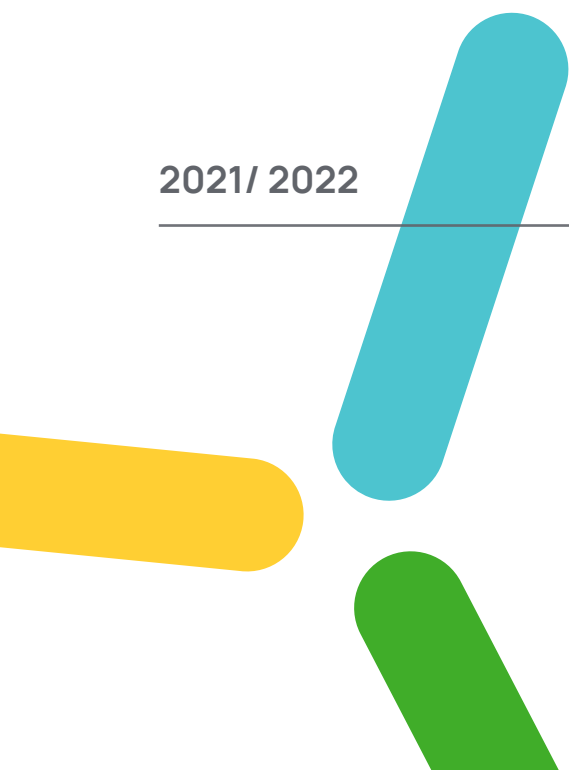


Cheshire and Warrington Skills Report

2021/ 2022



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01 Foreword

Cheshire and Warrington is a great place to live, work, study and relax. It is also a brilliant place to start, scale and internationalise a business and has so many of the attributes that businesses seek when looking for great places to locate. Our vision is to build on these strengths and create a healthy, sustainable, inclusive, and growing region.

Cheshire and Warrington has, for many years, been one of the fastest growing economies in the country, and this means that we stand a better chance than many other places of successfully navigating our way through the

current crisis. But the challenges are still huge. Claimant unemployment in Cheshire and Warrington doubled as soon as the lockdown in March 2020 took effect, and at the end of January 2021 67,000 people were on furlough. Even so, hard to fill vacancies, particularly in digital occupations, persist. At the same time, we face the end of the Brexit transition period and climate change, the challenge of our generation. With Cheshire West ranking amongst the top four carbon emitters in the country this is a challenge we cannot duck.



Clare Hayward , Digital Skills Fair

I am very confident that our region will rise to the challenges that we face today. Our strong and diverse economy is one of the most productive in the country and includes manufacturers of the strength of Bentley; major life science companies like AstraZeneca and Recipharm; significant energy and utilities companies including Engie, Sellafield and United Utilities; major retail finance centres, such as the headquarters of M&S Bank and the credit card operations of Lloyds Bank; the global Innovation Centre of Barclays Bank; and the UK's largest outlet shopping centre at Cheshire Oaks.

Our economic strengths are founded on a skilled and talented workforce, with more people qualified to degree level than the national average. This is a competitive advantage we are committed to retaining. We need to make use of all our talent and with an ageing population and a demand for 71,000 more people qualified to Level 3 or above by 2027, this will be a challenge which cannot be met by the current levels of new entrants to the labour market – it will only be achieved if we skill our existing workforce and ensure that all our young people are able to access good quality learning and the opportunity to progress.

To meet future challenges, all our stakeholders must work together to inspire more of our residents to acquire higher level skills, with better attainment and progression for our young people, particularly disadvantaged young people. This is the focus of the Pledge partnership¹. If we succeed in this, we will stimulate both growth and inclusion. Through focussed and collaborative action, we intend to deliver a recovery from the current downturn. Our skills strategy is sharply focussed on these issues.

High skills and high employment will allow us to deliver on our vision for a healthy, sustainable, inclusive, and growing region:

- We will deliver locally on the government's healthy ageing mission to 'achieve an additional five years of healthy, independent life by 2035, while narrowing the gap between the experience of the richest and poorest'
- We will demonstrate leadership on sustainable growth. We recognise the value of our natural environment and will work to ensure that whilst securing sustained growth the environmental benefits of our activities outweigh the costs.

¹ [The Pledge](#) is an initiative that puts employers at the heart of inspiring and informing young people in Cheshire and Warrington.

- Cheshire and Warrington will be a place where people, regardless of their background or circumstances, are helped to 'live their best lives'
- We will be the UK's fastest growing economy, making the most of new opportunities inside and outside of the EU, driven by innovation and a top location for people and business to live, work, invest, and relax

Recent events have served to emphasise that no Plan should be cast in stone, and that key actions should be kept under review. We need to be agile, work in partnership and move at pace to ensure impact, cutting through the noise of multiple overlapping initiatives by providing a clarity of focus on the things that need to be done. The Cheshire and Warrington Employers' Skills and Education Board has led the review of the Plan it developed three years ago and will lead regular reviews of this Plan.

Working with skills, education, and employment stakeholders and with support from Government as it implements the Skills for Jobs White Paper, I am confident that the employers and residents of Cheshire and Warrington can build the high skilled, healthy, inclusive, sustainable, and growing place to which we aspire.



Clare Hayward

Chair Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership,
Chair of the Cheshire and Warrington Employers' Skills and
Education Board

02 Skills Advisory Panels Introduction

Skills Advisory Panels (SAPs) bring together employers, skills providers, and key local stakeholders to better understand and resolve skills mismatches at a local level. There are 36 SAPs across England as part of Mayoral Combined Authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships.

The Department for Education (DfE) supports SAPs with grant funding primarily to produce high quality analysis of local labour markets and Local Skills Reports. The Reports set out the local strengths and skills needs and how the SAP proposes its area addresses its key priorities. The Reports aim to influence local partners and feed intelligence to central government, including the national-level [Skills and Productivity Board \(SPB\)](#).

In January 2021, DfE published its White Paper Skills for Jobs: [Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth](#) which set out a number of reforms aimed at putting employers more firmly at the heart of the skills system. The White Paper outlined plans to test in 2021-22, in a small number of areas, “Local Skills Improvement Plans” created by business representative organisations.

The White Paper is committed to build on the work of SAPs to date. SAPs and their [Local Skills Reports](#) will continue as the DfE trailblazes “Local Skill Improvement Plans” and until any potential changes are made to a SAP’s remit and responsibilities.

In Cheshire and Warrington, the Skills Advisory Panel is the Employers’ Skills and Education Board. As a sub-committee of Cheshire and Warrington’s Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), the Board focuses on the skills and education aspects of the Local Industrial Strategy, the Strategic Economic Plan and the Covid Recovery Plan. The terms of reference of the Employers’ Skills and Education Board are published on the LEP website ².

The Board, supported by the LEP Executive, makes investment decisions on skills and education of up to £1 million ensuring proper scrutiny to provide value for money

and strategic fit with local priorities. Members investigate key issues and challenges and share good practice to inform development of local strategies, interventions, and investments. Key programmes of work which are described in detail in sections 4 and 6 include the Pledge, the Digital Skills Partnership, the Data and Labour Market work and the Accelerate training support programme.

The current membership of the Board is:

