers and upskilling the existing workforce is central to securing Cumbria's long term economic growth.

2.3 National Strategies and Plans

2.3.1 Industrial Strategy

The [UK's Industrial Strategy](#) identifies eight key sectors to drive long-term economic growth through targeted investment, innovation, and skills development. Of these, five align closely with Cumbria's economy and are reflected through the Going for Growth Strategy and this LSIP, among other plans. These are advanced manufacturing, clean energy, construction, defence (sits within Manufacturing in the LSIP) and health & social care. In addition, digital and technologies is considered as a cross-cutting theme.

The LSIP supports the UK Industrial Strategy by building a skilled workforce across the sectors identified as national priorities. It does this by ensuring Cumbrian skills provision is positioned to meet growing workforce demands, creating an enabling framework that accelerates economic growth through the adoption of new technologies, the transition to net zero, and expert

professional support. This will be inclusive by design to broaden the talent pipeline and increase labour supply, including address workforce constraints in the skills system itself.

2.3.2 Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper

The [Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper](#) sets out the government's plan to reform the skills system in England, developing the skilled workforce the economy needs. It aims to deliver change in the following ways:

- We will work with employers as part of a joined-up skills system that drives growth and leaves no place or person behind.
- We will develop a specialist and prestigious further education sector so that everyone can access opportunities through high-quality training.
- We will strengthen our world-leading higher education sector to align with the needs of the economy, become more specialised and sustainable, and deliver good value for the students who study here.

The key priorities of the paper include tackling skills shortages, improving essential workplace skills, reducing the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET), creating clearer qualification pathways, and joining up skills and employment support through closer integration of the Adult Skills Fund and Jobcentres. The introduction of the new Growth and Skills Levy, replacing the Apprenticeship Levy, gives employers a faster and more flexible way to upskill their workforce.

The LSIP supports this paper, reflecting the paper's ambition to close skills gaps, grow productivity and build a workforce that meets the long-term needs of the local economy. Within this it supports priorities such as addressing NEETs, improving qualification pathways and moving more people into employment with appropriate skills development.

2.4 Local Strategies and Plans

2.4.1 Cumbria Combined Authority

On 24th February 2026, the new Cumbria Combined Authority (CCA) was established. This brings together the leaders and deputy leaders of Cumberland Council and Westmorland and Furness Council to form a new Cumbria-wide institution, which will focus on providing strategic leadership, coordinating investment and planning at the Cumbria scale, and addressing challenges that cannot be tackled effectively by individual councils acting alone. Devolution will unlock at least £333m in investment over 30 years, alongside additional powers from national government. Cumbria will elect its first mayor in 2027. The Combined Authority will take the strategic lead on transport, skills and employment, business support and infrastructure investment. It is expected that its role in oversight of the LSIP will be closely aligned to new arrangements on skills leadership that will support the Combined Authority in its leadership role.

The LSIP team is working with the CCA to support development of its wider skills plan, while the CCA has been active in supporting development of the LSIP, ensuring that priorities and actions set out in this report will contribute positively to implementation of emerging CCA plans and achievement of objectives.

2.4.2 Cumberland Council Plan

[Cumberland Council](#) has the central aim of improving health and wellbeing. By addressing inequalities, local economies that work for local people, environmental resilience, and delivering excellent public services, the council seeks to make an impact on the factors that improve health and wellbeing.

Its 2023-2027 Plan identifies four key priority areas to improve the health and wellbeing of residents:

- The local economy can have a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of individuals. We want to enable the move to an economy that builds wealth locally and offers opportunities for everyone, and where people have the skills to take them. We want to achieve greater social value in public sector procurements, exploring more ways of retaining wealth within our community. We will seek to utilise our assets as a catalyst for economic activity, generating opportunities for residents, businesses, social enterprises and the community and voluntary sector alike.
- The environment in which our people live has a huge impact on health and wellbeing. The climate and environmental emergency demands our attention, our leadership and our action. The repercussions of inaction will be significant for our local economy and our services. We want to support the growth of a low carbon economy by working with others to identify opportunities, help businesses and residents manage resources better and ensure appropriate training opportunities are in place. We want to help the most vulnerable with issues such as fuel poverty and the impacts of extreme weather.
- We want Cumberland to be a high performing council. Our services have a direct and indirect impact on our resident's health and wellbeing. We want our residents to benefit from excellent, efficient and enterprising public services. We will deliver what they need, when they need it with a focus on collaboration, dialogue and delivering strategic impact at a local level.
- We are committed to addressing systemic inequalities such as racism and making Cumberland a fairer place. We will take a proactive approach to delivering the public sector equality duty. We want our residents to access opportunities that will empower them to achieve their goals. Inequality continues to hold people back from reaching their potential and we will work with residents and partners to challenge entrenched issues in areas such as health, education, life expectancy and deprivation. We have a key focus on food security and the food system. We believe each resident has a "Right to Food". This means that food should be adequate, available and accessible.

The LSIP will contribute to achievement of this by, for example, supporting development of a thriving local economy that offers opportunity for everyone and skills development to enable people to take up those opportunities. A key element will be actions around getting more people,

especially those from deprived areas and/or with barriers, into the active workforce and supporting their skills development, retention and progression.

2.4.3 Westmorland & Furness Council Plan

[Westmorland & Furness Council's plan](#) aims to help key sectors (advanced manufacturing, tourism, agriculture, creative industries and higher and further education) to recruit and retain staff and seek to enable and encourage young people and families to live and thrive in the area. Their plan recognises that a strong economy is essential to delivering high quality jobs, retaining young people, attracting investment, and underpinning the services that support quality of life. It also prioritises addressing inequality, tackling climate change, empowering communities, and supporting health and wellbeing.

Westmorland and Furness Council's Plan values are to be:

- Ambitious - We will focus on identifying and delivering the outcomes that our communities want to see. We will support our workforce to innovatively transform services for the better, enabling residents and visitors to have healthy, happy lives.
- Inclusive - We will be an inclusive council and will work collaboratively with partners to challenge each other to improve diversity and eliminate all forms of discrimination in our organisations and through local leadership increase participation in local decision making with underrepresented communities.
- Outcome focused - We are outcome focused and we will focus on identifying and leading the delivery of the changes that our communities want to see.
- Collaborative - We will work with partners, communities, and residents to deliver the best outcomes for all.
- Responsible - We are responsible, socially, environmentally, and financially. Providing leadership in the drive to become carbon neutral and delivering value for money in everything we do. We will make the best and most efficient use of our resources, while making sustainable decisions and striving to deliver on our promises to you.
- Needs-led - We will intervene early to prevent harm, act in an equitable way leaving no-one behind, and enable all to ask for help to gain access to the right service, in the right place at the right time.
- Ecologically aware - We will provide leadership in the drive to become carbon net zero and sustainable.

The LSIP specifically prioritises advanced manufacturing, tourism (including cultural and creative) and agriculture (within land-based) as key sectors and supports higher and further education. It seeks to address issues in recruitment and retention, enable and encourage more (particularly younger) people to stay in or move to the area. Through the actions around inclusion, it helps to address inequality, health and wellbeing and through clean energy and net zero actions it supports activity to address climate change.

