



SOLENT  
LOCAL  
ENTERPRISE  
PARTNERSHIP

# SOLENT SKILLS ACTION PLAN & LOCAL SKILLS REPORT



REPORT REFRESH

January, 2022

#solent2050

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# 1. FOREWORD

## Committed to helping the Solent region prosper post-pandemic

**Rachael Randall,**  
Chair of the Skills Advisory Panel  
and Solent LEP Business Director

**T**his refresh of our Solent Local Skills Report and Skills Action Plan provides a timely opportunity to review progress on our plans and priorities designed to help the Solent reach its full economic potential.

Nearly two years since the first Covid-19 lockdown in the UK, and a year since the UK's exit from the EU, the impact on both organisations and individuals, in terms of jobs and skills, is significant and still evolving.

As we release this refresh of the Local Skills Report, the much-anticipated Levelling Up White Paper has been published. We are pleased to see that the local priorities we have identified here in the Solent are reflected in Levelling-Up policy. Of the 12 medium term Missions identified within the White Paper, one is focused on improving skills and training with the aim that by 2030, the number of people successfully completing high-quality skills training will have significantly increased in every area of the UK. The UK Government's goal is to support a high-wage, high-skill economy by building skills and human capital, particularly in places where they are weakest. To deliver on this, the policy programme is focused on:

- putting local employers at the heart of provision.
- strengthening locally accessible institutions, notably the national network of further education colleges
- ensuring that all individuals have lifetime access to training
- offering new opportunities to access high quality work and progress in the workplace; and
- providing employment support for disabled people and people with health conditions.

The work that we identify in this plan supports this programme, and we look forward to working with Government and



local partners to ensure that the Solent skills ecosystem supports the levelling-up of the Solent economy.

A further mission within the Levelling Up White Paper is for the number of primary school children to achieve the expected standard in reading, writing and maths to significantly increase. Part of the policy programme to deliver on this includes the establishment of Education Investment Areas - cold spots of the country where school outcomes are the weakest, and where investment, support and action will be targeted to help children from all backgrounds and areas to succeed at the very highest levels. In the Solent, Isle of Wight and Portsmouth have been identified as such areas. The geography of these cold spots underscores some of the challenges coastal economies such as the Solent encounter.

Making sure people have the right skills to progress their careers at the same time as ensuring businesses have the skills available to build back better after the pandemic has never been more important. Training and skills are critical to our region's future prosperity. As we continue the path to economic recovery, we are committed to building on our pioneering employer-led skills system and excellent track record of partnership working to deliver the best outcomes for our local and business communities.

This refresh defines how an integrated response to skills development is being delivered to meet the challenges of the region's economic recovery and develop a world-class talent base. It sets out how,

through using a strong evidence base and through successful collaborations with partners, we provide opportunities for our residents, workforce and our businesses to obtain the skills they need to remain competitive and to grow.

It defines the Solent's skills strengths, needs and priorities, and examines progress under the themed approach we have adopted under four interconnected strategic priorities:

- Awareness & Aspirations;
- Brokerage: Matching Supply with Demand;
- Core Sectors & Competencies; and
- Digital Inclusion.

It reflects how the impact of current economic challenges is being felt keenly in particular sectors and unevenly in our region, such as in the logistics, construction and hospitality sectors.

Our focus on targeting the skills requirements in key sectors in the Solent is delivering results. We have established Maritime UK Solent which is raising the profile of maritime careers and we anticipate the National Shipbuilding Strategy refresh will bring opportunities to the Solent's maritime sector. Our newly convened Construction Network, established to bring together employers, supply chain and education providers to address skills issues and build long term resilience in the industry, is already attracting a wide range of members from across the sector.

The Solent suffers from a technical skills deficit, trailing behind the rest of the South East in productivity, in the same way as many coastal economies up and down the country. However, significant opportunities are on the horizon. The Solent Freeport is a once-in-a-generation opportunity that will generate significant labour requirements, predicted to bring 26,000 new jobs to the area and prospects for local people from disadvantaged areas.

*continued...*

# Committed to helping the Solent region prosper post-pandemic

## *continued...*

The Green Growth Institute within the Freeport will focus on green skills; while the application led by Solent University in partnership with the LEP for an Institute of Technology (IoT) has been successful in reaching Pre-Award stage. The proposed £13m institute will ensure young people in our communities can access high-skilled careers and businesses have the workforce they need for the future across maritime, engineering and digital technologies.

It is clear the benefits of these major projects will take time to be realised, and we continue to build on existing initiatives such as the Solent Apprenticeship Hub,

expanding the remit to develop an independent skills brokerage offer integrated with our business-focused Growth Hub. The integration with the Growth Hub is proving invaluable in gaining intelligence on real time skills and recruitment challenges. This integration is also providing opportunities to provide programmes to upskill local businesses, such as improving digital skills - ever more important to business resilience and growth since the pandemic - through the Digital Accelerator programme and moving to Net Zero through our Sustainable Business Support programme.

It is widely acknowledged that the world of work has, most likely, changed forever

and coupled with other important drivers such as the role of autonomy, the economic shock of the pandemic will be felt for many years to come. In this context, the work of the Solent Skills Advisory Panel has never been more important. As the economy begins to move forward, we are committed to helping the Solent grow and maintain its competitiveness. We will do this by ensuring our region has the skills employers need, and the job opportunities our communities deserve.



## 2. Skills Advisory Panels - Introduction

The Solent Skills Advisory Panel brings together local employers and skills providers to pool knowledge on skills and labour market needs, and to work together to understand and address key local challenges.

### Skills Advisory Panels: The national context

Since 2018, Skills Advisory Panels (SAPs) have been bringing together employers, skills providers and key local stakeholders to better understand and resolve skills mismatches at a local level. SAPs are part of Mayoral Combined Authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships and there are 36 in total across England. The Department for Education (DfE) has supported SAPs with grant funding primarily to produce high-quality analysis of local labour markets and publish Local Skills Reports, which set out the local skills strengths and needs and how the SAP proposes its area addresses its key priorities.

This second iteration of SAPs' Local Skills Reports comes at a time when DfE is Trailblazing new Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs), in eight areas of the country. Developed by Employer Representative Bodies, LSIPs are part of a suite of reforms launched in DfE's "Skills for Jobs" White Paper<sup>1</sup> that aim to put employers more firmly at the heart of the skills system. An evaluation of the eight Trailblazers will inform the national roll out of the programme. In the meantime, and before LSIPs are rolled out across the country, it is DfE's intention that Skills Advisory Panels and this Local Skills Report should continue to influence the behaviour of local partners and feed intelligence to central government, including to sectoral focussed skills teams and the national-level Skills and Productivity Board (SPB).

### A strong local skills partnership

The Solent SAP was established in April 2019 as a means of enabling the Solent LEP to support employers, education providers and local government in identifying current and future local skills needs, and using this intelligence to shape the provision and funding of post-16 education and training and careers guidance.

In particular, the Solent SAP strengthens the capability of the Solent LEP to carry out high quality analysis which is being used to identify the skills and employment needs and priorities for the Solent economy, its businesses, resident workforce, to enable further economic growth and prosperity. To date this has included comprehensive Local Skills and Labour Market Analysis<sup>2</sup> as an important first step in providing a forensic understanding of the existing and future skills gaps and employment priorities to inform the 'people' component of our emerging Solent 2050 Economic Strategy<sup>3</sup>.

The Solent SAP meets a minimum of three times a year, with capacity to convene more frequently to respond to specific local requirements and challenges, and as situations arise.

More recently, the expertise that the Solent SAP provides is being leveraged to steer the skills input into the Solent Freeport Full Business Case, to make best use of existing fora and ensure alignment across work programmes.



1. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/957856/Skills\\_for\\_jobs\\_lifelong\\_learning\\_for\\_opportunity\\_and\\_growth\\_web\\_version\\_.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/957856/Skills_for_jobs_lifelong_learning_for_opportunity_and_growth_web_version_.pdf)

2. <https://solentlep.org.uk/media/3114/solent-lep-skills-and-local-labour-market-report-june-2020-final.pdf>

3. <https://solentlep.org.uk/what-we-do/planning-for-solent-2050/>

# Solent LEP Skills Advisory Panel Members



Rachael Randall,  
Chair, and  
Principal & CEO,  
HTP Apprenticeship  
College



Lester Biddle,  
Technology Director,  
HT Training Ltd, and  
Chair of the  
Association of  
Learning Providers,  
Hampshire & IofW



Debby Clement,  
Co-Founder &  
Director,  
Peopley Ltd



James Fitzgerald,  
Finance Manager &  
Corporate Finance  
Specialist,  
Portsmouth City  
Council (accountable  
body to the LEP)



Mike Gaston,  
Principal & CEO,  
Havant &  
South Downs  
College



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Anne-Marie  
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Solent LEP



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Manager,  
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Harry Kutty,  
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Cantell School



Anna Marshall,  
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Wiltshire, Hampshire  
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Corporate &  
Commercial Banking  
at NatWest



Councillor Jeremy  
Moulton, Cabinet  
Member for Growth  
and Deputy Leader,  
Southampton City  
Council