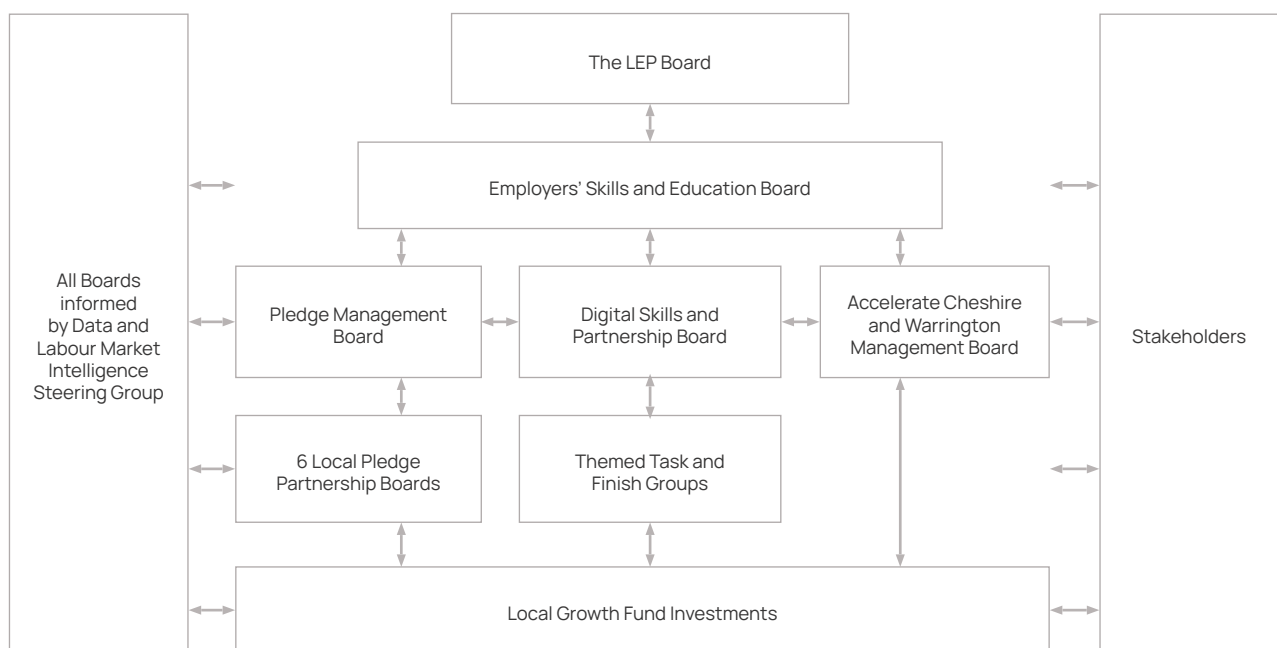
- *Clare Hayward – Chair (Cirrus), employer representative
- *Phil Atkinson (Science and Technology Facilities Council, Daresbury) employer representative
- *Nicola Dunbar- Deputy Chair (Altens Lorry Park), employer representative
- Paul Colman (South Cheshire Chamber), employer representative
- Dheshi (Cheshire College South and West) – representing the training providers
- Kath Mackay (Alderley Park), employer representative
- James Richards (Network Rail), employer representative
- *Bill Carr (Carpe Diem), employer representative
- Louise Higgins (United Utilities), employer representative
- Sarah Hopkinson (Engie), employer representative
- Maggie Chen (Deputy Chair of LEP’s Engagement Board)
- Kim Hardman (Astra Zeneca), employer representative
- Nicola Johnson (Bentley Motors), employer representative
- Kurt Allman (University of Chester), HEI representative
- Nicola Merriman (National Skills Academy Nuclear)
- *Eleanor Blackburn (Warrington Borough Council), local authority representative
- *Cllr James Nicholas (Cheshire East Council), local authority representative
- *Clare Latham (Cheshire West and Chester), local authority representative
- *Lucy Liang (AUE Ltd), employer representative
- Pat Jackson (LEP)

*With voting rights

² The Terms of Reference for the [Employers’ Skills and Education Board](#).

The diagram below illustrates the relationship between:

- the LEP Board
- the Employers' Skills and Education Board
- the Digital Skills Partnership
- the Pledge Management Board and the Local Pledge Boards
- the Management Board of Accelerate Cheshire and Warrington
- the Data and Labour Market Intelligence Steering Group



03 Skills Strengths and Needs

The Cheshire and Warrington Labour Market Assessment contains an analysis of the Cheshire and Warrington Labour Market. This is briefly summarised below. This report, and further detailed reports on employer demand; digital skills; the training infrastructure; young people, and the impact of Covid-19 on the [labour market](#).

3.1 Context³

- There is a continuing need to maintain a clear strategic framework that encourages collaboration, coherence, and a focus on impact across Cheshire and Warrington between the myriad of well-meaning initiatives that are continually being introduced at national and local level.
- An ageing population and strong economy will put pressures on the skills system. Whilst the 16-18-year-old population is forecast to grow 15% by 2028, providing a growing pipeline of talent, inflows of skills into the workforce will be insufficient to offset the outflows resulting from retirements.
- The business base is strong - in 2019, there were over 43,000 businesses employing 500,000. Cheshire and Warrington has a higher job density than England. Cheshire and Warrington residents have higher skills than Great Britain and Cheshire and Warrington employees work in higher skilled occupations. However, the proportion of the workforce qualified to Level 3+ (L3+) is approximately 20 percentage points lower than in Germany.
- European funding has supported high volumes of learning aims (22% of all delivery in 2018/19).
- In 2019 Cheshire and Warrington LEP invested £5 million in the specialist equipment needed to deliver digital and STEM-related training and education. This is the foundation investment in our Institute of Technology.
- Covid-19 has hit jobs and employment. Between January 2020 and January 2021, the number of people on a payroll

in Cheshire and Warrington decreased by almost 2% (in line with the national decrease). 67,000 people were on furlough at the end of January 2021.

- Numbers of unemployed young people have increased significantly. The young are most likely to be furloughed. Numbers of 50+ claimant unemployed are the highest on record. Many are retiring to economic inactivity taking their skills out of the workforce. Whilst the self-employed have been hit in the current crisis, business start-up can provide a route out of the downturn for some.

3.2 Demand for Skills⁴

- Pre Covid there was a mismatch between the skills and qualifications that individuals chose to acquire and the skills and qualifications that employers need. As a result of Covid there is a cohort of newly employed and furloughed workers who are not aware of the job opportunities available to them and the scope to transfer their skills to the new jobs.
- The Covid-19 downturn is driving reductions in jobs across several sectors. The employment rate is decreasing as is economic activity - some of our more highly qualified, older workers are leaving the labour market unaware of new job and reskilling opportunities. Significant redundancies are expected in Q3/4 2021, with women at higher risk.
- Consistent with the analysis that underpins the Skills for Jobs White Paper, demand for higher level technical skills is forecast to grow because of the changing nature of work, and is likely to be further increased by key economic development initiatives including:
 - The High-Speed Growth Corridor that runs from Crewe to Warrington
 - Our digital infrastructure plan which includes enabling Gigabit Capable infrastructure; extended 4G rollout and

³ Labour Market Assessment at [Data and Labour Market Information](#), Section 3, P11-37

⁴ Ibid, Section 4, P39-68

the encouragement and promotion of the role of next generation mobile technology, including 5G trials; and driving adoption of digital connectivity by increasing participation/skills and take-up of services making sure people have the right skills required to realise the benefits and opportunities of enhanced digital connectivity

- The £1 billion Hynet (hydrogen energy and carbon capture) project, which has the potential to add £17 billion of Gross Value Added, create 5,000 new jobs by 2025 and save over 1 million tonnes of CO2 per annum: the equivalent of taking more than 600,000 cars off the road.
- Proposals for a £40m National Translational Technology Development Centre and a Catapult Quarter (as part of the Science Corridor) to enable stimulus and capacity building for the UK diagnostics sector.
- Most local growth sectors pay above the average Cheshire and Warrington wage, as do local digital occupations. Six 'digital' occupations which employers find hard to fill, currently pay £15,000 above the average Cheshire and Warrington salary. These are: IT and telecommunications directors; IT specialist managers; IT project and programme managers; IT business analysts, architects, and systems designers; Programmers and software development professionals; and IT and telecommunications professionals.
- However, more than 20% of Cheshire and Warrington employees earn less than the Real Living Wage.

3.3 Supply of Skills ⁵

- Level 3 qualification delivery to adults is low and declining (currently c4.5k residents pa) - but could increase as the Level 3 entitlement is implemented. We will need to inform learners and influence training providers to ensure a match with the needs of the economy.
- A higher proportion of employers train their employees in Cheshire and Warrington than is the case in England, however not enough employees receive training in Cheshire and Warrington (57% vs 60% in England) or training towards qualifications (9% vs 11%)
- Place of residence and disadvantage constrain young people's attainment. Increasing the proportion of disadvantaged young people that acquire a Level 3 will drive growth and inclusion.
- There are very significant gender disparities in L3 delivery to young people for particular occupations across all routes (apprenticeship, vocational, academic)
- More adults and young people travel into Cheshire and Warrington to learn than travel out, particularly at L3+.

Over 400 non-resident adults started L4+ Engineering programmes with Cheshire and Warrington providers in the last three years.

- Digital skills delivery has declined but the capacity of providers to deliver digital skills is increasing. The delivery of "digital skills" learning aims at all levels in FE has decreased by 19% from 2016/17 to 2018/19 (a 22% decrease for L3). However, in 2019 the LEP invested £5m in the specialist equipment needed to deliver digital and STEM-related training and education.
- The proportion of female participation in digital skills is too low at every level, and across all ages, being as low as 25% for L4+ provision.
- The quality of skills delivery benchmarks well using the National Achievement Rate Tables (NARTS), although there are some areas of concern, including in apprenticeship delivery.
- The overall FE achievement rate for Cheshire and Warrington residents in 2018/19 was 87.8%, 1.8% higher than for England. The achievement rate for 19+ was 1.5% higher in Cheshire and Warrington and, at 86%, the achievement rates for 16–18-year-olds exceeded the national achievement rate of 82.6% by 3.4%.
- The overall apprenticeship achievement rate for Cheshire and Warrington residents in 2018/19, at 65.1%, was slightly higher than the overall national apprenticeship achievement rate of 64.7%. However, the achievement rate for 16-18 L2 Apprenticeships in 2018/19 was 61.7% - 4.1% lower than England. The achievement rate was lower with every type of provider in Cheshire and Warrington, but particularly poor in the case of apprenticeships delivered by national providers.