Both Cumberland Council and Westmorland and Furness Council share a commitment to inclusive and sustainable economic growth, recognising that a strong economy will improve the health, wellbeing and opportunities of their residents. They recognise the importance of talent development and upskilling across all age groups. Both council plans share a vision for making

the area a desirable place to live and work. The LSIP supports both the Cumberland and Westmorland and Furness Council Plans by working to raise skill levels, improve access to high quality training, and support residents into more secure employment, and in doing so addresses workforce challenges and employer needs in both council areas.

2.4.4 Economic Growth Board - Going for Growth

Enterprising Cumbria is the county's economic development body, supported by Cumberland Council and Westmorland and Furness Council and is now part of the Combined Authority. Established in 2024 to replace the Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership, it promotes inclusive growth, skills investment, and Cumbria's profile as a place to live, work, and do business. Its Economic Growth Board is leading the development of a long-term economic vision for the county and includes good representation of the LSIP's Steering and ERB Groups.

[Enterprising Cumbria's Economic Growth Strategy: Going for Growth](#) sets out a vision of Cumbria 2045 as a modern, entrepreneurial economy where world-leading sector strengths and an outstanding natural environment drive shared prosperity. Grounded in robust evidence, the strategy directs collective efforts to unlock Cumbria's potential, address persistent barriers to growth, and underpin its devolution ambitions.

Going for Growth demonstrates the contribution that large, dispersed areas like Cumbria can make to the UK's industrial strategy, productive growth and net zero ambitions. Cumbria is already seeing billions of pounds of investment: leading the next generation of the nuclear deterrent; £250m investment in town growth and regeneration; £4.9m investment in a new nuclear robotics and AI cluster; and new plutonium immobilisation facility to support thousands of skilled jobs. This strategy builds momentum to drive further economic growth as well as innovating how we deliver services and supporting nature recovery.

Going for Growth prioritises sectors and clusters where there are significant opportunities, including advanced manufacturing, robotics, defence, clean growth and visitor economy. It addresses the key barriers to investment and growth in Cumbria through:

- Improved infrastructure to support and enable growth projects - with shorter journey times, improved grid connectivity and to support major investment in nuclear decommissioning and in our nuclear deterrent.
- Faster productive growth - building on our sector strengths and growth opportunities and supporting all businesses to innovate and become more competitive.
- Defence and energy security - maintaining our UK critical role, preparing for future investment and increasing local spend in supply chains.
- Enhancing nature - building a growth plan that delivers 30x30, with increased investment, skills and jobs in land-based industry.
- Innovating in public service design and delivery - to equip our people to be ready for these opportunities and ensure businesses have access to the skills they need.
- Accelerating major housing developments in thriving places - supporting the two local authorities to deliver sites such as 10,000 new homes at St Cuthbert's Garden Village and 800 new homes at Barrow Marina Village, and create places that people want to live, work and study, with creativity and culture built into plans.

Cumbria's case for change turns its strengths into a plan for growth, focusing on:

- Addressing Cumbria's productivity gap

Low productivity has a direct and far-reaching impact on living standards. With a £3 billion productivity gap, Cumbria's economy is held back by an underrepresentation of high-value sectors and a skills base that is not fully aligned with the demands of emerging sectors. Poor transport and digital connectivity compound these challenges, limiting investment and restricting businesses' ability to access markets, talent and supply chains.

- Boosting the working age population

Successful delivery of the priorities in this strategy will create more new jobs. Cumbria is creating jobs with an estimated 6,000 new jobs to deliver the nuclear deterrent and 200 new jobs from the UKRI-funded nuclear robotics and AI cluster based in Whitehaven. This means we need the working age population to meet the needs of our growing economy. There is currently a projected 6% decline in Cumbria's working-age population to 2045. Targeted interventions around housing, connectivity, promotion and public services will attract and retain younger workers and upskill the existing workforce, supporting a vibrant and resilient Cumbria.

- Unlocking the potential of our people

Health outcomes in Cumbria vary significantly between areas, reflecting disparities in socioeconomic conditions and access to services. Despite progress in increasing the number of residents with RQF4+ qualifications, Cumbria lags behind the North West and national averages, limiting business ability to attract the higher-level skills they need in the workplace. Sustained investment in health and skills, supporting people into work and to stay healthy in the workplace, is essential to build a more productive workforce.

- Driving growth through nature recovery and net zero

Our economic performance is intrinsically linked to the health and resilience of our natural environment. Protecting and enhancing these natural assets ensures the continued vitality of the visitor economy while supporting land-based industries such as agriculture and forestry. Cumbria's clean energy ambitions depend on its natural environment, which provides a foundation for sustainable practices and attracts investment in green innovation. It is strongly linked to our existing commitments to deliver Net Zero by 2037. Investing in nature recovery, such as natural flood management, strengthens climate resilience and reduces the economic risks associated with environmental degradation.

Through addressing the productivity gap, growing the workforce, investing in people and skills, and protecting its natural environment, this strategy will result in economic growth for Cumbria. By aligning training supply with employer demand, and helping to drive employer demand, the LSIP helps to unlock the productivity gains and business investment that Going for Growth wants to deliver. LSIP sector priorities align with Going for Growth and the LSIP supports the strategy's goal of attracting and retaining talent in Cumbria and growing our working age population, addressing one of the most significant barriers to sustainable economic growth in the region.

2.4.5 Work & Health Board and Get Cumbria Working Work and Health Plan

[The Get Cumbria Working plan](#) aims to unlock Cumbria's growth by enabling more residents, especially those facing the greatest barriers, to enter, remain and progress in good jobs, while improving health and wellbeing. The purpose of this plan is to align partners around a single approach that reduces economic inactivity, narrow disability and gender participation gaps, and raises real household incomes. The plan supports the government's goal of boosting economic growth, raising living standards, and increasing employment across the UK, in line with the Get Britain Working ambition of an 80% national employment rate. The Get Britain Working White Paper aims to significantly increase the UK's employment rate and reduce economic inactivity by focusing on skills, health-related barriers, and providing personalised support.

Implementation is led by the Work and Health Board, which includes representation from the councils, ICBs, and DWP, as well as the Council for Voluntary Service and Cumbria Social Enterprise Partnership, University of Cumbria, Cumbria Chamber of Commerce and the Economic Growth Board. Delivery of Get Cumbria Working is aligned with Jobcentre Plus and a range of partner provisions.

Get Cumbria Working identifies that there will be future demand for labour due to the major investment coming to Cumbria. This investment includes:

- Major investment by key employers associated with defence and energy security, including BAE Systems and Sellafield and their associated supply chains.
- Housing development, including large strategic sites such as St Cuthbert's Garden Village in Carlisle and Marina Village in Barrow.
- Strategic employment sites, such as Pioneer Park, Kingmoor Business Park, around the ports of Barrow and Workington, and Penrith 41.
- Infrastructure development, such as the Port of Workington and the dualling of the A66.

The plan also highlights Cumbria's economic structural challenges including:

- Population structure: Cumbria's ageing population presents structural challenges to labour supply. Only 59% of residents are of working age.
- Rurality, transport and access: Cumbria's rural geography and limited transport infrastructure restrict access to jobs, education, and essential services. With 58% of residents commuting by car, reliance on private vehicles is high due to limited public transport options.
- Skills mismatches and gaps: Cumbria faces significant skills mismatches with only 38.8% of residents holding degree-level qualifications compared to 47.2% nationally. This limits access to higher-skilled roles and constrains economic growth. Demand for advanced qualifications is rising, with projections showing a shift toward higher-level skills by 2035, yet mid-and lower-level qualifications remain stable or decline. This evolving landscape underscores the need for targeted upskilling and career guidance. Combined with below-average productivity in key sectors, these skill gaps present structural challenges that hinder competitiveness, workforce mobility and the county's ability to attract and retain talent.