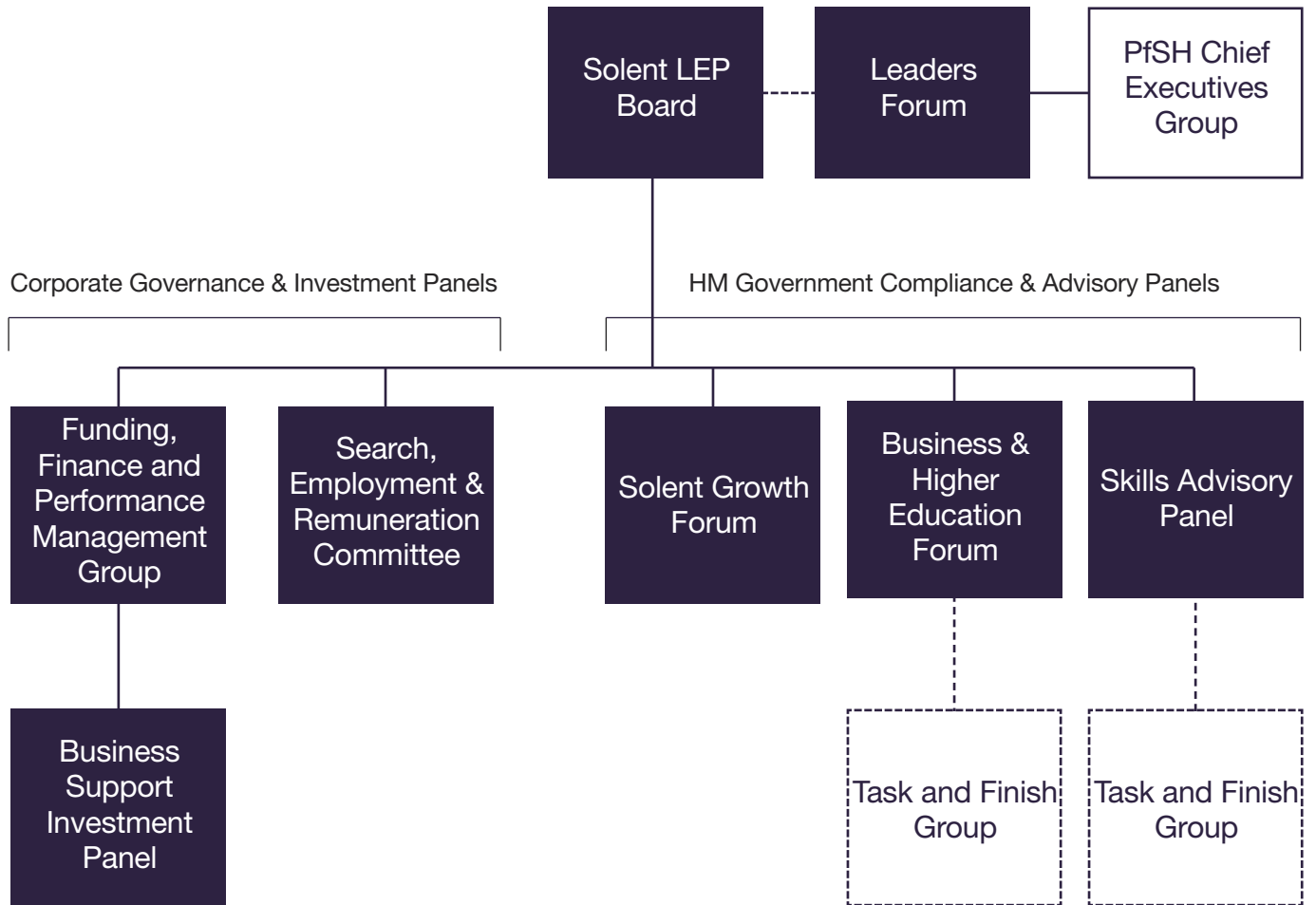
Councillor Derek  
Pretty, Cabinet  
Member for the  
Economy, Eastleigh  
Borough Council



Captain Allan Youp,  
Royal Navy, Head of  
the Solent Maritime  
Enterprise Zone

# Governance

The Skills Advisory Panel sits within the Solent LEP Governance Structure as summarised below. The Panel has regard for, and acts in accordance with, the Solent LEP Assurance Framework<sup>5</sup>.



Further information about the Solent SAP, its membership and Terms of Reference can be found online<sup>6</sup>.

To find out more about the work of the Solent SAP, this report, or to engage in the local skills agenda please contact [info@solentlep.org.uk](mailto:info@solentlep.org.uk)

5. <https://solentlep.org.uk/media/3588/solent-lep-assurance-framework-february-2021-v2.pdf>

6. [https://solentlep.org.uk/media/3271/solent-skills-advisory-panel-tor\\_september-2020-final.pdf](https://solentlep.org.uk/media/3271/solent-skills-advisory-panel-tor_september-2020-final.pdf)

## 3. Skills strengths and needs

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**The Solent Skills Advisory Panel continues to develop and build upon its comprehensive evidence base and understanding of existing and future skills gaps and employment priorities for the area.**

### Our local skills landscape

The Solent region benefits from an established and successful skills decision-making and delivery architecture, including the Solent SAP, the Solent Careers Hub and Enterprise Advisor Network, the Solent Local Enterprise Partnership, the Solent Apprenticeship & Skills Hub, together with a long history of partnership working across the area's 101 schools, 13 Further Education and Sixth Form Colleges, three Universities and over 20 commercial group training providers<sup>4</sup>. The area has an outstanding track record of joint working, strong employer engagement and investment in world class skills facilities, including delivering CECAMM, the Isle of Wight College's specialist engineering centre, CEMAST at Fareham College, CETC at the Solent Enterprise Zone which was established in 2017 in response to a county-wide skills shortage in civil engineering, Brockenhurst's Centre for maritime technologies and the Youth Employment Hub led by Eastleigh Borough Council.

Fareham College has been recently confirmed by the DfE to lead a Strategic Development Fund<sup>5</sup> pilot that will see 11 Further Education and Sixth Form Colleges in the Solent region work collaboratively on a range of projects designed to support the upskilling and reskilling of local people and provide businesses with the skilled workforce they need. Projects include providing the skills needed for a future green economy and for jobs related to carbon reduction.

Solent has recently been successful in securing an Institute of Technology (IoT) through the Wave 2 opportunity. The £13m Maritime Engineering and Digital Institute of Technology will ensure the Solent LEP region transitions to a higher technically skilled economy. It will fuel the growth of the UK's globally leading Solent maritime cluster as it makes a paradigm shift towards autonomy and green fuels, delivering the Government's ambitions in the Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution, Freeports, MoD investment, Maritime 2050, and the levelling-up agenda. To do this, curricula will focus on the STEM higher technical skills required across digital technologies, engineering and marine. Rooted in demographic and labour force analysis, the IoT will provide a pipeline of talent to offset an aging demographic, serious deprivation and improve job opportunities.

Despite this track record of success, and recognising that the more recent successes will take time to have impact, parts of the Solent continue to suffer from economic disconnection as they have struggled to respond to de-industrialisation, changes in tourism, and globalisation. This has resulted in

deep social and economic challenges that need to be addressed. A key area of market failure that is currently holding back the Solent's economic potential relates to the local labour market and skills deficiencies amongst the Solent's resident base and within key sectors such as construction, business services, health and social care. Like many coastal economies, the Solent trails the rest of the South East in productivity, suffers from a technical skills deficit and geographical and socio-economic challenges that hinder skills development within and outside the workplace. Wider factors continue to change the way that our businesses operate (such as advances in technology and automation) and impact upon the supply of labour locally (such as an ageing population) and this will require a more holistic response that looks beyond skills development in isolation.

The Solent's natural coastal geography is overlaid with intense urbanisation, strategic trade and defence functions that can provide a barrier to effective connectivity. The presence of two large cities, the role of three International Gateways in connecting the UK with global markets, and the challenges imposed by the Solent's unique geography come together to result in severance and disconnection between some of our communities, making the challenge of accessing skills development and employment opportunities even greater.

Our evidence base<sup>6</sup> shows us that across the Solent there are currently significant skills gaps at higher technical levels and in specific sectors. We do not have enough technicians, engineers or health and social care professionals to meet the many vital challenges we face, from building our green and maritime economy to meeting the health and care needs of our ageing population. Investing in these skills at a local level will be critical to improving our productivity and maintaining our international competitiveness. With 85% of the area's residents working within the Solent, there is a significant opportunity to bring the benefits of investment in skills and workforce development to the communities of the Solent.

More recently, the combined effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and Brexit have resulted in significant labour market volatility within the Solent, with many of our sectors reporting recruitment challenges and skills shortages, which in many cases is having significant knock-on implications for operational capacity and business performance. These issues are explored on a sector-by-sector basis in more detail below. Looking ahead, our local skills community faces a key challenge to equip our region's workforce with the green skills and competencies required to support the Solent economy's transition to net zero.