3.4 Supply and Demand⁶

- There is a mismatch between the skills employers need and the skills individuals choose to acquire, because not enough people get the information that they need to make informed decisions about the subjects to study and the careers to follow. Individual demand needs to be underpinned by high quality and inspirational information about the future needs of the economy, as well as challenging stereotyping for example around gender, and the perception that creativity must be channelled into the creative industries rather than science, engineering and digital.
- The Employer Skills Survey (ESS) has found that employers in Cheshire and Warrington are much more likely to have skills shortage vacancies in high skill roles than their counterparts in England and more likely to experience bottom line business impacts because of skills shortages.
- Based on the posting intensity for a job, there are a

⁵ Ibid, Section 5, P69-132

⁶ Ibid, Section 6, P103-122

range of hard to fill vacancies, half of which are digital occupations the majority of which are at Level 3 and above: programmers and software development professionals; IT business analysts, architects, and systems designers; web design and development professionals; and IT user support technicians. Skills providers should ensure that they deliver the qualifications that these roles require. There is detailed information on this in the Cheshire and Warrington Opportunities Portal⁷.

- Significant levels of replacement demand are forecast in some occupations, ranging from 22% to 42%.
- There is good alignment of FE delivery with those that have the lowest levels of skill, in the places where many of those people live; but more can be done. For example, analysis of learner participation by neighbourhood suggests that digital skills participation should be promoted in communities in Wilmslow, Frodsham, Stanlow, Chester, and Poynton
- Among those of working age, the economically inactive are the most likely to be internet non-users, particularly those adults on long-term sick leave or disabled. To address this, those areas most deprived as measured by the Employment Domain of the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019 (i.e., those places with high levels of working age economic inactivity) should be targeted for Digital Inclusion investment.
- Economic development and replacement demand will accelerate demand for L3+ skills (particularly digital and STEM). 71k more will be needed by 2027. Starts on substantial L3 qualifications for adults is low and declining. This may change with the implementation of the FE White Paper. Starts on GCSE English and Maths for adults are declining. The annual volume of adult L3 achievements (c4.5k) will not deliver the volume of people required for L3+ roles by 2027, and because the population is old and getting older, the number of L3+ people leaving the workforce will exceed the number of L3 19-year-olds joining the workforce.

⁷ Portal link candwopportunities.co.uk

04 Skills Strategy

4.1 The 2018 Cheshire and Warrington Skills and Education Plan⁸

In 2018 Cheshire and Warrington published a Skills and Education Plan. This Plan identified three priorities for action as follows:

- To ensure everyone in Cheshire and Warrington is fully informed about the career and progression opportunities open to them we will ensure that employers are at the heart of inspiring and communicating to young people, parents, teachers, professional youth workers and individuals seeking work or who want to progress in work about new technologies, career and progression opportunities in Cheshire and Warrington. We will build on the good practice of the Pledge model which acts as the 'glue' to bring employers together with the current plethora of careers advice and guidance initiatives both in school and in out of school activities.
- To improve the overall quality of the curriculum offer by supporting groups of employers in key sectors to work together with training, skills development and education providers, local authorities and other partners. Working together they will pool expertise and resources, establish a critical mass of learners, and develop coherent packages of training and education with an initial focus on STEM and digital skills and the key sectors identified in the Strategic Economic Plan. This collaborative work could work through the Accelerate training support programme and a virtual Institute of Technology to ensure all our learners are able to access outstanding lifelong teaching and learning that enables them to access jobs, progress, and benefit from economic growth.
- To support these priorities, we will establish a communications hub to provide coherent messages about jobs and progression opportunities across Cheshire and Warrington. Our Job Opportunities Portal which is still at proof of concept stage, has started to provide this hub of information.

4.2 Refreshing the 2018 Skills and Education Plan

Much of the analysis that underpinned Cheshire and Warrington's Skills and Education Plan when it was published in 2018 remains valid. Many of the key features of the Cheshire and Warrington labour market identified therein continue to prevail:

- The employer base is strong and makes a significant contribution to UK plc.
- The ageing workforce will drive high levels of replacement demand.
- Future demand for skills will increasingly be at 4+.
- High numbers of residents earn below the Real Living Wage.

The Employers' Skills and Education Board believes in the need for a coherent and well targeted approach where individual projects operate within a clear strategic framework. They believe that the key market failure identified in the Plan, that: "we have a clear mis-match between the skills employers need and the skills individuals choose to acquire. This is because not enough people get the information they need to make informed decisions about the subjects to study and the careers to follow. This is particularly true for STEM and Digital skills." continues to be the case. However, the pandemic has significantly changed the labour market context, so it is appropriate to refresh our Plan now.

In addition, although we still have significant numbers of hard to fill vacancies⁹, the claimant unemployment numbers in Cheshire and Warrington doubled as soon as the lockdown in March took effect, and at the end of January 2021 67,000 people were on furlough.

We therefore need to extend the scope of our plan to focus on furloughed and recently unemployed as well as those further from the labour market who are now competing with vast numbers of newly unemployed. We also need to ensure that employers lead the co-design of training with skills providers so that training is of greater utility to employers, and fewer hard to fill vacancies arise.

⁸ [Employers' Skills and Education Board](#)

⁹ Employer Demand for Labour and Skills in Cheshire and Warrington, Page 39, [Data and Labour Market Information](#)

This refresh has been informed by an extensive body of analysis of the Cheshire and Warrington labour market overseen by our Data and Labour Market Steering Group¹⁰. In identifying the key learning and labour market issues that should be addressed in our refreshed Skills Strategy, the Cheshire and Warrington Employers' Board for Skills and Education has applied the following tests:

- If the issue that has been identified is effectively addressed, will this make a significant contribution to delivering our vision for a growing, inclusive, sustainable, healthy place?
- Is there action that local partners can take that can make a substantial impact on the issue identified?

Applying these tests to our labour market analysis (summarised in Section 3), six key issues that can be addressed by local action have been identified:

- The labour market downturn that has been triggered by the global pandemic must be mitigated, and action needs to be taken to ensure a recovery that delivers growth and inclusion and meets employer demand including filling hard to fill vacancies.
- More employees need to be trained and coherent curriculum pathways need to be developed. To meet future employer demand including for technical, green tech, and digital skills, Cheshire and Warrington needs 71,000 more adults qualified to Level 3+, and 75,000 more qualified to level 4+ by 2027.
- Employers in Cheshire and Warrington are much more likely to have skills shortage vacancies in high skill roles and more likely to experience bottom line business impacts from this.
- The gap between those young people in receipt of free school meals (FSM) and those not in receipt of FSM for progression to a sustained place in education at Key Stage 4 is too big (12-14%), as it is for attainment of Level 3 at age 19 (29-36%). This failure to maximise the skills of our young people puts unnecessary constraints on economic growth.
- Where young people live in Cheshire and Warrington links to their level of attainment. Young people tend to less well in Ellesmere Port, North Warrington and Crewe.
- There are significant gender disparities in L3+ delivery in ICT, Engineering, Health and Social Care, and Construction across all learning routes. This embeds a structural deficiency in the labour market where some occupations only draw on the talents of half of the population. Female participation in digital skills is too low at every level and for all ages.

To inform the work of the National Skills and Productivity Board, the Department for Education has also asked SAPs to categorise our skills issues in terms of:

- Covid-19 and renewal issues
- Cross cutting skills issues
- Sector/occupational skills issues

This categorisation is at Appendix A. Our action to address the six skills issues that can be addressed by local action, as identified above, is detailed in Section 5 - our Skills Action Plan. In acting on these issues, any specific key sectoral issues (gender disparities, hard to fill vacancies, forecast future skill needs etc) that have been identified in our analysis will be addressed.

Certain types of action or intervention are out of scope for our Skills Strategy because local partners do not have the relevant powers. For example, local action cannot be taken to change the composition or priorities of skills providers operating in Cheshire and Warrington because responsibility for procurement and management of skills providers has not been devolved, so partners seek to influence the use of Government investment in provision, rather than direct it, to meet the needs of the economy. Similarly, funding rates are determined nationally; the eligibility of what qualifications/which learners are funded is determined nationally; and support and challenge to improve the quality of skills delivery is a national responsibility.

4.3 The Refreshed Plan

Building on the previous Plan for Cheshire and Warrington, this has led to a refreshed statement of priorities:

Our vision is to be a healthy, sustainable, inclusive, and growing region. We will build a better and more resilient future together recognising the changing landscape. We are operating in a new, digital, and innovative world and therefore the Cheshire and Warrington Skills and Education priorities are:

1. Young People - our employers will be at the heart of inspiring and informing people about future technologies, career pathways and learning so that they can make well-informed decisions about their futures.
2. Employees - employees will develop the skills and aptitudes that employers require to be able to grow, innovate and adopt digital. Highlighted skill gaps include amongst others green tech, life sciences, logistics, digital and STEM skills to support our key sectors.