Get Cumbria Working identifies key groups most at risk of economic inactivity and reduced labour market participation which are: economically inactive individuals, people with disabilities and

health conditions, young people and those NEET, older workers, and other disadvantaged groups. Targeting these groups ensures implementation efforts are directed where they are most needed to maximise employment participation.

The LSIP and Get Cumbria Working plan share a commitment to reducing economic inactivity, improving resident wellbeing, and tackling the challenges of an ageing workforce population. Where Get Cumbria Working supports individuals into employment, the LSIP ensures the skills system is responsive enough to make that employment sustainable and well matched, closing the gap between what employers need and what the workforce are trained to do - and supports and encourages employers to take on and develop those with barriers.

2.4.6 Team Barrow

[Team Barrow](#) operates as a trilateral initiative between central government, Westmorland & Furness Council and BAE Systems, supported by a range of stakeholders. The aim is to enable Barrow to become a new “powerhouse for the north.” The partnership focuses on expanding BAE Systems’ defence capability, supporting energy security and revitalising Barrow and Furness as a place where people choose to live, work and thrive. It aims also to ensure local people benefit from the opportunities in the area and ensuring a diverse and vibrant economy. The LSIP team and partners are closely involved in the Team Barrow workstreams.

A key element of Team Barrow’s plans and activities is focused around skills and employment. The LSIP is supporting this on a practical level, for example through shared research activity, and more widely through its sector focus and actions to grow the workforce and ensure availability and take up of appropriate training and development opportunities. This includes particular focus on NEETs and others with barriers.

2.4.7 Apprenticeships Nationally and Cumbria’s Apprenticeship Plan (currently in draft)

The new Apprenticeship Action Plan for Cumbria is aiming to reverse the decline in 16-18 apprenticeships starts across Cumbria by improving awareness, strengthening employer support, addressing inclusion gaps, and preparing stakeholders for upcoming change to apprenticeship structures.

The plan identifies various workstreams:

- Workstream 1 - Communications and awareness. This aims to create a coherent, consistent, countywide narrative explaining what apprenticeships are, who they are for, and how to access them.
- Workstream 2 - Employer support and retention. This has the objective to increase employer participation and improve retention for 16-18 apprenticeships.
- Workstream 3 - Inclusion and disadvantaged young people. This ensures all actions address barriers faced by disadvantaged young people.
- Workstream 4 - Changing apprenticeship structures. This will prepare stakeholders for government reforms and ensure clarity during transition.

- Workstream 5 - Local variation and place-based needs. This aims to balance countywide consistency with local responsiveness.

The LSIP supports the Apprenticeship Action Plan by identifying opportunities to grow apprenticeships across its sector priorities, helping tackle Cumbria's economic challenges and reverse the decline in 16-18 apprenticeships starts.

Nationally, the Apprenticeship Levy has been replaced by [The Growth and Skills Levy](#), providing a more flexible offer to employers and learners to help people gain relevant, high-quality skills at work and fuel innovation in business across the country. It offers foundation apprenticeships across key sectors including construction and the built environment, engineering and manufacturing, health and social care, digital catering and hospitality and retail service, supply and administration. These apprenticeships offer a clear progression route, enabling individuals to gain relevant employability skills and experience that can lead to more specific or advanced apprenticeships. Employers can also access shorter modular apprenticeship units in areas including AI leadership, battery manufacturing, electric vehicle charging, electrical fitting and assembly, permanent modular building assembly, solar photovoltaic installation and maintenance, and welding, designed to help employers respond quickly to evolving skills needs and invest in workforce development. Several of these align with Cumbria's growth priorities and will be supported through the LSIP.

2.4.8 Careers Hub

[Cumbria Careers Hub](#) works directly with careers leaders across secondary schools and colleges in Cumbria to ensure every young person receives relevant and impartial careers education and guidance. This includes building a strong understanding of local labour market opportunities and the priority skills needed across the County to support economic growth, productivity and future workforce demand throughout their time at school and college.

The Hub offers practical assistance and resources to help schools and colleges develop effective, high-quality careers programmes that align education with employer needs and emerging growth sectors.

The key strategic priorities for 2025-26, to ensure the Careers Hub achieves maximum impact, are:

- To deliver continuous careers improvement, rooted in strong labour market intelligence
- To increase high-quality work experience opportunities for all learners, linked to local employers and growth industries
- To boost skills pathways that respond directly to the current and future skills needs of the County and support inclusive economic growth

The LSIP aligns closely with the Careers Hub's work through its shared focus on employer engagement, strengthening skills pathways and expanding work experience opportunities, these play a vital role in supporting young people at risk of becoming NEET. Together, these priorities support the LSIP's objectives around recruitment, skills supply and workforce growth, ensuring

the education system plays a central role in meeting Cumbria's skills needs and driving sustainable economic development.

2.4.9 Regional Clean Energy Skills Action Plan - North West Clean Power Report

[The North West Clean Energy Report](#) highlights a transformational opportunity for the region, projecting billions of pounds in investment and the creation of 35,000 new clean energy jobs by 2028. Cumbria is identified as central to the North West's clean energy transition, with various major strategic projects taking place in the county. As part of the Clean Energy Superpower Mission, the UK government's Clean Power 2030 (CP30) Action Plan outlines £60 billion of investment to upgrade GB's power grid infrastructure, enabling £40 billion of private investment annually into clean power projects.

The North West has the potential to move ahead of national net zero targets by harnessing its industrial expertise, skilled workforce and innovation capacity. Key economic benefits include:

- Job creation and workforce development: investment in training programmes to develop a workforce skilled in renewable energy, industrial decarbonisation, electric transport, and energy efficiency, supporting existing workers to transition to green industries.
- Industrial competitiveness and innovation: driving innovation in carbon capture, hydrogen production and low-carbon manufacturing.
- Energy cost savings for businesses and households: Investing in local renewable energy generation and energy efficiency will reduce energy costs, increasing residents' disposable income and improving business profitability.
- Attracting investment and business: positioning the region as a leader in sustainable infrastructure, attracting domestic and international investors.
- Local ownership and community benefits: enabling communities and local government to own energy assets and accrue broader local returns.

The transition from carbon-intensive industries to clean energy brings significant workforce challenges, including growing competition for qualified workers, an ageing workforce, barriers to training access and the need to promote green skills opportunities to young people. The LSIP addresses these challenges, recognising energy and net zero as a key growth sector and focusing on skills supply, employer engagement and widening access to training.

2.5 Mapping Against Other Strategies & Plans

A mapping of LSIP priorities and actions against these other strategies and plans is set out in Annex D.

3.0 LOCAL SKILLS NEEDS

The evidence and analysis in this section are grouped around the key skills priorities set out in Section 1 and provide the basis for the actions in Section 4.

3.1 LSIP Priorities

Priority sectors selected by partners/key stakeholders for Cumbria are construction, energy/low carbon land-based, manufacturing & engineering (including defence), health & social care and the visitor economy (including cultural & creative).