4. Note: Portsmouth College and Highbury College have recently merged to form a new college, the City of Portsmouth College

5. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/skills-accelerator-trailblazers-and-pilots/skills-accelerator-local-skills-improvement-plan-trailblazers-and-strategic-development-fund-pilots>

6. <https://solentlep.org.uk/media/3114/solent-lep-skills-and-local-labour-market-report-june-2020-final.pdf>



# 3. Skills strengths and needs

## Skills strengths and needs in the Solent

Our evidence base identifies the following key strengths, priorities and needs with regards to skills and employment within the Solent.

### Skills strengths:

- One of the Solent's key economic strengths is its ground-breaking research and the presence of three excellent universities that attract students and academics from around the globe.
- In particular, the Solent boasts world-leading marine and maritime education and research establishments as a result of agglomeration effects that have supported a world-renowned business cluster in the region; these have strong expertise in the area and provide a key source of innovation, talent and emerging business.
- The region is home to a number of specialist Centres of Excellence for skills development, responding directly to local employer needs and requirements. For example, CECAMM based on the Isle of Wight is a specialist centre for engineering, while CEMAST based at the Solent Enterprise Zone specialises in STEM skills to support local companies in the development of new engineering and manufacturing solutions. Fareham



College's CETC was established in response to a county-wide skills shortage in civil engineering. The Solent's new Institute of Technology will further expand this existing expertise through a focus on higher technical skills in maritime, engineering and digital technologies.

- The qualification profile for Solent residents indicates a relatively strong skills base up to A-level or equivalent (i.e. NVQ Level 3).
- Employment outcomes amongst adult learners are stronger across the Solent than the UK as a whole; of all adult FE and skills learners in the Solent in 2019/20, 75% went on to sustained employment. This indicates good alignment between FE provision and employment opportunities in the Solent.

### Skills needs and priorities:

- Addressing acute skills shortages and recruitment challenges currently being experienced across many of our key sectors such as maritime, hospitality and logistics in order to support our local business base to maintain operational capacity and resilience.
- Impact of autonomy on demand for labour and skills needed by our businesses; for instance maritime autonomy will accelerate as the sector shifts to greater digitisation and more autonomous and remotely operated vessels, as well as utilising autonomous onshore operational systems for mooring vessels to quays and docks (Smart ports).
- Developing the skills and talent base we need to drive a green industrial revolution in the Solent, recognising that these will be critical enablers to delivering the transition to net zero.
- Addressing school underperformance and student attainment, including at Key Stages 4 & 5.
- Importance of softer skills, such as social skills and communication skills.
- Boosting graduate retention rates from the Solent's universities, including by drawing on the Solent's competitive advantages around relative housing affordability to more effectively compete with London for graduate talent.
- Reducing the rate of young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) through skills participation and a more flexible and localised response.
- Tackling persistent pockets of skills deprivation and inequality across the Solent, some of which are likely to be exacerbated by Covid-19 and the disruption this has had upon learning.
- The need to ensure a strong supply of labour to replace those leaving the labour market.

### 3. Skills strengths and needs

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The significant labour market impacts of Covid-19 continue to unfold across the Solent, with some sectors also experiencing longer term disruption associated with Brexit-related acute labour shortages and pressures.

#### Ongoing labour market disruption

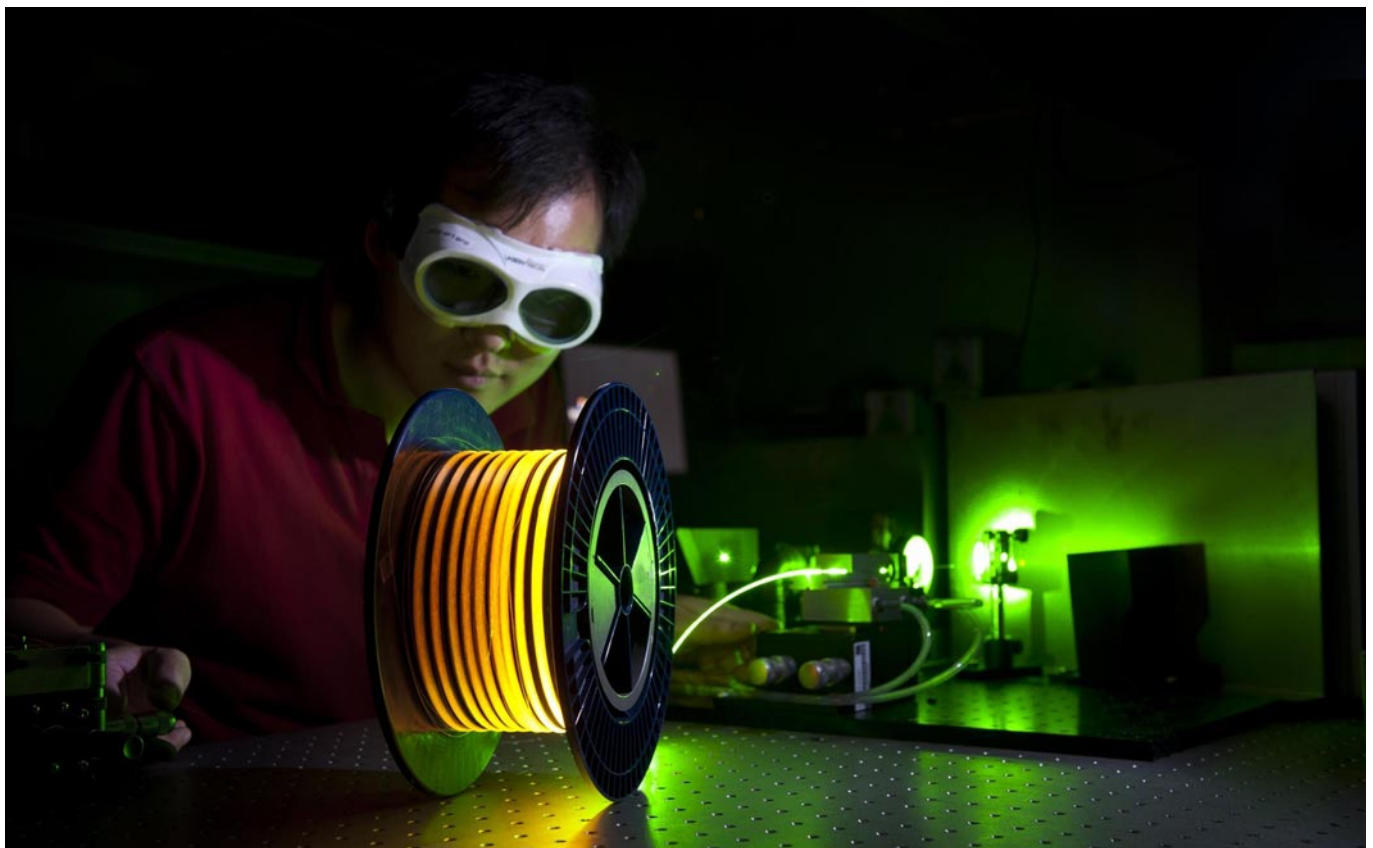
Emerging data and wider feedback tell us that the impact of Covid-19 on our labour market has been significant; from the impact on individuals caused by redundancies and unemployment, through to the challenges faced by our further and higher education sector and the disruption to learning in schools. As Covid-19 restrictions continue to be eased in early 2022, the full scale of labour market impact remains difficult to fully determine.

Our young people and those on low incomes are particularly vulnerable to Covid-19 induced unemployment, with a significant number of jobs at risk in lower skilled and lower paid occupations such as retail and hospitality, which have been some of those hardest hit by the pandemic.

Whilst labour market effects gradually eased over the latter part of 2021 as restrictions were lifted, a significant number of Solent residents remain unemployed, as reflected within latest official Claimant Count figures. As of November 2021, over 30,000 Solent residents were claiming out-of-work benefits, equivalent to 4% of the region's total working age

population, with rates in Portsmouth and Southampton highest. This number fell from 44,160 in November 2020. For many families and communities, Covid-19 has accentuated the challenge of worklessness, and widened the gap between those who were unemployed before the pandemic and who are now even further from the labour market.

The pandemic has also caused longer term disruption to the region's labour market, to the skills prospects of local residents and to local business productivity as the scale of the workforce has declined within key sectors such as hospitality, where many businesses struggled to retain staff on furlough schemes. Many of the region's career development programmes, intended to raise awareness of career options available and develop softer employability skills, have also been disrupted and significantly scaled back due to Covid-19 restrictions in place across many workplaces. Many of our sectors are also experiencing severe labour shortages and recruitment challenges in response to Brexit-related labour supply changes, threatening the future viability of key pockets of our business base.



# 3. Skills strengths and needs

The Covid-19 pandemic will have far-reaching implications for the Solent's skills landscape and for the types of skills that our employers will need in future as society adapts to a 'new normal'.

## Implications of Covid-19

As we reflect on the short to medium term impacts of Covid-19 on our economy, it becomes increasingly apparent that the pandemic will have lasting effects on our day-to-day lives and the way in which people, businesses and society in general will operate in the years to come.