¹⁰ [Data and Labour Market Information](#)

3. Economically Inactive and Unemployed – those who are out of work will be helped to access employment; those who are threatened with unemployment will be helped to stay employed; and those furthest from the labour market will be helped to move closer to it. We will align national and local programmes, and local investment (where available), to secure maximum impact.

In delivering these priorities, we will be inclusive, agile, deliver with pace and keep it simple. We will be data and labour market intelligence and stakeholder feedback driven, recognising the changing environment.

Of particular concern to Cheshire and Warrington partners is information failure in the labour market. Labour market demand will not be satisfied unless it is mirrored by demand from learners which is underpinned by high-quality and inspiring information about what the economy will need in the future. It is important that there is a better convergence of what individuals want to acquire with the skills employers will need.

Successful delivery of our Plan is contingent on several factors:

- A strong economic recovery
- A strong and responsive Government policy framework
- Employers working together to inspire and inform demand from their employees and young people as well as those seeking work with high quality, inspirational, careers information resources.
- Labour Market Information (LMI) to inform the inspirational careers work, underpin curriculum planning and help focus programmes into specific geographical areas and particular cohorts of individuals, to ensure a high-quality talent pipeline.
- Employers working with skills providers to co-design the curriculum and ensure it provides the skills they need.
- Learners can access work experience and then progress from learning into job vacancies.
- Linking job opportunities from major capital investment to local people needing a job, including switching capital to revenue to support skills.
- Flexible investment of skills budgets responsive to local need including the Adult Education Budget and the Shared Prosperity Fund.
- Delivering world class facilities and kit to support skills.
- Government investment in SAPs and Digital Skills Partnerships.

In addition, key stakeholders and influencers will work together to support the delivery of flagship programmes that will deliver:

- Young People – employer-led inspiration and better information, targeted at key geographies and key cohorts.
- Employees - Reskilling and upskilling the existing workforce.
- Out of work – Workforce recovery support to access jobs and skills.

This will be underpinned by effective governance and stakeholder engagement provided by the LEP Board supported by the Employers' Skills and Education Board, and the Workforce Recovery Programme. Our stakeholder map is extensive and can be found¹¹.

¹¹ Stakeholder map: candwgrowthhub.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Skills-and-Ed-Board.mind-map-ver-18-Feb-2021.pdf

05 Skills Action Plan

As detailed above, Cheshire and Warrington has developed a new statement of skills priorities:

Our vision is to be a healthy, sustainable, inclusive, and growing region. We will build a better and more resilient future together recognising the changing landscape. We are operating in a new, digital, and innovative world and therefore the Cheshire and Warrington Skills and Education priorities are:

1. Young People - our employers will be at the heart of inspiring and informing people about future technologies, career pathways and learning so that they can make well-informed decisions about their futures.
2. Employees - employees will develop the skills and aptitudes that employers require to be able to grow, innovate and adopt digital. Highlighted skill gaps include amongst others green tech, life sciences, logistics, digital and STEM skills to support our key sectors.
3. Economically Inactive and Unemployed – those who are out of work will be helped to access employment; those who are threatened with unemployment will be helped to stay employed; and those furthest from the labour market will be helped to move closer to it. We will align national and local programmes, and local investment (where available), to secure maximum impact.

In delivering these priorities, we will be inclusive, agile, deliver with pace and keep it simple. We will be data and labour market intelligence and stakeholder feedback driven, recognising the changing environment.

The delivery landscape is complex with a multitude of delivery partners and programmes. The Board has identified in our skills action plan a small number of transformational work programmes that can deliver the impact needed and that will report on progress to the Board regularly.

This will be underpinned by effective governance and stakeholder engagement provided by the LEP Board supported by the Employers' Skills and Education Board and the Workforce Recovery Programme. It is possible that resources will not be available to deliver all the actions below. In this case we will seek to prioritise action that delivers growth by using all our talent – for example

increasing the proportion of disadvantaged young people to acquire a Level 3 by age 19.

In delivering our work programme we will retain a focus on addressing the following key issues that have been identified through our labour market research and prioritised by the Employers' Skills and Education Board:

Key Issue 1

The labour market downturn triggered by the global pandemic must be mitigated, and action needs to be taken to ensure a recovery that delivers growth and inclusion and meets employer demand including filling hard to fill vacancies.

Key Issue 2

More employees need to be trained and coherent curriculum pathways need to be developed. To meet future employer demand for technical, green tech, and digital skills, Cheshire and Warrington needs 71k more adults qualified to Level 3+.

Key Issue 3

Employers in Cheshire and Warrington are much more likely to have skills shortage vacancies in high skill roles and more likely to experience bottom line business impacts from this.

Key Issue 4

The gap between the progression of young people in receipt of free school meals (FSM) and those not in receipt of FSM to a sustained place in education at Key Stage 4 is too big, as it is for attainment of Level 3 at age 19.

Key Issue 5

Where young people live in Cheshire and Warrington links to their level of attainment.

Key Issue 6

There are gender disparities that need to be addressed in Apprenticeships, Diplomas and A Levels in particular subject/occupational areas.

Skills Action Plan

The table below summarises the actions we will take, who will take it, who will be affected and the issue(s) that each action will impact. Many of the milestones reflect the urgency required to deal with the current labour market impacts of the pandemic.

1. Young People - Our employers will be at the heart of inspiring and informing people about future technologies, career pathways and learning so that they can make well-informed decisions about their futures.

Action	Who will this affect	Delivery Partners	Key Issues to be addressed	Milestones and Targets	Metrics
a) Inform and inspire - Cheshire and Warrington employers and schools will inform and inspire our young people about the future technologies, jobs, career pathways (including T-levels) and development opportunities available across the region.	Young People	The Pledge, Employers, Schools, Colleges, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)	1, 4, 5 and 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement of over 500 employers by Dec 2022 in the successful delivery of the Pledge programme. 6 case studies by Dec 2021 on digital roles in different sectors with at least 3 of these featuring females. Establish a team of 25 11-24-year-old digital champions by Dec 21. Establish at least 6 coding clubs by Dec 2021. 	Gatsby NEET KS4 progression KS5 attainment
b) Better links between employers and schools/ colleges/youth groups - enterprise advisors from our businesses advising the senior leadership teams of all our schools and colleges on their strategic careers planning.	Employers, Young People, Schools, Colleges	The Pledge, Employers, Schools, Colleges HEIs	4, 5 and 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enterprise advisors with strong business experience in all our schools by December 2021 (currently 61% of schools have an enterprise advisor). 	NEET KS4 Progression Gatsby Gender disparities
c) Careers Hub - deliver a Careers Hub that focusses support and resources on young people that ensures all our young people receive support - particularly those eligible for free school meals and in disadvantaged communities.	Young People	The Pledge, Employers, Schools, Colleges HEIs	1, 4, 5 and 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial phase of the careers hub working with 20 schools to be completed by July 2022. 	Gatsby NEET KS4 progression KS5 attainment
d) Online career fairs - build on the success and continue to deliver a programme of online career fairs.	Employers, Young People, Providers	The Pledge, Employers, Apprenticeship providers, Schools, Colleges, HEIs	1, 3, 4, 5 and 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 15 career events and a comprehensive library of videos by December 2021. 	Gatsby NEET KS4 progression KS5 attainment
e) Work experience and progression into work - support work experience and internships to underpin better informed choices and talent retention for all groups of people including those in disadvantaged communities and with complex needs	Employers, Young People	The Pledge, Employers, Schools, Colleges, HEIs	1, 3, 4, 5 and 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> By September 2022, a coherent programme of work experience for all our young people in Key stages 4 and 5. Increase the % of young people undertaking work experience in our priority sectors by 15% by September 2022. 	Gatsby NEET KS4 progression KS5 attainment
f) Support employers - develop good practice to engage and recruit young local talent	Employers, Young People	The Pledge, Employers, HEIs	1, 3, 4, 5 and 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Run at least 10 events with employers to share good practice in the next year. 	NEET, HTF Vacancies

Skills Action Plan

2. Employees - Employees will develop the skills and aptitudes that employers require to be able to grow, innovate and adopt digital. Highlighted skill gaps include amongst others Green tech, life sciences, logistics, digital and STEM skills to support our key sectors.