Similarly, the same group agreed key themes for consideration including AI/robotics/digital, professional services/roles such as accountancy, inclusion/opportunity for all and net zero/green.

These priorities have been agreed by partners/key stakeholders based on consideration of the various strategies and plans in place or under development for Cumbria, alongside various labour market data and national strategies (see Annex C, Section 1 below).

Cumbrian partners have been and remain committed to working collaboratively to ensure that the various strategies and plans are coherent and complementary, working together to achieve our share vision for Cumbria.

Based on these priorities we have undertaken a range of primary and secondary research focused on these sectors and priorities, but also looking more widely, and are currently completing review of draft findings and actions with businesses and other stakeholders.

The sources used are considered robust and relevant because the findings from the range of sources used have reinforced each other, rather than conflicted, and reflect the views, experiences and understanding of the range of relevant stakeholders. In addition, responses through one-to-ones have repeated themes and issues. More details on research and engagement is provided in Annex C.

Priorities for the LSIP have as a result been determined as:

- Increasing the supply of skills relevant to skills needs in priority sectors, in particular amongst young people because of our ageing workforce. While there are some changes needed to provision this is largely now an issue of increasing numbers and take-up, including enabling relevant progression. This includes specifically a focus on equality and inclusion and reduction of NEET numbers through a joined-up approach that ensures all learners, particularly those facing one or more disadvantages can access, understand and progress into local opportunities.
- Enhancing provider capacity to deliver the courses needed, not least through increased availability of trainers and assessors and to support them in increasingly collaborative working/shared delivery to maximise effectiveness for the county.
- Dealing effectively with skills gaps in the existing workforce.
- Building on LSIP engagement to date to engage employers to drive skills delivery and take-up.

3.2 Headline Priority Skills Gaps

Based on employer engagement and labour market analysis, the key skills gaps are:

- Level 2-3 technical and trade roles (construction, engineering, care)
- Entry-level workforce shortages across priority sectors
- Higher technical skills (Level 4+) in engineering, energy and digital
- Core employability skills (communication, teamwork, reliability)

These reflect labour shortages, an ageing workforce and employer-reported recruitment difficulty.

3.3 Link to Employer Evidence

These priorities are directly informed by employer engagement activity and survey data, which highlight:

- Persistent recruitment difficulties across sectors
- Skills shortages driven by low applicant numbers and technical skills gaps
- Gaps in both occupational and employability skills

3.4 Local Skills Dashboard

The Skills England Local Skills Dashboard (department-for-education.shinyapps.io/local-skills-dashboard/) highlights the following:

- Apprenticeship achievements of 2,380 in 2024/25, up 130 on 2023/24
- FE achievement rate per 100,000 of 3,494, which is lower than the national average, with the county sitting 18th out of 42 areas, but growing faster than that average over the last four years
- Higher FE achievement rate in apprenticeships than the national average of 789 compared with 538
- Education and training achievement rate 2,562 compared with 2,867 nationally
- Tailored learning rate (primarily non-qualification-based provision) 742 compared with 968 nationally
- Employment rate 80%, 7th out of 42 areas and higher than the national average of 75.8%, increasing faster than the national average over the last 4 years
- Unemployment rate 2%, lower than the national average of 4.3% and 41st out of 42 areas
- Inactivity rate 19%, lower than the national average of 20.7%, 27th out of 42 areas and declining faster than the national average over the last 4 years
- Employment 244,100, lowest of all 42 areas, growing slower than the national average over the last 4 years
- 53,600 inactive people, 41st out of 42 areas, with inactivity declining more slowly than average over the last 4 years
- 4,400 unemployed people, 42nd out of 42 areas, with unemployment declining more slowly than average over the last 4 years

- Qualification rate at Level 3+ 68% compared with 67.3% nationally, 17th of 42 areas, increasing faster than the national average over last 4 years
- Qualification rate Level 4+ 39% compared with 46.8% nationally, 36th out of 42 areas, increasing slower than the national average over last 4 years and lower in all age groups than the national average

3.5 SOC/SIC Alignment

More details of skills needs in key sectors, including mapping of priority skills needs to SOC and SIC classifications. are set out in Annex A.

3.6 Link Between Evidence, Skills Needs and Actions

The LSIP provides a clear and consistent link between employer evidence, identified skills needs, agreed actions and measurable outcomes. Each priority skills gap is directly connected to actions in Section 4 and to outcomes and indicators set out in Section 5 and Annex B.

4.0 AGREED CHANGES AND ACTIONS NEEDED

The actions below are organised in line with Cumbria's key skills priorities to provide a clear link between identified skills needs, agreed changes, and the outcomes the LSIP is intended to deliver.

Following engagement with the range of stakeholders, changes and actions needed are as set out below. These are covered in more detail in Annex B.

As set out in Section 1, the Employer Representative Body (ERB) leads delivery, coordination and performance management of the LSIP.

Each action within this plan and in Annex B identifies a lead organisation and supporting partners. The ERB will:

- Oversee delivery across all priorities
- Monitor progress against agreed metrics and milestones
- Convene partners to resolve delivery issues

This ensures clear accountability across the system and a consistent focus on delivery of employer-led priorities.

The priority actions for the initial delivery phase (2026-2027) are summarised in Section 1 and expanded in detail below. Each action directly addresses one or more of the skills gaps identified in Section 3.

4.1 Increase Workforce Supply into Priority Sectors

Cumbria has a relatively small and ageing workforce, alongside significant opportunities. The need to increase the supply of skills relevant to skills needs has therefore been identified across the range of priority sectors, particularly among younger people as we have an ageing workforce.

System-wide delivery and join-up is fundamental, so delivery of these actions will be coordinated across employers, FE and HE providers, Jobcentre Plus, careers services and wider partners, ensuring alignment between skills provision, employment pathways and progression into work.

Actions have been identified as follows.

4.1.1 Cross cutting

4.1.1.1 There is a need to grow apprenticeship volumes, through increasing the number of apprenticeship opportunities offered by employers and by increasing the take-up of these opportunities by learners. This will require activity to make apprenticeships more accessible and easier to organise for employers, particularly smaller employers who have limited time and headspace and a less regular requirement (enhanced/replaced Apprenticeship Hub, apprenticeship/training advisers, awareness and understanding communications and resources) and considering the opportunities for use of a flexi-jobs agency (working with Team Barrow for construction and RCESAP for manufacturing and clean energy, and consider in relation to land-based). It will also require activity to increase demand and/or take-up by learners such as supporting employers to develop their talent pipelines through education outreach, enhancing learner aspiration and informed choice. The LSIP recognises that improving apprenticeship and technical education outcomes depends on sustained investment in early careers education, particularly at KS3 and KS4. Delivery will therefore be aligned with the Cumbria Careers Hub Plan to ensure learners, parents and educators understand the local growth sectors and progression routes. Activity in relation to both learners and employers will include support for actions set out in the Cumbria Apprenticeships Plan and a piece of work looking at reasons for reducing Level 3 engagement and how this could be addressed. We will utilise the Future Skills Questionnaire alongside undertaking a piece of work gathering the views of young people in work and training to inform employer outreach and provision. We will also work with employers and educators to roll out the Essential Skills Programme.