Although it is still too early to predict the full extent of this, we consider 'Life after Covid' will instigate some longer term 'paradigm' shifts and opportunities for local skills development here in the Solent, and we want to be ready to capture and facilitate these opportunities as we chart a course to economic recovery and growth.



Digital transformation  
Delivering digital skills inclusion



Towards a more dynamic workplace  
Implications of remote working and training for 'core' skills (such as communication, people management)



Increased environmental awareness & "green recovery" focus  
Adapting skills around technologies of the future and the pathway to Net Zero



Rediscovery of "proximity" and "local"  
A more self-sufficient labour market



Embedding health and wellbeing into our economic plan  
Skills innovation opportunities as society adapts to a 'new normal'



Levelling up economic opportunity  
Tackling skills deprivation and raising productivity

## 3. Skills strengths and needs

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**Skills challenges inevitably vary by industry, and there are some notable and growing skills requirements, gaps and shortages within the Solent's strategic sectors and those considered a priority across Government.**

### Adult Social Care

Social care is about supporting people to maintain their independence, dignity and control. This includes providing personal and practical support to help people live their lives. Adult social care offers significant numbers of long-term career opportunities in the current job market; Skills for Care estimate that there are 1.49 million people working in social care, and by 2035 the UK will need to fill around 580,000 more jobs<sup>7</sup>.

There are various pathways into adult social care, including apprenticeships and traineeships, and skills provision in the Solent is delivered via a number of providers including Solent University, Portsmouth City College and HTP Apprenticeship College. Proposals are also underway by the University of Portsmouth and Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust to create a new multimillion-pound medical school in the city to train the next generation of doctors as part of a major strategy to 'level up' Portsmouth. The aim of the new health hub would be to revolutionise medical training in the city and attract talented students from deprived communities who ordinarily may not consider a career in medicine.

Our Local Skills and Labour Market Analysis<sup>8</sup> identifies a 'mismatch' between the supply and demand for skills in the health and social care sector, which represents a large employment sector where skill-shortage vacancies account for a higher share of employment than is the case for the overall Solent LEP economy. Demand for social care skills was increasing with pre-existing workforce shortages before the Covid-19 pandemic, and the pandemic is expected to accentuate these skills challenges further.

### Construction

The Solent LEP area is home to a relatively large number of businesses in construction; the sector makes significant contributions to GVA in the area, is forecast to grow strongly in future in employment terms and is a relatively productive sector compared to the Solent average<sup>9</sup>.

The construction sector requires a wide range of skills and occupation types, and local skills provision is delivered by a large number of FE, HE and vocational training providers including City College Southampton, Eastleigh College and

Solent University. Apprenticeships offer a particularly popular route into the industry, with almost 1 in 5 of all people in employment in the Solent's construction sector having undertaken an apprenticeship.

In response to a county-wide skills shortage in civil engineering, Fareham College's Civil Engineering Training Centre (CETC) was established in 2017, providing a purpose-built mock construction site close to the College's existing CEMAST campus on the Daedalus airfield, dedicated to the delivery of a specialist Civil Engineering & Groundworks Apprenticeship. This unique Apprenticeship training programme supports the construction industry across the region by creating more jobs and opportunities for skilled groundworkers.

Our evidence base also suggests a mismatch between the supply and demand for skills in construction, with the sector accounting for about 15% of all skill-shortage vacancies in the Solent LEP area. Almost half (46%) of all vacancies in this sector are skill-shortage vacancies, which is well above the Solent average (20%).

Regional data also suggests that the construction sector is more dependent on migrant labour than others; workers of EU nationality are almost four times as likely to be employed in construction in the South East than non-EU workers. The end of EU freedom of movement and the introduction of a new Points Based Immigration System has proved to be a challenge for the construction industry, and the migrant workforce has been falling over the last three years. The Construction Industry Training Board<sup>10</sup> notes that economic headwinds due to the pandemic have made it harder for many employers to commit resources to training, and the majority of employers have reported difficulties sourcing materials. This has combined with a surge in demand, following the easing of Covid-19 restrictions and a continuing skills shortage, to contribute to higher wages and squeezing margins for many employers. These increasing wage pressures and the rising cost of raw materials are hampering employers' ability to recruit and train a skilled workforce. Furthermore, local Colleges (including Fareham College) have reported requiring an increasing level of entry qualifications to construction apprenticeships, required by the changing nature of jobs using more advanced technology.

7. <https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Careers-in-care/Think-Care-Careers.aspx>

8. <https://solentlep.org.uk/media/3114/solent-lep-skills-and-local-labour-market-report-june-2020-final.pdf>

9. *ibid*

10. <https://www.citb.co.uk/media/cxxlqsps/citb-migration-and-uk-construction-report-2021.pdf>

## 3. Skills strengths and needs

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### Construction (continued)

Anecdotal feedback from local construction employers in the Solent points to a severe shortage of suitably qualified workers across all skillsets and levels of experience, from site operatives through to surveyors, skilled trades and management positions. Brexit is reported to have had a significant impact, with many eastern European labourers having left the UK labour market. An ageing workforce has also prompted concerns over the future talent pipeline and where the future workforce will be sourced from. Feedback from early career engagement activity (e.g. with schools in the area) suggests that there can be poor awareness amongst the education sector and younger students of the varied career paths and options available within construction, resulting in a limited pipeline of learners and knock-on recruitment impacts for local employers.

### Digital and Technology

Digital skills underpin growth across the economy and are vital to ensuring global competitiveness and productivity and has become even more critical to business resilience and growth through the pandemic. However, market and institutional challenges mean that many businesses are struggling to obtain employees with the right skills to exploit technological opportunities, and sections of society are missing out on the benefits of the digital economy. For example, there are challenges in ensuring that the workforce have the digital skills needed to equip them for job roles that are increasingly becoming digitalised.

With assets such as the Southampton Web Science Institute (WSI) and the QinetiQ Innovation and Collaboration Hub, the Solent has existing and growing expertise in the area of digital and disruptive technologies, offering huge potential to draw together world-leading expertise to collaborate across multiple disciplines to become a world leader in digital knowledge and innovation and to pioneer technologies for instance around climate change adaptation and decarbonisation. The region's digital and technological innovation capabilities will become ever more important in a world that is increasingly exposed to unexpected disruption.

Digital and technology skills provision is delivered across a number of providers in the Solent including a variety of courses offered by Solent University. The University of Portsmouth's Future Technology Centre, which opened in 2018, offers students, researchers and partners a collaborative and practical learning environment to run experiments, debate and explore ideas about how the latest technology can help improve society, while the Centre for Creative and Immersive Extended Reality (CCIXR) will deliver immersive and creative extended reality (XR) facilities to

address the critical shortage of digital skills in the region. The Solent's successful bid for a new Institute of Technology will deliver technical knowledge, combined with the practical skills demanded by employers, to provide higher technical training in science, technology, engineering and maths subjects to fuel the growth of the globally leading Solent maritime cluster. As part of the IoT remit, collaboration through all levels of education within the IoT geographical area will be supporting the required people pipeline.

'Embracing and innovating new technology' is identified as a key enabler for our overarching economic vision for Solent 2050, yet our skills evidence base<sup>11</sup> shows us that there is a need to strengthen the link between education and local business, especially given the changing requirements of employers, such as the growing need for digital skills and reacting to the impacts of automation. This will create new jobs and occupations but identifying skills for the future is a challenging task. Recent evidence suggests that alongside digital and broad-based knowledge, interpersonal skills and cognitive skills are going to be increasingly important.

Digitalisation of many jobs in the UK and the Solent LEP area has already taken place but as artificial intelligence continues to develop this process this is expected to intensify. Several studies have shown that 80% of middle-skilled roles are digitally intensive, and that these jobs are growing twice as fast as those not requiring digital skills.

### Haulage and Logistics

Successful haulage and logistics are at the heart of the UK's economy, yet for many years the sector has struggled to recruit the staff it needs. As a gateway region, the haulage and logistics sector perform an incredibly important role within the Solent economy. In addition, with the surge in online retail as bricks and mortar retail shut down through the pandemic and the prevailing High Street challenges, the role of logistics has become even more critical. With an ageing workforce, and many EU workers returning home after Brexit, it has never been more important to attract and retain new employees to the sector.

Staffing shortages have been under immense scrutiny over recent months and the effects of both Brexit and Covid-19 continue to be felt on the logistics labour market. Latest intelligence from Logistics UK<sup>12</sup> indicates that over the last two years, the HGV driver shortage has moved from chronic to acute and there are significant difficulties reported finding other key roles in the sector, including fitter, mechanic and technician roles and warehouse staff. The nationwide shortage of HGV drivers is a key contributor to current supply chain disruption, as businesses struggle to recruit the drivers needed to keep goods moving across the country.