Action	Who will this affect	Delivery Partners	Key Issues to be addressed	Milestones and Targets	Metrics
a) Inform and inspire – produce high quality labour market information that underpins individuals' understanding of local skills gaps and career opportunities; supports skills providers in delivering an agile and responsive curriculum; and informs employers' workforce planning.	Residents (all age); Colleges, schools, and skills providers; employers; careers partners	Data and Labour Market Intelligence Group	All	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Produce reports on the impact of Covid-19 and deep dives into key issues e.g. sustainable clean growth skills needs, by end 2021. Develop 6 case studies by Dec 2021 on the use of new technologies in industry to inspire employers to adopt new technologies and develop employee skills. Increase the number of referrals for digital leader mentoring programmes such as Digital Boost by Dec 2021. 	
b) Stimulate demand from employers and individuals - develop the skills our economy needs, underpinned by curriculum pathways (Level 2 to Level 4+), developed in line with the White paper, that support an individual's progression in employment.	Employers, employees	Skills providers, careers partners	1, 2 and 3.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Submit a business case for an IoT by April 2022. 	Attainment levels, HTF vacancies, % of employees receiving training
c) Increase the number of employees trained - ensure that training providers are aware of the training needs and we make the most effective use of the training programmes available – for example, using Accelerate to deliver training to employees at all levels, as their roles develop.	Employees, employers	Skills providers	2 and 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least 1500 individuals trained by Accelerate by 2023. Increase the number of high-level digital skills courses offered in the Accelerate programme from 5 to 30 by Dec 2021. Using Accelerate, deliver bootcamps for 40 furloughed people. 	Attainment levels, HTF vacancies, % of employees receiving training
d) Develop the capacity of our skills system – invest (as resources allow) in the estate and equipment required to deliver digital and technical skills at the volumes required; and by supporting the creation of an Institute of Technology. We will also ensure that existing investment in digital and technical capacity over-delivers on outputs, and that good practice is shared	Skills providers, learners, employers	Skills providers, employers	2 and 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 11k people and 540 businesses benefitting in digital skills training through the Local Growth Fund Skills Projects by December 2022. 	2019/20 capital investment delivers the impact contracted for IoT bid successful. L3+ delivery volumes

Skills Action Plan

3. Economically Inactive and Unemployed – those who are out of work will be helped to access employment; those who are threatened with unemployment will be helped to stay employed; and those furthest from the labour market will be helped to move closer to it. We will align national and local programmes, and local investment (where available), to secure maximum impact.

Action	Who will this affect	Delivery Partners	Key Issues to be addressed	Milestones and Targets	Metrics
a) Improve access to quality jobs, careers, and skills information - work with JCP and the National Careers Service to deliver online job fairs and develop an online Opportunities Portal that provides local information on job opportunities, apprenticeships, and learning.	Unemployed, economically inactive, threatened with redundancy	JCP, careers partners, skills providers, employers	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Six online job fairs by February 2022. Review of the Opportunities Portal pilot portal and agree next steps in April 2021. 	Claimant count/rate, LFS unemployment, economic inactivity rate
b) Stimulate job creation - deliver wage subsidy programmes such as Kickstart and training for enterprise and entrepreneurship.	Unemployed, employers	JCP, providers, employers, chambers, local authorities	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with the Growth Hub and training providers influence the development of programmes to support more digital businesses in Cheshire and Warrington to grow and become sustainable beyond 4 employees. 	Claimant count/rate, LFS unemployment, economic inactivity rate
c) Help people retain their jobs - support those being threatened with redundancy including access to retraining through for example, skills bootcamps that deliver programmes co-designed with employers	threatened with redundancy	Employers, providers	1 and 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subject to approval of DfE and ESF bids and using Adult Education Budget, deliver bootcamps for 40 unemployed people securing job interviews by December 2021. 	HTF vacancies, claimant count/rate
d) Help the unemployed access employment – ensure AEB and national programmes for the unemployed (Restart, Kickstart, Job Entry Targeted Support (JETs) and the Work and Health Programme) are tailored to the needs of residents and designed to secure maximum impact and secure sustainable outputs including employment in local businesses	Skills providers, learners, employers	JCP, providers, employers	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Influence close partnership working with these programmes and the Local Growth Fund Skills investment projects to ensure the investments exceed their targets (ref 2d) so that as many residents in Cheshire and Warrington benefit from the investment in technologies and skills development. 	Claimant count/rate, LFS unemployment, economic inactivity rate
e) Support those furthest from the labour market – deliver programmes to support those who are furthest from the labour market to move closer to it, including Journey First, Parents First, and key Housing Association Programmes	Economically inactive, unemployed	Local authorities, JCP, providers, housing associations	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over the next 12 months narrow the digital exclusion gap by providing digital equipment, connectivity, and digital skills development opportunities as part of ESF and JCP programmes and linked to Local Growth Fund projects. Establish a team of 30 Digital Champions by Dec 2021 to support individuals in the Community. 	Claimant count/rate, LFS unemployment, economic inactivity rate

06 Assessment of progress, impact made to date and case studies.

Cheshire and Warrington's current Skills and Education Plan was published in 2018. The Plan set out the three priorities described in Section 4.

The plan has provided a framework for partners to mobilise the action required and to cut through the noise of multiple overlapping initiatives by providing a clarity of focus on the things that need to be done. The following maps our local initiatives to the three Plan priorities.

The Priorities

The Delivery

Employers at the heart of inspiring and informing young people, those seeking work and progression, and other stakeholders about the opportunities in Cheshire and Warrington

- 'The Pledge' puts employers at the heart of inspiring, informing and communicating with the next generation of employees
- Employers responded to the C-19 downturn with a series of online careers fairs

Improve the skills of our workforce by supporting employers to work with providers to pool expertise and resources, and develop a coherent and responsive curriculum offer

- 'Accelerate', a £30m flexible workforce development initiative driven by employer demand
- Digital Skills Partnership developing the skills of the current and future workforces so businesses can fully utilise new digital technologies
- Bespoke support to those threatened by redundancy because of C-19
- The Cheshire and Warrington Virtual Institute of Technology
- £12.1 million for Skills Capital to widen access to new technologies and develop science, engineering and digital skills

Provide and communicate coherent information about jobs and employment across Cheshire and Warrington

- Opportunities Portal, a digital front door to thousands of local jobs, apprenticeships and courses in Cheshire and Warrington
- Support to skills providers to develop their curricula by providing high quality Labour Market Information
- The Pledge use of LMI to target activity

Progress in delivering each of the priorities is described in more detail below:

6.1 Inspiring and Informing

Since launch in 2019 over 400 employers have worked with the Pledge to deliver inspirational and informative events designed to inspire young people, their teachers, parents and carers. In response to the pandemic, employers have worked through the Pledge to move much of its delivery online:

- A wide range of videos and other material for use at online events has been produced. The growing library of videos is now being used regularly by increasing numbers of teachers to support the curriculum.
- Over 40 local employers took part in an event to inspire 12,500 11-14-year-olds across Cheshire and Warrington. 'Spring into Careers' was attended by over 30 schools and involved inspirational videos and a live, moderated interactive chat between employers and young people.
- A group of employers meet regularly to share good practice about virtual work experience and recruitment practices and to tackle the need to support some of our more disadvantaged student and challenge some of the gender imbalances in the subjects students choose to study.
- An online careers festival 'Paving the Way' was held in May 2020 involving 77 schools and 67 employers. 116 employer videos were produced for the event.

Subsequently, there have been 85,600 website visits and 20,242 unique page views learnliveuk.com/paving-the-way-virtual-careers-festival/

Employers, learners, and stakeholders are providing valuable feedback on what works:

"Through their use of the Learn Live platform, the Pledge have supported Siemens in reaching thousands of young people during the lockdown pandemic, including a Virtual Careers Fair and Covid response week broadcasts – supporting young people make informed career choices."
- Michaela Lawton, Siemens, Congleton.

"As Chair of the Warrington and Cheshire Young Apprentice Ambassador Network, I have been working closely with the Pledge. As a network we feed in to support businesses, schools and colleges to promote apprenticeships. We have attended the virtual careers fair and found this to be a success!" - Chloe Cunningham, United Utilities.

"Our Enterprise Coordinator has been most helpful in helping us to audit our provision against the Gatsby Benchmarks, not only challenging us on the quality of what we are providing for our pupils but also in making some great suggestions of help and support - thank you very much for all of this!" - Carolynne Stratton, Assistant Headteacher, Weaverham High School.

Case Study: Digital Bootcamps

Half of the job roles that employers find hardest to fill in the Cheshire and Warrington labour market are digital that require skills above Level 3. These job types have been identified as: Programmers and software development professionals; IT business analysts, architects, and systems designers; Web design and development professionals; and IT user support technicians. One of the reasons why such roles are difficult to fill is that only 25% of starts on Level 4+ digital skills learning in FE in Cheshire and Warrington are by females.

One way of addressing this skills issue is the delivery of digital bootcamps. These are typically 12-14 weeks duration, target unemployed people and deliver Level 4 skills in areas such as coding as well as key employability skills such as team working. There are several national pilots of digital bootcamps from which local partners are learning.