Sector specific needs include:

- Manufacturing/Defence - welders, machinists and electrical
- Energy and Net Zero - plumbing, heating, electrician (domestic and industrial) and engineering technicians and ensure the new skills needed are incorporated into all relevant apprenticeships
- Construction - all trades but especially roofing, electrical, groundworkers, fenestration and civil engineering technicians
- Visitor Economy - chef de partie and commis chef, plus a range of other occupations as well as provision such as full-time Travel & Tourism and consider a stepped approach to the Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship
- Land-based - Level 2-6 across a range of skills and explore options to develop pre-apprenticeship activity such as Foundation Apprenticeships to enable more young people to progress into apprenticeships

- Social Care - Level 2-6 ranging from care workers to social workers and nurses

4.1.1.2 To fill current and emerging needs, while at the same time supporting inclusion and opportunity, there is a need for a range of activities to support more people into the active workforce, in particular those with barriers. These include:

- Continuation and growth of the ECITB work ready pathway model and expansion of this approach into other sectors, plus consideration of how we can use ASF and increasing flexibility to get more unemployed local people into L2 training, work and progression.
- Development by Cumbria Strategic Partners of a Good Work Charter (incorporating Disability Confident, Care Leavers Covenant, Armed Forces Covenant, etc) and encouraging and supporting implementation of this by businesses, including through resources and advice.
- Encouraging and supporting employment of people from wider groups such as people with disabilities/long term health conditions, care leavers/experienced, prisoners on ROTL, ex-offenders, service leavers/veterans, etc. This will include promoting the benefits and opportunities to businesses and engaging and working with prisons, the Work & Health Board (Get Cumbria Working Plan), Connect to Work/Inspira, Armed Forces, etc.
- Consider how we best work with Jobs Plans and agree appropriate actions.
- Undertake a piece of work on how the county and its businesses can best engage with targeted universities active within and beyond Cumbria to encourage graduates to come to Cumbria to work and how we can move more graduates into graduate jobs.
- Aligning LSIP activity with support for disadvantaged residents provided by Jobcentre Plus whose offer provides tailored support for groups such as young people, disabled individuals, those with health conditions and carers, as well as people with complex barriers. This includes personalised support, the Youth Guarantee, work experience, Sector-Based Work Academy Programmes (SWAPs), in-work support, Access to Work, and other pre-employment and in-work support.

Aiming for equality of opportunity these actions will be targeted towards priority groups including disabled people, those with health conditions, care leavers and individuals facing barriers to work, with progress monitored through participation, progression and employment outcomes.

4.1.1.3 ASF and Bootcamps. To support more effective pathways and skills development we will use the ASF flexibility which will come with the Combined Authority to ensure Bootcamps offer an effective pathway at Level 2, for example by, reducing the number hours and considering a modular approach (including apprenticeship units), as well as increasing their attractiveness to employers as a tool for upskilling of existing staff. We will also work together to ensure ASF funding is targeted at the skills areas most needed. As well as a direct impact this will also support progress into apprenticeships. Activity will draw on the ECITB Scholarships model.

Skills Bootcamps will play a central role as a flexible, employer-led mechanism to respond to acute and emerging skills needs across Cumbria's priority sectors. They will support both new entrants and existing workers to transition into growth roles, complementing apprenticeships and technical education and higher-level provision. They will support rapid entry into priority sectors, workforce transition and upskilling, and piloting of future-facing provision where apprenticeship or full qualification routes may be slower to respond. Where demand is validated, Bootcamps will be aligned with progression routes into apprenticeships, higher technical qualifications and higher education.

Sector specific requirements through Bootcamps/ASF include:

- Manufacturing - production operatives at L2
- Energy & Net Zero - production operatives at Level 2 and develop a comprehensive short-course offer that is accessible to learners in all parts of Cumbria, supported where possible by ASF, new Apprenticeship Units and Skills Bootcamps for the self-employed
- Construction - align ASF offer to Level 2 occupational and upskilling requirements and grow progression to apprenticeships
- Visitor Economy - hospitality team members, cooks (and use ASF funding to increase supply of chefs also)
- Land-based - pathways in, especially for adults
- Social Care - care and support workers at Level 2

4.1.1.4 There are a range of identified needs in higher level skills which would have a positive impact on our workforce challenges, not least through helping to keep/attract younger people. This is the across priority sectors, and includes highlighting Level 6+ pathways, with the following key sector specifics:

- Manufacturing - develop full-time undergraduate and postgraduate HE offer in mechanical and electrical engineering; explore ways to brigade employer demand at Level 4+ and avoid overlapping provider offers to create viable cohorts; and build on Level 8 doctoral STAND-Up programme training the next generation of nuclear engineers
- Energy & Net Zero - continue systems engineering pathway development (National College for Nuclear) and implementation; ensure an appropriate HE offer including Beng; build on Level 8 STAND-Up programme as above; offer SMR operation and maintenance to Level 7; and ensure HE delivery incorporates net zero requirements appropriately such as net zero regulations within project management.
- Visitor economy - consider changing the Chartered Manager degree apprenticeship to a Year 1 Certificate, Year 2 Diploma and Year 3 Degree, building up to a degree without commitment to the full programme at the outset.
- Land-based - develop apprenticeship delivery to Level 6.
- Care - review requirements as part of the professional services study below; ensure availability countywide of apprenticeships to Level 6, social work at Levels 6 and 7; care management at level 5+ and nurses at Level 6; and consider further requirements as part of the review of the sector beyond social care.
- Overall - consider as part of the work on encouraging more graduates into Cumbria whether there is provision that would support that if available in the county and similarly as part of the review of professional services.

4.1.1.5 Similarly, there are a range of identified needs in T Levels and other 16-18 provision which would support both direct skills development and progression, with the following sector specifics:

- Construction - Align 16 to 19 technical education with skills shortages and maximise progression to the sector via apprenticeships. Explore low learner demand for T Level provision despite strong employer interest and develop/use T Level provision to strengthen the pathway to occupations at Level 3+ via apprenticeships and HE.
- Land-based - grow 16-18 FE provision, particularly T Levels, connecting with apprenticeships to provide pathways to employment

4.1.1.6 Although a range of activities are underway or planned, examples elsewhere indicate the value of an overarching NEET strategy for Cumbria, which takes a countywide approach combined with local focus. There is a need to address in particular the 17-24 age group as well as seeking to act early in education to avoid young people becoming NEET.

4.1.1.7 Undertake a review of professional services (such as accountancy) within practice and industry and determine appropriate actions.

Expected outcomes and impacts will be, for example, improved supply of skills, increased take-up of provision, increased employment of disadvantaged groups and new/enhanced provision in place. They will be measured through employer surveys, review of provision, feedback from Work & Health Board and discussion with employers/providers. These and responsibilities are set out in detail in Annex B.

4.2 Align Education and Training Provision to Employer Need

4.2.1 Cross cutting

4.2.1.1 To mitigate staff shortages, we will support collaborative working, with development and implementation by relevant partners of initiative(s)/pilots(s) to recruit trainers/assessors from industry into FE (and schools) either full or part time, including being made available by their employers, as well as contributing through approaches such as mentoring and masterclasses.

4.2.1.2 Further develop and enhance the Work Based Learning Provider Forum and collaborative working by providers, including shared provision/alignment of curriculum offer, etc, especially in niche occupations and higher levels - flagging this regionally to allow experts to be drawn from across the region.

4.2.1.3 Work with the CTEC and other TECs as established, including to support niche and low volume requirements (e.g. in construction).