11. <https://solentlep.org.uk/media/3114/solent-lep-skills-and-local-labour-market-report-june-2020-final.pdf>

12. <https://logistics.org.uk/campaigns/logistics-uk-skills-and-employment-advice-hub/logistics-uk-s-skills-and-employment-report>

## 3. Skills strengths and needs

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### Haulage and Logistics (continued)

Logistics businesses are putting in place a wide range of interventions to attract and retain staff through measures such as pay increases, recruitment drives, and the introduction of apprenticeship and upskilling training schemes, whilst at the national level Skills Bootcamps are seeking to improve pathways into the sector. Yet there remains concern that some supply chain disruption will continue in 2022 until these crucial roles are filled across the industry.

This intelligence is reflected locally within the Solent's haulage and logistics sector, based on feedback from local employers. For instance, cargo handler Portico, based within Portsmouth International Port, reports increasing difficulties in recruiting experienced stevedores, LGV and crane drivers over recent months. Feedback indicates that Brexit has affected the availability of HGV and forklift drivers as these roles have often traditionally been filled by European workers. LGV driver wages have been driven up by the shortage of skilled workers and higher salaries are now required in order to attract experienced drivers. Covid-19 has also had an effect on the shortage of operators with some workers re-considering job opportunities in other sectors. This combination of Brexit-related labour supply, an ageing workforce and poor working conditions within some parts of the sector suggest there is a need for incentives to encourage more people to consider careers as drivers/operators and for training to be made more easily accessible and more affordable.

There are various training routes into the haulage and logistics industry spanning a range of skills levels and entry points. Local provision in the Solent is delivered through a number of Colleges and Universities, offering a range of courses from a Level 2 Certificate in Warehousing and Storage (via City College Southampton) through to degree level courses in international logistics management (Solent University) and logistics and supply chain analytics (University of Southampton). Eastleigh College has recently signed up to deliver the brand new Careers Colleges Trust International Logistics and Supply Chain pathway Level 3 qualification.

Our evidence base shows that the Solent's logistics sector accommodates a particularly high concentration of apprenticeships. While raising the level of advanced skills is seen as a priority to increasing productivity, a supply of skills to several priority sectors including transport & logistics will require upper intermediate (NVQ3) as well as lower intermediate skills (NVQ2). Many new entrants to the labour market begin their careers with an intermediate skill and through life-long learning (workplace or externally) move up the qualifications ladder.

### Manufacturing

The Solent has a strong manufacturing base which is relatively productive and boasts strengths in advanced manufacturing in particular. This is a target sector for Solent Freeport, which is forecasting over 26,000 direct new jobs in the Solent.

The Solent's manufacturing and marine sectors are closely linked, with the area's marine and maritime sector providing a vital link in the export and import chain of the full range of manufacturing sectors in the UK and this role comes in various forms. Manufacturing represents an important part of the Solent's globally renowned marine and maritime cluster, supported by a number of leading education and training institutions such as the Centre of Excellence for Composites, Advanced Manufacturing and Marine (CECMM) based on the Isle of Wight, aimed at creating a world-class workforce in response to the skills required by local businesses, including marine and maritime businesses. As our economy transitions to net zero, the demand for green advanced manufacturing skills will increase, building on the Solent's existing strengths in renewable energy manufacturing through the presence of key local employers such as Vestas on the Isle of Wight. The new Institute of Technology in the Solent will further support vocational professional pathways into the Solent's maritime industry as well as associated advanced manufacturing, digital and technical pathways.

Manufacturing requires a workforce equipped with skills across all levels, but with a key emphasis upon upper intermediate (NVQ3) as well as lower intermediate skills (NVQ2). Many of the engineering & manufacturing technologies starts in the Solent LEP area are at Level 2 and Level 3 (44.1% and 41.1% respectively), with Level 4+ accounting for just 7.3%.

Apprenticeships represent a popular route into the sector, with nearly 17% of all people in employment in the Solent's manufacturing sector having an apprenticeship. At sector subject Level, Engineering & Manufacturing Technologies had the largest number of apprenticeships starts across all sector subjects, with around 2,500 starts or about a quarter of all apprenticeship starts in the Solent LEP area.

Our evidence base<sup>13</sup> points to some skill-shortage vacancies and skills gaps within the area's manufacturing sector, with 57% of manufacturing companies in the Solent LEP area expecting to see a need for new skills in the next 12 months. The incidence of skills gaps in manufacturing is more prevailing than in most other industrial sectors in the Solent LEP area. An ageing population and the fact that 34% of people in employment in this sector are already over the age of 50 imply skills gaps and skills shortages are likely to increase in the future.

13. <https://solentlep.org.uk/media/3114/solent-lep-skills-and-local-labour-market-report-june-2020-final.pdf>

## 3. Skills strengths and needs

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### Manufacturing (continued)

Data also suggests that workers of EU nationality are twice as likely to be employed in manufacturing in the South East than non-EU workers, which poses a challenge in the aftermath of Brexit.

Anecdotal feedback from local employers suggests that advanced manufacturing businesses across the Solent in particular are struggling to recruit and fill technical focused roles such as experienced qualified engineers, citing an ageing existing workforce and very limited pipeline of new talent entering the labour market. For instance, key local employer Airbus employs c.1,000 people on site at their Portsmouth facility and currently have over 70 unfilled vacancies across a range of skill levels and roles, with this figure increasing over the last 12 months. The company also struggles to attract the required digital skills and capabilities particularly amongst early career starters and those re-joining the workforce.

### Visitor Economy

With its unique combination of outstanding natural environments, coastal communities, associated marine and cultural heritage and an array of world class visitor attractions, the visitor and cultural economy is a critical part of the Solent's economy. Our long-term economic strategy, Solent 2050, recognises the economic value of the sector and identifies a significant opportunity to develop a more distinctive tourism offering for the Solent.

However, this sector has been very directly impacted by Covid-19 restrictions which effectively closed the sector for a large part of the 2020 and 2021 seasons. Cruise ship calls at our two ports were completely halted, and cultural attractions were some of the last to re-open as restrictions eased. Ongoing social distancing measures may constrain capacity for some time and, ultimately, revenues. Feedback from the sector has highlighted how significant these effects are, with redundancies and business closures reported; heritage attractions with high overheads are particularly at risk.

The labour market impacts of Covid-19 and labour market challenges associated with Brexit have combined to result in a severe shortage of staff across the region's visitor

economy, with shortages reported to be particularly acute within lower skilled roles in the food and beverage sector and housekeeping segment of the accommodation sector. Whilst not unique to the Solent area, this has significantly constrained the operational capacity of many businesses, and the most recent wave of Covid-19 infections over the 2021 festive period has generated further challenges with regards to consumer demand and business turnover.

The growing effects of Brexit, the pandemic, online competition and continuing social change have meant that recruiting the right person has become ever more challenging to the point where many high street businesses are struggling to trade effectively because of staffing issues. Yet these challenges have been prevalent within the region's visitor economy for some time, caused in part by poor perceptions about the opportunities that a career in hospitality can offer, particularly amongst younger people and those entering the labour market for the first time. Intelligence from local visitor economy employers suggests that employee retention is also a key issue, as well as investing sufficiently in training to enable the workforce to achieve its potential.

Research by the Local Government Association in 2019<sup>14</sup> found that the tourism and hospitality industry had the highest proportion of hard-to-fill vacancies, and greater growth in the number of monthly job postings, than any other sector of the economy. It identified that skills difficulties were being exacerbated by two main factors – the possible impacts of leaving the EU and a demographic downturn in young people – the latter particularly affecting rural areas. Indeed, the sector has faced a challenge in recruiting enough workers to meet its needs for some time.

There are various pathways into the visitor economy sector, from apprenticeships, traineeships and internships through to higher education courses and degrees. Skills provision in the Solent is delivered via a number of providers including Eastleigh College, Solent University and HIT Training. As with other priority sectors outlined above, the visitor economy sector requires a range of intermediate and lower level skills, and many new entrants to the labour market begin their careers with an intermediate skill and through life-long learning move up the qualifications and career ladder.

14. [https://local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/12.19%20Work%20Local%20-%20skills%20in%20the%20tourism%20sector\\_V04.pdf](https://local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/12.19%20Work%20Local%20-%20skills%20in%20the%20tourism%20sector_V04.pdf)

## 3. Skills strengths and needs

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### Labour Market Transition to Net Zero

Achieving the UK's net zero and long-term environmental goals depends on a skilled green workforce in the economy to deliver these; the Government is aiming for 2 million 'green jobs' by 2030 including those jobs which are needed to deliver the Government's wider long-term environmental objectives, including jobs in enhancing biodiversity and the circular economy, as well as net zero.

It is essential that the Solent's workforce has the correct skills for net zero to take advantage of the jobs which will be created by new projects and initiatives, building on our ambition to be at the vanguard of environmental innovation and decarbonisation as the UK embarks on its journey to net zero.

Our existing employment and skills base will need to expand and diversify over the coming years to be able to service and deploy increasingly complex technology to drive a green economy. We need to ensure that future skills development opportunities within the areas of climate change adaptation and decarbonisation keep up with evolving technology and business requirements and are accessible to local communities. This will enable the Solent to respond to the

clean growth agenda with maximum impact and success.