To highlight the benefits of bootcamps, the Digital Skills Partnership advertised a 'sponsored' place on a Code Nation digital bootcamp. After a rigorous application process, Emily Baldocke from Ellesmere Port was recruited to a bootcamp between September and December 2020. During her training Emily presented to the Cheshire and Warrington Digital Skills Partnership Board. Bentley Motors, a Board member, suggested that Emily should apply for a Bentley Higher-Level Apprenticeship. Emily was successful in her application. She started with Bentley at the end of January 2021.



Case Study: Online Careers and Jobs Fairs

At the beginning of 2020, employers and other stakeholders in the Pledge and the Digital Skills Partnership agreed to pilot an approach to on-line Careers/Jobs fairs. The previously well-established model that operated at the time was that a single business would do a session with 30-40 learners in a school or college. Network Rail and Bentley brokered a partnership between Learn Live, the Pledge, and Warrington & Vale Royal College to pilot a very successful on-line event focussed on Wind Turbines in early March 2020.

With the onset of the pandemic this online approach to careers and jobs fairs for young people was mainstreamed in Cheshire and Warrington. To date a range of online events have been held including 6 careers fairs. The most recent careers fairs attracted over 6,734 participants on the evening and 1,100 live chat exchanges using the moderated chat facility enabled participants to engage meaningfully with employers. There were also a further 3,600 on demand viewings of the videos for this event.

In total the 6 online events generated 185 videos that are now being used by teachers to support their lessons. Feedback from employers, teachers, and the young people themselves has been very positive. Employers such as Sellafield have said that they value the opportunity to have meaningful encounters with such high volumes of learners.

Following on from the Careers Fairs a series of 9 sector-based 'Industry Insight Days' are being delivered from January to May 2021. Roles explored included - games design, product design, user experience (UX), internet security, cyber security, and process efficiency. Following the 'Industry Insights Digital Day' employers have been involved in delivering a series of 17 'Deep Dive' sessions to 127 participants. The 'Deep Dive' sessions provided an opportunity to further explore different job roles, routes to digital jobs and develop their digital skills. Sessions have included exploring digital degree apprenticeships and degree courses, using Canva to create CVs, introduction to coding, introduction to digital drawing and how to fast track your digital career.

As the pandemic began to take its toll on jobs, the Pledge partnered with Job Centre Plus to use the approach developed for young people to deliver an all-age online jobs fair. The most recent event attracted 11,000 participants (many aged over 40). Cheshire JCP has now mainstreamed the approach developed with the delivery of monthly online job fairs. As a result of the success of these online events TalkTalk and McCann Medical approached Cheshire JCP and initiated an online Ambition 21 event for the whole of the North West Region on 6th 7th, and 8th of April. Over 90 employers and more than 5,000 job vacancies were showcased during the event.

6.2 Improving Skills

Partners in Cheshire and Warrington have initiated a range of actions to ensure that the skills system is better aligned with the needs of employers:

- Accelerate - a £30m flexible workforce development initiative driven by employer demand. Accelerate co-funds bespoke training to employers and groups of employers to meet business needs.
- The Digital Skills Partnership (DSP) Board is a small but very influential group of employers with representation from larger companies (Astra Zeneca, Bentley Motors, Encirc, Science and Technologies Facilities Council Daresbury Laboratory and United Utilities), SMEs working in the digital sector (Blue Beck, Drive Works and Port Swigger) and a charity. The DSP is developing the skills of the current and future workforce so businesses can fully utilise new digital technologies.
- The Cheshire and Warrington virtual Institute of Technology is a partnership that brings together all the colleges in Cheshire and Warrington and the University of Chester. Its focus is to deliver the Level 4+ digital and technical skills that employers will require with a particular focus on sustainability and digital. The proposal to deliver 1.5k L4 learning aim starts per annum was submitted to Government at the end of 2020.
- In the most recent tranche of investment to widen access to new technologies and skills, £5m from the LEP has leveraged £5m from partners to deliver 805 jobs, support 3.5k businesses and 84k learners and provide 2,062m² new/improved floorspace.

"My experience of the Accelerate broker and the wider Accelerate team was seamless from start to finish. I approached the broker as I had identified a sales training course that I really wanted to do and that would help my business. The start of the course was within a week of me contacting the broker. ... I am pleased to say that I got my place on the course and it is already proving helpful." VK. Business Assist

6.3 Coherent Information

Partners are using data and LMI to inform the strategic investment priorities, including capital investments, of the Employers' Skills and Education Board, the Pledge and the Digital Skills Partnership. Over the past year Cheshire and Warrington LEP with advice from our Data and Labour Market Steering Group has commissioned several reports¹² about skills and the labour market and provided access for some partners to EMSI's Course Vision tool.

Our data and labour market intelligence is used to:

- Inform strategic investments of the LEP.
- Underpin strategic priorities of local training providers and inform the shape of the curriculum.
- Provide a source of intelligence about job opportunities to young people and those seeking work across Cheshire and Warrington

6.3.1 Inform strategic investments of the LEP

Our analysis has highlighted the critical importance of STEM and digital skills to the future Cheshire and Warrington economy. In response to this the LEP has invested £5m skills capital to ensure that learners and businesses can access cutting edge equipment to develop the skills needed for the future. A range of projects are being supported including:

- The IOTA project - delivering learning experiences in STEM to a minimum of 8,000 learners and supporting 300 local business over 5 years.
- The Made.Digital project where at least 9,000 young people over 5 years will be learning how to use technology and develop important coding skills.
- The Widening Access to Technology and Digital Skills (STREAM) project - a collaboration between 3 training providers and various community organisations, raising awareness of digital skills. The project is facilitating access to technology and opportunities to develop digital skills. Live streaming will ensure this project has a wide reach to over 15,000 people over 5 years.
- The #GettingStudentsOnline initiative - provided £77k funding to make local businesses aware of the numbers of our students without access to computers or the internet and invite them to make donations of cash or new computers to schools to assist these students. The £77k was used to purchase 390 laptops for a range of Cheshire and Warrington schools with the highest percentage of students who are eligible for free school meals.
- Advanced Construction Training (ACT) centres involve a 'hub and spoke' model and are driving collaboration between all our local colleges and employers to develop, commercialise and promote digital technologies and skills training for construction, nuclear and allied industries. The specialist equipment being purchased through the investment has been agreed upon following consultation with employers and will enhance existing resources at each of the partner colleges.

¹² The reports have included a Learning and Labour Market Assessment; Adult Workforce and Skills Delivery in Cheshire and Warrington; Digital Skills in Cheshire and Warrington; The Supply of Education and Training in Cheshire and Warrington; Young People, Learning and Skills in Cheshire and Warrington; Employer Demand for Labour and Skills in Cheshire and Warrington; and several Covid-19 Labour Market Impact reports



Fanuc Robotic Arm, Specialist Equipment

6.3.2 Underpinning strategic priorities of local training providers and inform the shape of the curriculum.

In an evaluation of the LMI programme, which was undertaken in September 2020, stakeholders were clear as to the benefits that LMI tailored to their business planning requirements brings:

“The digital report was shared and used to influence project work and future provision, so too was the skills and the adult workforce report – used to inform a revised plan for 20/21.” Training Provider

“All the reports have been extremely useful in providing relevant information to support decision making across various departments in the college. The Learning & Labour Market Assessment was extremely useful in allowing us to identify which sectors were growing and allowing us to plan new directions for apprentices and adults who currently work in the most vulnerable sectors. The COVID-19 impact reports allowed both myself and my colleagues to have timely information around the impact on our learners and those most at risk.” College Leader

“All the data and information provided in the Young People report proved to be very useful including 15-19 forecasted growth, deprivation/ disadvantaged/NEET data, No. of young people with access to a PC/laptop and Wi-Fi, and attainment/achievement/progression data..... this all informs plans for targeted support and IAG.” Local Authority

6.3.3 Providing a source of intelligence about job opportunities to young people and those seeking work across Cheshire and Warrington

Through its utilisation in the Pledge where it is being deployed in supporting the continuous professional development of career teachers and on school websites for easy access by students, parents, and carers; and in the Opportunities Portal and by JCP to support job-search by adults.