4.2.1.4 Undertake a piece of work on how best address inclusivity in provision and progression/progression into employment.

4.2.1.5 Complete development of a holistic and placed based education and skills model for Cumbria, building on discussions to date and led by the Combined Authority bringing the skills and education agenda together effectively and supporting progression and achievement through pre-school to post-graduate.

4.2.1.6 While education is not a growth sector it is a critical enabling system underpinning all priority sectors so we also acknowledge and will seek to address skills gaps in education in teaching assistants, Maths and English as well as technical tutors.

4.2.2 Sector specific

There are also a number of sector specific actions:

4.2.2.1 Manufacturing- explore routes to aggregate SME training demand in areas such as Carlisle (vast majority of provision is in West Cumbria/Furness).

4.2.2.2 Energy & net zero - make Cumbrian providers a key part of the supply chain for a fleet of new SMRs, central to new nuclear developments (Enterprise Park feasibility study).

4.2.2.3 Visitor Economy - further grow catering specialisms in colleges, expanding on existing capability and facilities.

4.2.2.4 Land-based - further grow land-based specialisms in providers, expanding on existing capability and facilities to address gaps.

Expected outcomes and impacts will be, for example, providers reporting improve ability to recruit and retain trainers/assessors, increase collaboration/complementary provision, inclusivity addressed more effectively. They will be measured through provider discussions and feedback. These and responsibilities are set out in detail in Annex B.

4.3 Reduce Skills Gaps in Key Occupations

4.3.1 Cross cutting

4.3.1.1 There is a need across all priority sectors to work with providers and employers to understand the opportunities and impact of AI, robotics and cyber security on workforce skills needs and the curriculum offer and agree appropriate actions. Across all priority sectors, employers identified growing demand for digital capability and technology-enabled skills, including automation, robotics and AI-supported systems. These future skills range from foundational digital competence required across the workforce, through to advanced technical skills in areas such as robotics maintenance, AI-enabled quality assurance, data-driven decision-making and systems engineering. The LSIP therefore treats digital, AI and robotics as enabling capabilities embedded across sector-specific provision rather than a separate sector. Curriculum development, workforce upskilling and employer engagement will ensure that future skills are anticipatory and aligned with innovation, productivity and Net Zero ambitions.

4.3.1.2 See also ASF and Bootcamps in 2.1 above.

4.3.2 Sector specific

4.3.2.1 Energy and net zero - ensure all relevant apprenticeship, study programme, ASF and HE provision in Cumbria incorporates up-to-date learning about net zero (i.e. embed heat pump training within plumbing and heating courses; solar PV within electrical training; net zero regs within project management, etc.), explore evening and weekend delivery and develop a comprehensive and modular short course offer accessible across the county.

4.3.2.2 Construction - review existing provision (including with CITB) to ensure there is an available programme of short, intensive courses for upskilling for existing workers, including the skills required to work on older buildings, and explore evening and weekend delivery.

4.3.2.3 Visitor economy - ensure there are short, intensive programmes available for employee upskilling - focussing on supervisory and people skills, particularly customer service and career progression into management (potentially via Skills Bootcamps).

4.3.2.4 Land-based - review and support growth of the current short-course offer within Cumbria (e.g. financial planning/commercial data/digital, new technologies and techniques, along with established driving and animal care courses).

4.3.2.5 Care - align the ASF offer to upskilling needs - digital skills, leadership and management (L5 Care apprenticeship?) and ensure the new Level 2 Adult Social Care Certificate (6-8 months to complete) is available in all parts of Cumbria.

Expected outcomes and impacts will be, for example, employers reporting fewer skills gaps in existing staff, and additional/enhanced provision. They will be measured through employer surveys, review of provision and discussion with employers/providers. These and responsibilities are set out in detail in Annex B.

Progress in delivering Net Zero skills will be measured through:

- Uptake of relevant training provision
- Employer engagement in green skills
- Reduction in identified skills gaps in Net Zero-related occupations

4.4 Improve Employer Engagement and Take-Up of Skills Provision

Although there has been robust employer engagement in development of this LSIP, there are opportunities for and value in a more formalised ongoing network approach. There is also a need to encourage and support employers to make more use of provision to address their skills needs.

4.4.1 Cross cutting

4.4.1.1 Review results of the recent small pilot on whether TNAs/independent advice help drive take-up of provision and agree further research/actions.

4.4.1.2 Undertake a piece of work exploring the lack of take-up across a range of different provision, despite employers saying it is needed, and how this could be addressed.

4.4.1.3 Build on or develop appropriate networks to support effective and appropriate skills delivery, support aggregation of demand and inform/participate in delivery of learning programmes. These may be sector specific, but where relevant may combine sectors such as construction, manufacturing and clean energy.

4.4.1.4 Align LSIP activity with and encourage take-up by employers of Jobcentre Plus, Disability Confident and employability pathways. Jobcentre Plus offers established employer support around recruitment and skills provision, particularly at entry and intermediate levels. This includes employer adviser engagement, vacancy brokerage, work experience, SWAPs, pre-employment preparation, in-work support and Access to Work. The Youth Guarantee also provides a coordinated route for young people into training, work experience and employment. The Disability Confident scheme helps employers recruit, retain, and develop disabled people and those with health conditions.

4.4.2 Sector specific

4.4.2.1 Manufacturing - use Sellafield funding to overtrain apprentices for the supply chain and pilot service to match those not getting jobs at Sellafield with other employers if a way can be found to make this work under current rules.

4.4.2.2 Explore expansion of the University of Cumbria/BAE full-time undergraduate programme being developed in Barrow across the rest of Cumbria, supported by employer and academic provider partners.

4.4.2.3 Construction - review, strengthen and enforce training and employment requirements (social value clauses) within public procurement in Cumbria.

4.4.2.4 Visitor Economy - support and build on the Tourism Talent Hub to position as the one-stop portal for all information on relevant provision and pathways, including short and commercial courses.

4.4.2.5 Land-based - continue to support and develop LANSS.

4.4.2.6 Care - promote case studies on the effectiveness of values-based recruitment - reliability, compassion, stamina, etc - to improve retention and cut turnover

4.4.2.7 Care - undertake a review of needs and issues in the sector beyond social care and determine appropriate actions.

Expected outcomes and impacts will be, for example, improve employer/provider engagement and groups/networks established or enhanced and additional/enhanced provision. They will be measured through employer surveys, review of provision and discussion with employers/providers/other stakeholders. These and responsibilities are set out in detail in Annex B.

4.5 Increase Participation and Inclusion in the Labour Market

Relevant actions are embedded within Sections 4.1 and 4.3.

4.6 Respond to Emerging Skills Needs (Net Zero, Digital and AI)

Relevant actions are embedded across Section 4, particularly 4.3.

5.0 OUTCOMES, IMPACT AND MONITORING FRAMEWORK

This section sets out the Impact Measures Framework for 2026-2029.

5.1 Overview

This LSIP includes a structured framework for measuring impact over the period 2026-2029. The framework sets out:

- A clear set of strategic outcomes to be achieved over the three-year cycle
- Defined outputs and metrics to monitor progress
- Annual milestones to track delivery
- A consistent approach to measurement and reporting aligned with national expectations

The approach builds on the detailed action-level monitoring in Annex B and brings this together into a single, coherent system for accountability, performance management and learning.