Our Ten Point Plan for Building Back Greener in the Solent<sup>15</sup> identifies ten locally significant priorities for accelerating the achievement of net zero in the Solent, with particular local strengths, opportunities and competitive advantages around renewable energy generation and storage, maritime decarbonisation, and low carbon hydrogen. It recognises that developing the business base and skills we need to build back greener in the Solent will be critical enablers to delivering the transition to net zero. Skills requirements will inevitably vary by individual sector although cross cutting requirements are likely to include digital and data skills, designing and implementing new technologies, and communication and change management skills.

Work is already underway across the Solent to build the skills infrastructure required to support this green transition locally. This includes the Solent's new Institute of Technology, which will inspire learners across the region to develop higher technical skills in Maritime Engineering and Digital Technologies to drive green innovation, while the Solent Freeport's Green Growth Institute will deliver world class employer-led training facilities to develop a pipeline of high-tech talent and green skills for the region.

15. <https://solentlep.org.uk/media/4005/solent-lep-10-point-green-plan-v8.pdf>



# 3. Maritime sector skills needs

## The Solent's world-renowned maritime cluster faces particular skills challenges and pressures as the sector responds to global drivers of change and an increasingly competitive labour market.

The Solent's natural coastal geography and strategic location has helped the region to develop a unique marine and maritime sector proposition and, over the years, strengthen its status as the UK's centre for marine and maritime excellence; a world-renowned business cluster in the region which spans many sub-sectors and component industries.

The Levelling Up White paper states that levelling up will only be successful if local actors are empowered to develop solutions that work for their communities. Government views that supporting private sector partnerships and building economic clusters to boost local investment, jobs and growth, is key to this. The Solent is identified as one of 20 economically significant clusters in the UK, due to its port and maritime specialisms, trade and its three Universities. UK Government wants to encourage private sector-led partnerships across the UK, especially when these coincide with existing or potential new clusters of business activity and highlights Maritime UK Solent as one of 16 of the UK's potentially transformative private sector partnerships currently underway. Ensuring the private sector is in the driving seat to identify the maritime skills that the area needs now, and in the future, will be a key feature of the work of Maritime UK Solent.

The economic footprint of the maritime sector is substantial, contributing £5.8 billion of GVA each year, equivalent to 19% of the Solent LEP economy. Critical to the successful performance of the sector locally is a world-class workforce and talent base that can adapt to the key drivers of change within global marine and maritime, including<sup>16</sup>:

- The impacts of digitisation and automation, including the use of robotics, sensors, data analytics and new communication systems, which will have numerous consequences in marine and maritime supply chains;
- The drive for greater environmental sustainability and the need to adopt carbon and greenhouse gas emission

reducing technologies, fuel efficiency and greener shipping; and

- Global competition in these industries and the need for mature marine and maritime sectors to upgrade into more knowledge intensive and research-based sectors in order to compete with lower cost competitors.

The impacts of these drivers over the next few decades will lead to significant changes in the demand for marine and maritime skills in the Solent.

Implementation of the Solent Freeport will also provide a major driver of demand for marine and maritime skills and capabilities across the region, across specialist sectors such as marine manufacturing and technology, decarbonisation including green hydrogen, autonomy, artificial intelligence and port-centric logistics. Freeport activity will generate a significant requirement for labour (projected to deliver 26,000 jobs directly in the Solent) across a range of jobs and skills levels and Freeport skills partners are committed to ensuring that local people, particularly from our most disadvantaged communities, can access these job opportunities. Related to this, we keenly anticipate the launch of Government's new National Shipbuilding Strategy and the opportunities this may provide for the Solent.

The UK's Maritime 2050 Strategy<sup>17</sup> notes that by 2050 the maritime sector will be an increasingly high-tech industry with a highly skilled workforce. New skills in IT, digital, and mechanical systems, and softer skills will be required to complement existing skills, while climate change and the shift to greener technology will also have a significant impact on skills requirements across the maritime industry. However, the strategy highlights the problems of attracting young people into the sector because of relatively poor conditions in some occupations, the lack of career progression, low diversity, and the general lack of visibility of the marine and maritime sectors.

16. [https://cdn.southampton.ac.uk/assets/imported/transforms/content-block/UsefulDownloads\\_Download/E4459525684A4F0BA0FD366E3C1DEBA7/smmi-solent-mm-skills-report.pdf?\\_gl=1\\*1lj5oz\\*\\_ga\\*Mjc2NDg5ODg5LjE2NDZzODA4Mzg.\\*\\_ga\\_51YK64STMR\\*MTY0MTM4MDgzNy4xLjEuMTY0MTM4MDg4OC45#\\_ga=2.108815810.1742989895.1641380838-276489889.1641380838](https://cdn.southampton.ac.uk/assets/imported/transforms/content-block/UsefulDownloads_Download/E4459525684A4F0BA0FD366E3C1DEBA7/smmi-solent-mm-skills-report.pdf?_gl=1*1lj5oz*_ga*Mjc2NDg5ODg5LjE2NDZzODA4Mzg.*_ga_51YK64STMR*MTY0MTM4MDgzNy4xLjEuMTY0MTM4MDg4OC45#_ga=2.108815810.1742989895.1641380838-276489889.1641380838)

17. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/872194/Maritime\\_2050\\_Report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/872194/Maritime_2050_Report.pdf)

## 3. Maritime sector skills needs

Recent labour market intelligence prepared by the Maritime Skills Commission<sup>18</sup> identifies a number of short-term concerns and longer-term issues regarding workforce skills within the sector, which are summarised below.

### Short-term concerns

- Hard-to-fill vacancies across a number of sub-sectors including boat and yacht-building, port agents and the Royal Navy (reports of difficulties recruiting engineers for instance).
- Anecdotal evidence of companies using short-term tactical responses like increased overtime or increased use of short-term contractors (some of whom become longer-term contractors).
- Much the most significant tactical response is to employ workers from abroad; this option may become more difficult, or more expensive, and possibly wholly unrealistic, in light of Brexit.

### Longer-term issues

- An ageing workforce: addressing the skills gap that will be created by the ageing population and developing a more diverse and representative workforce.
- Automation and technology: responding through a training programme that is sufficiently dynamic to meet the needs of the advancement of technology. We need people with great flexibility and adaptability for the future, addressing both seafarer and non-seafarer roles.
- Brexit and recruitment overseas: use of foreign labour – from both the EU and beyond – is an integral part of the way that many companies across the sector work, in some cases from choice, and in some from necessity.
- Competition for talent: concerns regarding the image of the sector, or parts of it, or of individual companies.
- Diversity: the assumption is widespread that the sector has a diversity problem, particularly in terms of gender and workforce ethnicity.
- Engineering: many sub-sectors within marine and maritime report difficulty recruiting engineers.

At a local level, recent research carried out by the University of Southampton and its Southampton Marine and Maritime Institute<sup>19</sup> provides a view of the supply and demand for marine and maritime (M&M) skills in the Solent region, and considers whether there are any perceived skill gaps or shortages, and which changes are seen as most likely to be disruptive. It draws on primary intelligence gathered through a survey of over 40 M&M firms, education and training providers involved in the Solent cluster. Key findings are as follows:

- Just over half of respondents indicated that skill problems are inhibiting their activities. The majority of shortages referred to types of engineering and science-based skills including electronics, software, robotics, mechanical engineering, marine and system engineers, and environmental scientists.
- New technologies are disruptive and skills will need to

adapt rapidly to new demands.

- Local education and training institutions' plans for new M&M courses on digital and electrical development, computing, AI and cyber security were not widely known. The prevailing view was that the training and skills landscape has been slow to change, that there is much duplication and fragmentation, that the competitive funding system gives little incentive to collaborate, and that it is hard for anyone to discern clear pathways through courses and careers.
- The challenge of attracting and retaining employees is a strong theme. As well as more engagement with maritime, it was argued that FE needs to offer foundation courses in engineering and digital systems, data and security, but there is uncertainty about exactly what skills are in demand.