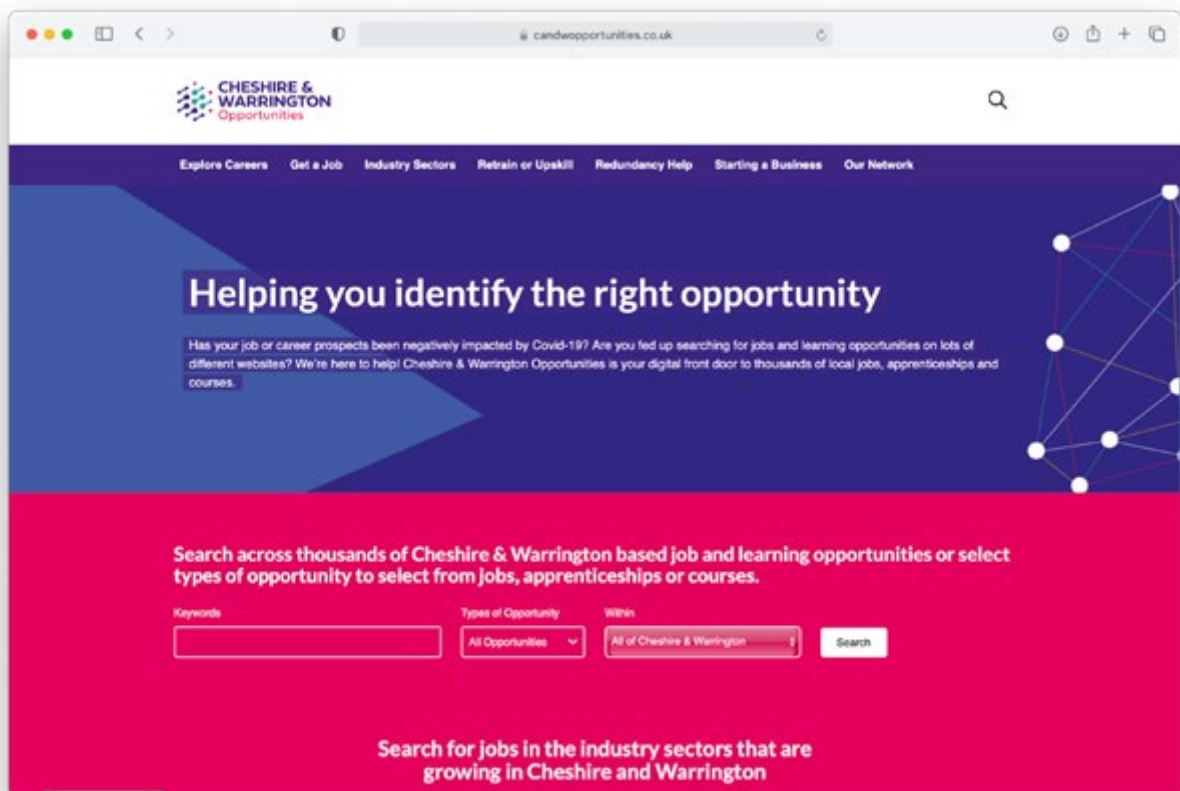
Opportunities Portal

Cheshire and Warrington LEP has worked with PDMS and other Northern Powerhouse LEPs to develop an Opportunities Portal to provide clear information and advice on jobs, apprenticeship and learning opportunities in Cheshire and Warrington. The portal is intended to support those who have been furloughed or been made recently unemployed to undertake self-directed job search and career development. Its use has been promoted through on-line job fairs and social media. Launched as a proof-of-concept project, usage has already been wider than initially intended with schools now using the tool to support their work on careers education.

[The Portal](#) pulls information on jobs from online postings (using Adzuna and other sources), links to National Apprenticeship Service vacancies data and draws on information provided to DfE on local training opportunities. Typically, the Portal will have

between 12,000 and 14,000 job vacancies in Cheshire and Warrington, with vacancies information updated every 30 minutes. A key feature is the ability to develop localised pages promoting growing sectors in Cheshire and Warrington.

A careers directory of 350 job roles is also available for users that want to consider a range of alternatives before narrowing their jobs search and for providers that need detailed information on the skill/qualification needs of current vacancies. The Portal has a range of other functionality including an 'alert' setting that emails the user with a link when an opportunity they may be interested in arises; and a search function that can be narrowed to opportunities within a certain radius from a location or widened to encompass opportunities in adjacent LEP areas. The portal had a soft launch in November 2020 and during March 2021 a social media campaign has significantly increased usage with 8,946 clicks to the site and 1,982 clicks to 'apply for a job'.



07 Looking Forward

The pandemic has had a huge impact on our labour market that requires urgent mitigation. However, transformative opportunities will be missed if we only focus on crisis management.

Our aim is to reshape the labour market so that it better supports our vision of Cheshire and Warrington becoming the healthiest, most inclusive, most sustainable, and fastest growing place in the country. This requires that our Skills and Education Plan be both ambitious and deliverable; it requires a unity of action/focus across our partnership drawing on the strength and capability of all our partners; and it requires that Government takes the action needed to enable the delivery of our priorities. We are clear regarding the different contributions of key stakeholders¹³ and partners locally:

Employers will:

- Lead the agreement of strategic skills priorities, and review their delivery, through the Employers' Skills and Education Board (the employer-led Skills Advisory Panel for Cheshire and Warrington) and the associated Pledge Board, the Digital Skills Partnership, and the Accelerate Board.
- Co-invest, alongside employees and the Government, in delivering the skills needed.
- Be at the heart of the Pledge inspiring and informing our young people about careers/opportunities and support schools to develop a more strategic approach to the careers curriculum.
- Provide role models to combat the gender stereotyping of occupations and learning routes.
- Create jobs, apprenticeships, and other opportunities to experience the world of work.

The Local Enterprise Partnership will:

- Broker the strategic partnerships, and exercise the influence, required to deliver the plan.
- Invest in the capacity of our skills system to deliver what is required, as resources allow.
- Work through the Growth Hub to support employers to understand/meet their skill needs.
- Lead partnership action to better understand the local labour market.
- Work closely with Jobcentre Plus, the Local Authorities and other partners to drive the levelling up agenda and flex support programmes in a way they target areas of greatest need in Cheshire and Warrington.
- Establish a careers hub to secure a more strategic approach to the careers curriculum in schools.

Local Authorities will:

- Ensure strategic developments deliver inclusive opportunities.
- Work with employers, schools, and careers partners to close the attainment gap.
- Work with employment partners and housing associations to ensure learning and employment support is delivered to those furthest from the labour market.

Colleges, the University, and skills providers will:

- Be agile and responsive in understanding and responding to employer skill needs, including acting to address skills gaps and needs that have already been identified.
- Put employers at the centre of the curriculum and teaching and learning.
- Stimulate demand for skills from learners and employers.
- Establish clear vocational pathways from entry Level to Level 4+.

¹³ See the Cheshire and Warrington stakeholder map candwgrowthhub.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Skills-and-Ed-Board.mind-map-ver-18-Feb-2021.pdf

Jobcentre Plus, voluntary sector and employment partners will:

- Provide employment support which is led by real vacancies.
- Tailor support for individuals according to their distance from the labour market.
- Ensure appropriate action to support all people who are newly unemployed as well as those further from the labour market. Key cohorts most affected by the Covid crisis include young people and those aged 50+.

Schools, Youth Groups, Careers and Guidance partners will:

- Ensure employers are at the heart of inspiring and informing our young people about careers/opportunities.
- Work with schools to attain the 'Gatsby' standards for good careers guidance.
- Support action to challenge gender stereotyping and close the attainment gap.
- Obtain feedback from young people.

Our Asks of Government

Certain types of action or intervention are out of scope for our Skills Strategy because local partners do not have the powers to make some things happen. So, for example, local action cannot be taken to change the composition or priorities of skills providers operating in Cheshire and Warrington because responsibility for procurement and management of skills providers has not been devolved to Cheshire and Warrington. Similarly, funding rates are determined nationally; the eligibility of what qualifications and which learners are funded is determined nationally; and support and challenge to improve the quality of skills delivery is a national responsibility.

These are all responsibilities of Government, and Government is an important partner in ensuring the skills system in Cheshire and Warrington can respond to the challenges that we have identified. The recent White Paper 'Skills for Jobs' is underpinned by a national analysis which is very similar to our own local assessment and provides a new policy framework for tackling the fact that the current output of Level 3+ qualifications in Cheshire and Warrington is too low to meet the forecast demand from employers. This is a significant constraint on our economy that requires urgent action.

We would therefore encourage Government to consider the opportunity to pilot as much of the White Paper's approach as early as possible in Cheshire and Warrington. We would urge:

- Agreement to our proposals for an Institute of Technology
- Trailblazing the development of a Local Skills Improvement Plan in Cheshire and Warrington.
- Help stimulate demand from employers by supporting College Business Centres in Cheshire and Warrington
- Early indication of budget allocations to Cheshire and Warrington providers to deliver the Lifetime Skills Guarantee at a level commensurate with our analysis of employer demand.
- Skills bootcamps to address the hard to fill vacancies that our analysis has identified.
- Ensure Cheshire and Warrington participates in the early roll out of Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs)
- Work with us to better align Careers and Enterprise Company and National Career Service – building on our experience of our Opportunities Portal, the work of our Pledge and our relationships with the National Citizen Service and the Office for Students' Uni Connect Programme.
- An extension of the Kickstart Programme – in recognition of the fact that when first announced we thought we were emerging from the lockdown but have since had 2 further lockdowns so need a more prolonged programme.

More generally, we would welcome a discussion with Government on the following policy areas that link to delivery of our local priorities:

Shared Prosperity/Levelling up funds – investment needs to be driven by local labour market intelligence more effectively than has been the case for ESF, so that support can be better targeted.