5.2 Strategic Outcomes (2026-2029)

The LSIP will deliver the following six core outcomes:

5.2.1 Outcome 1: Increased supply of skills aligned to employer demand

- More individuals entering and progressing through priority skills pathways
- Reduction in key skills shortages across priority sectors

5.2.2 Outcome 2: Reduction in skills gaps in the existing workforce

- Employers report improved workforce capability
- Increased participation in upskilling and reskilling provision

5.2.3 Outcome 3: Increased employer engagement in the skills system

- More employers actively participating in design and delivery of provision
- Increased employer investment in skills and workforce development

5.2.4 Outcome 4: Improved alignment and responsiveness of technical education provision

- Curriculum better aligned with priority sectors and emerging skills needs
- Clearer progression pathways from entry level to Level 8

5.2.5 Outcome 5: Increased participation and progression, particularly for disadvantaged groups

- More individuals from priority groups (e.g. NEET, disabled people, those with barriers) entering and sustaining employment and training
- Reduction in NEET levels and economic inactivity

5.2.6 Outcome 6: More effective use of funding and investment to support local priorities

- Adult Skills Fund (ASF), Bootcamps and other provision increasingly aligned to priority sectors
- Evidence of funding decisions shifting to meet local skills needs

5.3 Outputs and Metrics

Each outcome is supported by a set of practical, proportionate metrics, drawing on those already used within Annex B.

5.3.1 Outcome 1: Increased supply of skills

Key metrics:

- Apprenticeship starts and completions (by sector and level)
- Participation in ASF, Bootcamps and FE/HE provision
- Number of new or expanded programmes aligned to priority sectors
- Progression rates into employment or further training

5.3.2 Outcome 2: Reduction in skills gaps

Key metrics:

- Employer-reported skills gaps (via surveys and engagement)
- Vacancy levels in priority occupations
- Participation in upskilling programmes
- Employer feedback on workforce capability

5.3.3 Outcome 3: Employer engagement

Key metrics:

- Number of employers meaningfully engaged (e.g. co-design, placements, training uptake)
- Employer participation in networks and partnerships
- Use of services such as apprenticeship hubs or skills support programmes
- Employer satisfaction and feedback

5.3.4 Outcome 4: Changes to technical education and pathways

Key metrics:

- Changes to curriculum offer (new courses, adaptations, rationalisation)
- Availability of provision across Levels 2-8
- Participation and progression rates across pathways (e.g. T Levels → apprenticeships → HE)
- Provider and employer feedback on alignment

5.3.5 Outcome 5: Participation and inclusion

Key metrics:

- NEET numbers and participation rates
- Participation in programmes by priority groups
- Numbers entering employment, training and progression
- Take-up of Jobcentre Plus and employability support offers
- Learner and stakeholder feedback

5.3.6 Outcome 6: Funding and investment alignment

Key metrics:

- Allocation of ASF and other funding to priority sectors
- Number and scale of Bootcamps aligned to LSIP priorities
- Employer and provider take-up of funded provision
- Evidence of funding being redirected to address identified gaps

5.4 Annual Milestones

Progress towards outcomes will be tracked through annual milestones as follows:

Year 1 (2026-2027): Establish and implement

- Key programmes, pilots and infrastructure in place
- Baseline metrics established across all outcome areas
- Initial increases in participation and employer engagement

Year 2 (2027-2028): Scale and embed

- Increased volumes of learners and employers engaged
- Adjustments to provision and funding based on evidence
- Early signs of reduced skills gaps and improved progression

Year 3 (2028-2029): Deliver impact

- Sustained increases in skills supply and participation
- Demonstrable reduction in key skills gaps and vacancies
- Clear alignment between provision, funding and employer need

5.5 Measurement Approach

5.5.1 Practical and Proportionate Measurement

Metrics will utilise:

- Existing administrative data (e.g. DfE, providers, JCP)
- LSIP and partner surveys
- Monitoring data from programmes and projects
- Qualitative feedback from employers, providers and learners

This ensures measurement is proportionate while providing meaningful evidence of progress.

5.5.2 Consistency and Comparability

To support consistency and national aggregation:

- Standard SIC and SOC classifications will be used where possible to:
 - Track sectoral progress
 - Align with Skills England reporting
 - Enable comparison with other LSIPs
- Definitions (e.g. “employer engagement”) will be standardised across partners.

5.6 Shared Ownership of Impact Measurement

While impact measurement is supported by all partners, the ERB is responsible for overseeing performance against LSIP outcomes and ensuring that delivery remains on track. As outlined in Section 1, the ERB is responsible for overseeing LSIP performance and reporting. In this role, it will coordinate monitoring activity, review progress with partners and ensure that delivery remains on track.

The ERB will also provide annual public reporting on LSIP delivery and impact.

Impact measurement will be co-owned across the system, including:

- Employers and Employer Representative Bodies
- Further Education, Higher Education and training providers
- Local authorities and the Combined Authority
- Jobcentre Plus and Work & Health partners

Partners will:

- Contribute data and intelligence
- Participate in review and interpretation of findings
- Use insights to improve delivery

5.7 Alignment with Wider Frameworks

Impact measures are aligned with:

- Get Cumbria Working Plan, particularly around employment, inactivity and inclusion
- Combined Authority skills and growth priorities
- Wider local growth and economic strategies

This ensures coherence between skills investment, employment outcomes and economic growth.

5.8 Reporting and Use of Impact Data

Impact data will be used to:

- Support local accountability and governance
- Enable Skills England oversight and comparison across LSIPs
- Identify gaps, risks or oversupply in provision
- Inform ongoing improvement and adaptation

Monitoring will be undertaken on a regular basis, with findings shared through LSIP governance structures and with key partners.

ANNEX A - FURTHER/EXPLANATORY INFORMATION ON SKILLS NEEDS

See separate document Annex A - Further Evidence

ANNEX B

See separate document Annex B - Table of Actions

ANNEX C

1. Outline the Evidence Base

Sources of evidence used include:

- Employer survey, 213 respondents of which 130 gave their names, split 47 0-10 employees, 65 11-249 and 18 250+.
- 1-2-1s with 68 employers in priority sectors
- 1-2-1s with 11 providers
- Workshops with 22 employers and 16 providers
- Westmorland & Furness Council and Cumberland Council strategic plans and discussions
- Get Cumbria Working Work & Health Plan and discussions with Work & Health Board
- Cumbria Growth Plan - Going for Growth
- Emerging CCA Strategic Skills Plan and Commissioning Strategy
- Team Barrow
- Discussions with WBLPF
- Discussions with ERB Group
- Discussion with Skills for Care, Ernest Cooke Trust and others
- Consideration of the National Industrial Strategy
- ONS
- Department for Education Local Skills Dashboard
- NW Net Zero Hub Skills Plan
- National Retrofit Hub recommendations to government
- Lightcast
- CITB NW Employer Intelligence Report
- Explore Education Statistics
- Annual Population Survey
- UCAS HE Participation
- Skills England Sector Evidence in the Growth & Skills Offer and Sector Skills Needs Assessments
- Skills England Assessment of Priority Skills to 2023
- The Skills Imperative 2035 - National Foundation for Educational Research

- Workforce Foresight - Innovate UK
- Post 16 Education and Skills White Paper
- Regional Clean Energy Skills Plan
- Careers Hub Plan
- Skills Bootcamps Plan
- Apprenticeships Plan (draft)

These sources are considered robust and relevant because of the mix use, the blend of national/government sources and local intelligence, significant collaborative working between Cumbrian stakeholders (e.g. LSIP, Team Barrow, CCA/Enterprising Cumbria, Local Authorities), the numbers and spread meaningfully engaged with and the reinforcement of issues and opportunities by the various sources used. We have also tested/verified findings with the range of stakeholders.