18. <https://www.maritimeuk.org/priorities/people/skills-commission/reports/labour-market-intelligence-scoping-report-august-2020/>

19. [https://cdn.southampton.ac.uk/assets/imported/transforms/content-block/UsefulDownloads\\_Download/E4459525684A4F0BA0FD366E3C1DEBA7/smmi-solent-mmm-skills-report.pdf?\\_gl=1\\*1lj5oz\\*\\_ga\\*Mjc2NDg5ODg5LjE2NDEzODA4Mzg.\\*\\_ga\\_51YK64STMR\\*MTY0MTM4MDgzNy4xLjEuMTY0MTM4MDg4OC45#\\_ga=2.108815810.1742989895.1641380838-](https://cdn.southampton.ac.uk/assets/imported/transforms/content-block/UsefulDownloads_Download/E4459525684A4F0BA0FD366E3C1DEBA7/smmi-solent-mmm-skills-report.pdf?_gl=1*1lj5oz*_ga*Mjc2NDg5ODg5LjE2NDEzODA4Mzg.*_ga_51YK64STMR*MTY0MTM4MDgzNy4xLjEuMTY0MTM4MDg4OC45#_ga=2.108815810.1742989895.1641380838-)

### 3. Maritime sector skills needs

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- Despite some problems with matching, apprenticeships are in reality much better than their perception. Apprenticeships suffer due to negative perceptions.
- Competition for high-skilled workers is fierce in advanced engineering skills, AI and cyber security. Skills recruitment issues are closely tied to the branding and visibility of M&M sectors in the Solent.
- At the lower levels of education, there was a strong call to provide pupils with the experiences necessary to build their/an interest in maritime. General and soft skills are deemed more important as they prepare pupils for the type of 'portfolio' career that will be commonplace in the future.
- FE institutions were not considered to be effective in providing the experiences and enthusiasm necessary to attract students into maritime and marine.
- At HE levels, it was argued that students need to be capable of the broad systems-level understandings of technologies necessary to incorporate cross-sector innovations and apply them to the unique settings of M&M firms.
- A consensus appeared around three interrelated sets of priorities needing investment – autonomy, digital and carbon reduction. There is significant overlap between these technological areas which reinforces their potential value.
- Many firms will need more advanced skills in autonomy, electrical software and robotics given the rapid advance of more autonomous platforms and systems. The Solent has some expert capabilities in this area particularly in small and subsea vessels, sensors and drones. It was felt that a focus on skills for more specialist and smaller platforms would bring benefits.
- A second priority area for skills development was in maritime data systems and the communication, analysis, management and interpretation of digital data. These skill sets have the widest application as they are essential to shipping and port operations and business services.
- Many argued that skills development needs to be supported by other measures to encourage and build the cluster. Many respondents would welcome more opportunities for cluster collaboration around problems and challenges. In particular, busy SMEs would welcome a cluster intermediary or an 'enabler'.

Further anecdotal feedback from marine and maritime employers based in the Solent suggests that skills needs, requirements and gaps inevitably vary by employer and can be very distinct and bespoke to particular roles and sub-sectors.

In general, many employers are currently struggling to recruit and fill job vacancies right across the board from entry level roles and apprenticeships through to experienced specialists. The cumulative effects of Brexit and Covid-19 are having an impact, with many workers returning to Europe and/or re-considering career options in light of the pandemic. For some employers, this is severely constraining their growth aspirations and potential, and many are looking for talent overseas or offshoring contracts as a solution.

Issues are reported at all ends of the skills spectrum, with skills shortages particularly acute within 'blue collar' occupations such as electricians and welders within the ship building and repair sector, partly as a result of Brexit related labour market impacts and restrictions. Local employers such as Serco and UK Border Force also report difficulties in attracting engineering apprentices and as a result are currently exploring different approaches to recruitment.

Elsewhere, other employers report a severe lack of digital and technical skills within the region's marine and maritime workforce, with the sector struggling to compete with higher profile service sectors for key professions such as computer coders, programmers and IT engineers. This shortage is likely to become increasingly acute as operations continue to be digitally driven, and employers suggest more could be done to raise awareness of the high paid, high value jobs available locally within marine and maritime.

The region is reported to struggle to retain marine and maritime workers that return to shore following a period at sea; whilst there are providers (such as Solent University) offering training courses to help provide these workers with a smooth transition into other parts of the industry, feedback suggests that more could be done to raise awareness of the various career pathways and transition opportunities available to the marine and maritime workforce at all stages of their career journey, to retain a greater share of talent here in the Solent.

Local marine and maritime employers also cite challenges associated with 'work readiness' and the importance of softer employability skills (such as adaptability, resilience, reliability etc) alongside the more formal technical, professional skills that employees need to undertake their job effectively. Often this requires real life work experience to build up, and the reduction in work placements and experience opportunities during the course of the pandemic has been unhelpful in this respect. They suggest that more emphasis should be provided throughout the education and training system upon preparing for the changing world of work, within the context of increasingly remote and hybrid working.

# 4. Skills Strategy

Underpinning our strategy are four overarching skills priorities around which our plan for future activities to realise the Solent’s significant economic potential is framed.

Our strategy for transforming skills and developing a world-class talent base in the Solent is framed around four overarching, and overlapping, priorities: awareness and aspirations; skills brokerage; core sectors and competencies; and digital inclusion.

These draw together our extensive evidence base on local skills needs, consultation feedback from a wide range of skills providers and stakeholders, implications of Covid-19 and Brexit upon the area’s labour market, and placing this within the context of our ambitious long term strategy for growth and prosperity through Solent 2050 <sup>20</sup>.

Our strategic skills priorities for the Solent also reflect ongoing Government reforms to transform and put local

employers at the heart of post-16 education and training, and are strongly aligned with overarching themes set out in the emerging Skills and Post-16 Education Bill <sup>21</sup> around the role of skills in strengthening local economies, productivity, stabilising the labour market, and global competitiveness.

They provide an overarching framework to influence forthcoming skills related interventions and help inform investment decisions to support and stimulate sustainable economic growth in the area.

On the following pages we explore each of these skills priorities in turn.



## 1. Awareness and aspirations

Raising awareness of the many skills opportunities and pathways that are already available and addressing aspirations at an early stage to boost skills participation and development



## 2. Brokerage: matching supply

Enhancing employer engagement to better understand and broker local skills needs to ensure that skills provision can respond to local business and sector requirements



## 3. Core sectors and competencies

Reflecting the unique economic characteristics of the Solent and representation of key sectors that are driving demand for skills over the short, medium and longer term



## 4. Digital inclusion

Reducing barriers to accessing education and learning opportunities through a more inclusive skills environment supported by world-class digital infrastructure across the Solent

20. <https://solentlep.org.uk/what-we-do/planning-for-solent-2050/>

21. <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/skills-and-post-16-education-bill-second-reading-opening-speech>

## 4. Skills Strategy



### 1. Awareness and aspirations

In the Solent we benefit from a talented labour market coupled with world-leading assets, including our three universities and a first-class further education system.

Yet awareness of the many skills pathways that are available varies significantly within our population and business base, and low aspirations represent an overriding constraint to skills participation and development across many of the Solent's communities. Linked to this are key challenges with regards to poor attainment during school years, above average levels of young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) and ongoing disruption to the local jobs base caused by Covid-19 prompting many people to re-consider career options.

Through this strategy we want to raise awareness amongst both learners and employers of the varied skills opportunities and pathways available locally to better equip our workforce to respond to changing employer requirements. This includes boosting take-up of some of the more vocational and higher level technical routes to work, such as Degree Apprenticeships and T Levels by raising their profile as an attractive alternative to academic pathways.

More fundamentally, the local skills sector has an important role to play in addressing early years aspirations and inspiring the next generation to achieve their potential.

We need to get our young people excited about the economic opportunities on offer right here in the Solent and carefully nurture a pipeline of future talent that aligns with local economic need.

Solent LEP has established Maritime UK Solent Limited to provide leadership for and promote a thriving maritime sector within the Solent through activities that support growth, collaboration, and innovation, and that showcase the Solent's maritime strengths on a national and international stage. MUK Solent has three priorities: People, Innovation; and Environment. Through the "People" priority MUK Solent will work with partners to progress activities to raise the profile of maritime careers, the breadth of opportunities that exist and the pathways to entry. This will be further supported through Freeport status and the opportunities this provides to boost awareness of our critically important maritime sector.



### 2. Brokerage: matching supply with demand

As we continue to recover from the economic challenges of Covid-19 and look ahead to develop a world-class talent base, we need to develop a more dynamic and agile skills ecosystem in the Solent that closes skills gaps and better matches skills demand with supply through closer collaboration between education, academia and industry.

Our evidence base points to ongoing examples of skills mismatch within key sectors and difficulties retaining those that we work hard to upskill, such as graduates. The challenge has been made more pressing by the Covid-19 pandemic, Brexit and ongoing supply chain disruption, as employer requirements change and businesses struggle to navigate what is often seen as a confusing and complex skills landscape.

In line with wider post-16 education and training reform that seeks to give employers a greater say in the development of skills, we require a more effective and comprehensive approach to employer engagement to better understand and broker local skills needs to ensure that skills provision can respond to the evolving requirements of local businesses and sectors.

This should focus in particular on 'hard-to-reach' SMEs that often lack the time, capacity and awareness to engage with skills providers but invariably share common concerns and workforce requirements.

Critical to this is simplifying the skills landscape across the Solent and the SAP has a key leadership role to play in signposting and brokering skills activity.

## 4. Skills Strategy



### 3. Core sectors and competencies

Our third priority reflects the unique economic characteristics of the Solent and representation of a number of key sectors (such as social care, logistics, construction, engineering, marine and maritime) driving demand for skills over the short, medium and longer term.

We need a more agile skills offer that can respond to changing economic need within our strategic sectors in a timely and innovative way to realise our potential as a world-renowned economic cluster by 2050. We want to invest in skills and talent development to support locally-significant industries including marine and maritime, engineering and hospitality, and respond to innovation opportunities.

This is therefore presented as an overarching priority within our skills strategy, as opposed to framing our response around particular sectors or occupation groups. Throughout the remainder of this Local Skills Report, we set out how the Solent's sector-specific networks, partnerships and initiatives will take the lead in championing skills development across our key sectors, for instance through MUK Solent and the new Institute of Technology from a maritime perspective.