Support for those made redundant from furlough – it is widely believed that there will be a wave of redundancies as furlough ends. Some of those made redundant will have been inactive for over a year and should not need to wait for intensive support from JCP and partners.

Levelling up skills as well as infrastructure – capital programmes designed to support levelling up should be top-sliced locally to support revenue investment in skills, including information, advice and guidance.

Apprenticeship levy flexibility – there has been a significant decline in apprenticeship volumes over several years and too few employees are receiving training. We seek further levy flexibility locally, possibly linked to the roll out of Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs), to address this.

Apprentice achievement rates – there is evidence that Cheshire and Warrington apprentices do better with Cheshire and Warrington providers than with out-of-area providers. We would like further discussion with Government to better understand this issue and agree the action that needs to be taken.

Digital – we would like a forward commitment to secure the longer-term funding of local Digital Skills Partnership and a commitment from DCMS to work with us to explore how to extend the remit of Digital Skills Partnerships to secure better engagement of regional businesses in digital technology policy development and establish stronger links between our local businesses and national and international businesses experts that work regularly with DCMS.

Stimulating demand to meet future labour market need – the development of high-quality resources to help inspire informed choices by individuals and employers and breakdown stereotypes that put STEM skills and creativity in different silos.

Whilst it may be ambitious, working together local partners and national Government will deliver this Plan. Our roadmap for effective delivery is summarised overleaf.

Roadmap

Skills to deliver Cheshire and Warrington's vision for growth, inclusion, sustainability and health

The Cheshire and Warrington Landscape

- C&W's £30.9bn economy is one of the UK's success stories. It has the highest GVA per head of all northern LEPs.
- The population is old and ageing. The only age band under 60 that is forecast to grow over 10% is the 16-18-year-old population which will grow by 15% by 2028.
- Job density is much higher than the national average.
- There are over 43,000 businesses in C&W, employing 500k.
- The employment rate is falling
- Key sectors are Manufacturing; Life Sciences; Energy and clean growth; Finance and Business Services; and Logistics and Distribution. Digital and sustainability are cross-cutting priorities
- Most of the C&W growth sectors carry a wage premium, although more than 20% of all C&W employees earn less than the Real Living Wage
- Replacement demand to 2027 is expected to vary for different occupations, from 22% to 42%.
- C&W Strategic Priorities: Town centres; Science corridor; High speed growth corridor; Digital infrastructure; Hydrogen and next gen nuclear.
- There is good alignment of FE delivery with those that need it, in the places where many of those people live

Key Issues and Opportunities

- △ C-19 is driving job losses, unemployment & economic inactivity, impacting the most vulnerable
- △ More employees need to be trained. To meet future employer demand for technical, Greentech, and digital skills, C&W needs 75k more adults qualified to L4+ by 2027.
- △ Employers in C&W are more likely to have skills shortage vacancies in high skill roles.
- △ The disadvantage gap for progression to education @16 is too big, as it is for attainment of L3 @19.
- △ Where young people live in C&W links to their level of attainment
- △ There are large gender disparities in apprenticeships, diplomas, and A Levels including in STEM and digital.

Our Objective

- ▷ Young people - employers will be at the heart of inspiring and informing.
- ▷ Employees - employees will develop the skills and aptitudes that employers require.
- ▷ Economically inactive and unemployed - we will align national and local programmes, and local investment (where available), to secure maximum impact.

Enablers

- ▷ A strong economic recovery
- ▷ A responsive Government policy framework
- ▷ Employers working together to inspire and inform.
- ▷ High quality LMI
- ▷ Employers working with skills providers to co-design the curriculum they need.
- ▷ Linking job opportunities from major capital investment to local people needing a job, including top slicing capital to support skills.
- ▷ Flexible investment of skills budgets responsive to local need including Adult Education Budget and Shared Prosperity Fund.
- ▷ Delivering world class facilities and kit to support skills.
- ▷ Govt investment in SAPs and Digital Skills Partnerships.

Leadership and Co-ordination

Employers' Skills Board
LEP Board
Digital Skills Partnership

Stakeholders

Employers
Young people
Workforce
Unemployed
Economically inactive
Colleges and Schools
Youth workers
Parents and Carers
Local authorities
JCP
Training providers
National Career Service
Voluntary sector
Housing Associations

Influencers

Business leaders
Employer ambassadors
Employer networks
Members of Parliament
Civic leaders
Press/social media

Skills Action Plan Programmes

Young people
Employees
Unemployed and economically inactive

Impact and Metrics

Increased Employment

- Employment rate & economic activity above 2019 by 2025
- DWP claimant metrics

Inspired Young People

- Gatsby benchmarks and a more strategic approach in all our schools to inspiring young people about new technologies and career opportunities.
- % FSM young people progressing to education @16
- L3 attainment gap @19

Skilled, Productive Workforce

- Increase % @ L3+ & % of employees trained.
- Eliminate in work poverty by 2030 and halve the number earning below the living wage by 2025.

Business Growth

- Double size of the economy by 2040

Digital Inclusion

- Decrease residents digitally excluded

Skills Inclusion

- Increase the % of workers and residents engaged in learning

Appendix 1

To enable national partners to better understand the skills issues identified across England's LEPs, a table in the format below has been requested.

Skills issue category	Issues to be addressed and supporting rationale
Covid-19 recovery and renewal skills issues	<p>At Risk of Redundancy- 67k people were on furlough at the end of Jan 21. If these people are made redundant, many will become unemployed after over a year of inactivity.</p> <p>Unemployed and economically inactive young people 16 – 24 - Numbers of unemployed young people have increased significantly. The young are most likely to be furloughed.</p> <p>Unemployed and economically inactive over 50s - Numbers of 50+ claimant unemployed are the highest on record. Many are retiring to economic inactivity taking their skills out of the workforce.</p> <p>Discouraged workers - Economic inactivity has increased as has the proportion of the economically inactive that want to work.</p> <p>Long Term unemployed (LTU) - is increasing and many of the newly long-term unemployed will not have the same barriers to employment as those who were long-term unemployed pre Covid.</p> <p>Self-employment - Whilst the self-employed have been hit in the current crisis, business start-up can provide a route out of the downturn for some.</p>
Cross-cutting skills issues (far-reaching, cross-sector)	<p>Address the mis-match between the skills employers need and the skills individuals choose to acquire. Not enough people get the information they need to make informed decisions. This is particularly true for STEM and Digital skills and of relevance in key geographical areas and key cohorts of individuals.</p> <p>Increase attainment of L3 and L4+ Skills - Cheshire and Warrington needs 71k more qualified to L3+, and 75k more qualified to L4+ by 2027. Fewer L3 qualified young people are joining the workforce than those L3+ leaving the workforce and only c4.5k adults per annum achieve a substantial L3 qualification¹⁴.</p> <p>Train more employees - Employers in Cheshire and Warrington are much more likely to have skills shortage vacancies in high skill roles and more likely to experience bottom line business impacts from this. However, compared to England, a lower proportion of employees received training in Cheshire and Warrington and a lower proportion train to a qualification. Also, 20% of employees earn below the Real Living Wage.</p> <p>Tackle low attainment of young people linked to disadvantage and place - Too few free school meals (FSM) 16-year-olds progress to a sustained place in education; too few FSM young people achieve a L2 @19; and too few FSM young people achieve a L3 @19. Young people do less well in Ellesmere Port, North Warrington and Crewe.</p>
Sector/occupational issues	<p>Deliver skills, particularly digital skills, to tackle current skill shortage vacancies - High volumes of vacancies with high job posting intensity indicates they are hard to fill vacancies and suggests that the following occupational areas should be considered as possible skill shortage areas and priorities for action by skills and employment partners: Managers and directors in storage and warehousing; Programmers and software development professionals; IT business analysts, architects and systems designers; Web design and development professionals; Quantity surveyors; IT user support technicians; Book-keepers, payroll managers and wages clerks; Customer service occupations. Half of these occupations are 'digital occupations', and the majority are at Level 3+.</p> <p>Gendered Learning - There are significant gender disparities in L3+ delivery in ICT, Engineering, Health and Social Care, and Construction across all learning routes. This embeds a structural deficiency in the labour market where some occupations only draw on the talents of half of the population. Female participation in digital skills is too low at every level and for all ages.</p> <p>Deliver technical skills to support future economic development - Demand for L4+ technical skills¹⁵ (digital, STEM, GreenTech etc) will increase with the delivery of Cheshire and Warrington economic development priorities, including: Digital infrastructure; High Speed Growth Corridor; Hydrogen/next generation nuclear; the Science Corridor.</p>

¹⁴ Forecast occupational demand is set out in the Labour Market Assessment [Employers' Skills and Education Board](#), Section 4.6 P59-67. The skills and qualifications needed for different careers can be found here candwopportunities.co.uk/explore-careers.

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