2. Demonstrate Alignment with the LSIP Guidance

We reviewed our existing LSIP governance and groups against the new guidance for 2026-29 and in light of Cumbria's journey towards a Combined Authority.

Following this we asked the emerging Combined Authority how we should best work with them, who they would like to represent them on the Steering Group and the best forum for consulting on the LSIP, and agree this with them. This has continued to evolve as they have moved along the journey to establish - and will evolve further.

We also added an HE representative to the Steering Group, representing the universities active in the county, and are engaging with them on HE related research and actions.

The Steering and ERB Groups reviewed our priority sectors and priorities and agreed these continue to be the key sectors for Cumbria. This decision took into account sector representation in the county, local authority plans and strategies, the Cumbria Going for Growth strategy, Team Barrow priorities, the emerging Get Cumbria Working Work & Health Plan and emerging Combined Authority priorities - as well as highlighting relevant national Industrial Strategy sectors.

We have achieved breadth and depth of engagement through, for example:

- Engaging not only with our more than 570 members across the geography and range of sizes and sectors, but also with our full 11,487 opted in contacts, including recruitment agencies.
- Engaging further through other key ERBs active in the county, and through them with their members and contacts - BECBC, CBI, CITB, Cumbria Tourism, ECITB, Farmer Network, FSB, LANSS and the NFU.
- Including the chair of the Work Based Learning Provider Forum in the Steering Group, representing the WBLPF. This Forum is made up of the four Cumbria colleges plus Myerscough as our local specialist land-based college, University of Cumbria and key independent training providers, plus a range of other stakeholders such as Inspira (careers advice and the Connect to Work contract holder), Careers Hub, DWP, Combined Authority (for Bootcamps), Centre for Leadership Performance.

- Engaging directly with the WBLPF and individually with members.
- 1-2-1s with 68 businesses in priority sectors.
- 1-2-1s with 11 colleges, university and ITPs.
- 1-2-1s with other key stakeholders such as JCP/DWP, CCA, Team Barrow, local authorities.
- Workshops with 16 providers.
- Workshops with 22 businesses in priority sectors.
- Business survey, open to all sectors, shared widely through our own channels and through the other ERBs and stakeholders
- Engagement with the Cumbria Strategic Partners Group, Growth Board, Work & Health Board and Team Barrow skills & employment workstream
- Offering trades unions opportunities to engage.

The employer survey was carried out jointly with the emerging Combined Authority and with Team Barrow as part of developing a shared evidence base and avoiding duplication.

The LSIP Steering Group is made up of a representative of each of Chamber, Cumberland Council, Cumbria Careers Hub/Enterprising Cumbria, Cumbria Economic Observatory, employer representative (BAE Systems), LSIP ERB Group, University of Cumbria (representing HE), Westmorland & Furness Council (also currently represent the Combined Authority), Work Based Learning Provider Forum (representing FE). Members represent their organisations/groups.

Alongside this sits an Employer Representative Body Group, which is made up of a representative of each of Chamber, BECBC, CBI, CITB, Cumbria Tourism, ECITB, Farmer Network, FSB, LANSS, NFU.

Governance includes sharing plans, progress and the draft report with the Councils' Joint Member Steering Committee and with the Growth Board for comment, alongside the LSIP Steering and Employer Representative Body (ERB) Groups and Chamber Board.

Linkage of the Steering and ERB Groups into Cumbria Strategic Partners, the Growth Board, Get Cumbria Working Work & Health Board, Barrow Rising (Team Barrow), etc. supports cooperative working with other groups and plans. We are working in tandem with the Combined Authority Strategic Skills Plan production, Team Barrow etc. to carry out research and work to a shared evidence base.

We have engaged with the above in identifying priorities and potential actions and gone back to them to consult on the proposed action plan. We will be further consulting with these and other stakeholders, including Disability Groups and Trades Unions, as we undertake the further research planned and implement actions.

3. Environmental and Net Zero Goals

We have taken into account the skills needed for jobs that support Net Zero targets, climate change adaptation and other environmental goals by:

- Including Energy and Low Carbon within our priority sectors

- Considering the skills and training needs and adaptations within other priority sectors e.g. Construction (including retrofit, new methods), Manufacturing, Land-based
- Keeping this in mind throughout as a cross-cutting theme when engaging with businesses and other stakeholders.
- Engaging with specifically relevant stakeholders such as Zero Carbon Cumbria

4. Equality of Opportunity

Building on the 2023-2026 LSIP, in which we included a range of actions around supporting disadvantaged groups, for this LSIP we:

- Are continuing to include actions around supporting talent pools such as people with disabilities and health conditions, are leavers, prisoners/ex-offenders, service leavers and veterans, people from areas of disadvantage, etc an to review and expand those actions
- Have included a specific action to review inclusivity and how this can best be achieved/improved in provision
- Are working in alignment with the Get Cumbria Working Work & Health Board and the Connect to Work programme
- Are engaging with relevant specialist groups and bodies.
- Are aligning LSIP activity with existing employment and work and health support, including Jobcentre Plus-led provision. This will ensure that people facing the greatest barriers can access, sustain, and progress through skills provision into employment.

5. Governance Structure

Throughout development of this Cumbrian LSIP, as with previous iterations, we have taken a partnership approach, engaging the range of business representative organisations, businesses, providers and other stakeholders, seeking to ensure genuine and broad engagement and buy-in throughout the process.

The LSIP Steering Group is made up of a representative of each of Cumbria Chamber, Cumberland Council, Cumbria Careers Hub/Enterprising Cumbria, Cumbria Economic Observatory, employer representative (BAE Systems), LSIP ERB Group, University of Cumbria, Westmorland & Furness Council (also currently representing the Combined Authority) and the Work Based Learning Provider Forum.

Alongside this sits an Employer Representative Body Group, which is made up of a representative of each of Chamber, Britain's Energy Coast Business Cluster (BECBC), CBI, CITB, Cumbria Tourism, ECITB, Farmer Network, FSB, Land & Nature Skills Service (LANSS) and the NFU.

Both groups operate as consultation groups to agreed Terms of Reference. We continue to review their make-up for fitness for purpose.

Agreed governance includes sharing plans, progress and the draft report with the Councils' Joint Member Steering Committee (as precursor to the Combined Authority) and with the Growth

Board for comment, alongside the LSIP Steering and Employer Representative Body (ERB) Groups and Chamber Board.

Linkage of the Steering and ERB Groups into Cumbria Strategic Partners Group, the Growth Board, Get Cumbria Working Work & Health Board, Team Barrow/Barrow Rising, etc. supports cooperative working with other groups and plans. We are working in tandem with the Combined Authority adult skills plan production, Team Barrow etc. to carry out research and work to a shared evidence base.

Our conflicts of interest and anti-bribery and corruption policies and LSIP register of interests are available on the LSIP page of our website.

ANNEX D

See separate document Annex D - Mapping Table