Beyond specific sectors, the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted a wider range of cross-cutting competencies and softer skills that have become increasingly important as we adapt to new ways of working, particularly around digital capability, leadership and management and business resilience.

Over the short to medium term we must focus on entrepreneurial skills and supporting people through the business start-up journey as a route (back) into the labour market, for instance for those made redundant because of Covid-19.

And over the longer term, we must be more effective in getting young people 'work ready' through a more explicit and consistent focus on employability skills as part of the school curriculum and post-16.



### 4. Digital inclusion

As we look to level up opportunity across the Solent to ensure that everyone can benefit from a more prosperous and productive regional economy, our final skills priority is to tackle barriers that many of our communities continue to face in accessing education and learning opportunities.

Despite our recent success in establishing centres for skills excellence here in the Solent, pockets of skills deprivation and inequality persist and too many of our young people are falling out of the skills system before they reach the labour market, as evidenced by our high NEET rates.

Digital exclusion represents one of the most practical manifestations of skills inequality, and has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and associated reliance on digital connectivity to access education and learning opportunities.

As online learning (alongside virtual ways of working more generally) becomes embedded over the longer term, it becomes increasingly important that learners of all ages have the means to access skills provision in terms of both infrastructure and competency.

Working in partnership, we need to enhance the employability and labour market prospects for our most disadvantaged residents by targeting support services around core skills, vocational and job readiness training, work experience, job-search assistance, career guidance and through challenging social perceptions (linked to Priority 1).

# 4. Skills Strategy

## Delivering our skills vision for Solent 2050

The Solent's people are its greatest asset and our human capital will prove to be a key driver of local competitiveness and productivity growth, and an important part of our area's ongoing recovery response to Covid-19. This is reflected within our long-term Economic Strategy, Solent 2050<sup>22</sup>, underpinned by a skills system that nurtures and develops the right talent to meet market demand, to enable the Solent to realise its potential as a world-renowned economic cluster by 2050.

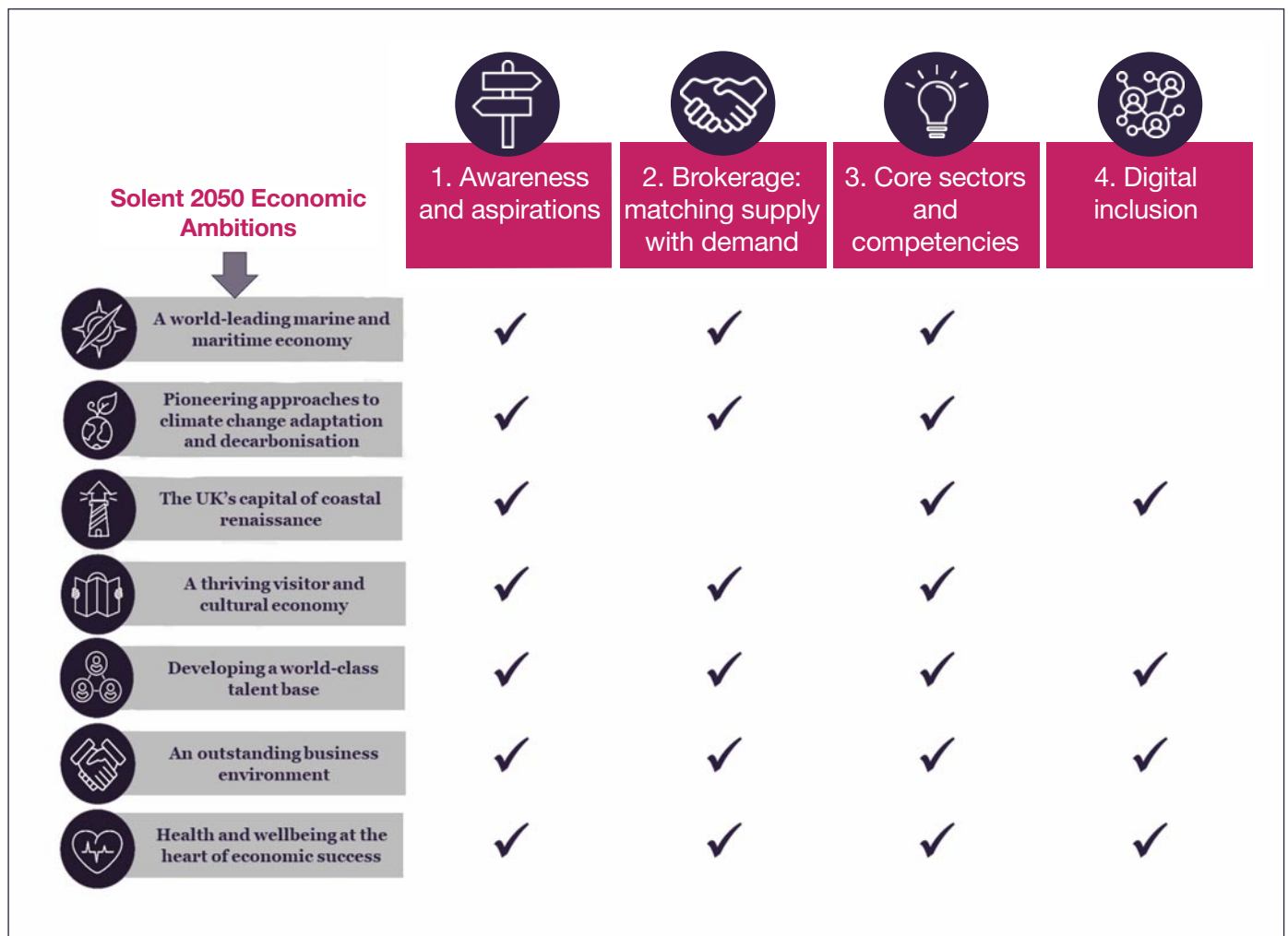
Underpinning the overall Solent 2050 vision are seven key ambitions around which our plan for future activities to transform the Solent is framed. This includes our commitment to develop a world-class talent base here in the Solent by "helping people at all stages of their career build the skills they need to respond to new technology and drive an innovative knowledge-based economy".

This acknowledges the need to develop a more dynamic

and agile skills ecosystem that closes skills gaps through closer collaboration between education, academia and industry need, especially given the changing requirements of employers, such as the need for more digital skills and reacting to the impacts of automation.

In May last year, the Solent LEP published the latest version of its Economic Recovery Plan<sup>23</sup> to support and position the Solent for recovery and growth in line with the long-term objectives set out in Solent 2050, identifying short to medium term skills priorities and interventions to deliver as the first step in this journey. This was followed by a 10 Point Plan for Building Back Greener in the Solent<sup>24</sup> which recognises the critical role of a world class green talent base in driving a green industrial revolution in the Solent.

As shown below, the four skills priorities we set out in this Local Skills Report align well with the overarching economic ambitions to boost productivity and prosperity through Solent 2050, and showcase how we intend to develop a world-class talent base in the aftermath of Covid-19 and as we transition the Solent's economy to net zero.



22. <https://solentlep.org.uk/what-we-do/planning-for-solent-2050/>

23. <https://solentlep.org.uk/media/3663/solent-economic-recovery-plan-v2.pdf>

24. <https://solentlep.org.uk/media/4005/solent-lep-10-point-green-plan-v8.pdf>

## 5. Skills Action Plan

### Priority 1: Awareness and aspirations

On this page we detail future actions and interventions to address our first skills priority to raise awareness of the many skills opportunities and pathways that are already available and address aspirations at an early stage to boost skills participation and development.

This broadly follows a three-stage approach to reflect short, medium and longer term programmes of activity over the next five years. Further details are included at Annex B, and the SAP looks forward to working with partners to develop new and/or augment existing delivery mechanisms as we collectively take these actions forward.

Short Term	Medium Term	Long Term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Develop a dedicated online Skills Portal to showcase and signpost the range of skills development opportunities available across the Solent, supported by a marketing campaign in 2022 and linked to high profile aspiration raising activity associated with Southampton's UK City of Culture 2025 bid.</li> <li>● Work with MUK Solent to leverage off its sector leadership and links with key local employers and Maritime UK to raise the profile of maritime careers, using emerging job and career development opportunities associated with the Solent Freeport as showcase examples.</li> <li>● Linked to this, work with our FE/HE providers, schools, business base and partners such as the Solent Apprenticeship &amp; Skills Hub to raise the profile of the exciting range of technical and vocational pathways into work including Degree Apprenticeships and T Levels, using recent case studies/success stories to help promote.</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>continued...</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Provide a central co-ordination role to implement the government's Lifetime Skills Guarantee in the Solent, building on further education reform set out in the Skills for Jobs White Paper<sup>25</sup> and emerging Skills and Post-16 Education Bill<sup>26</sup> to ensure people can access training and learning flexibly throughout their lives and are well-informed about what is on offer.</li> <li>● Encourage a more enterprising mindset amongst our young people by working with key partners to give school students practical experience of running a business and succeeding in the changing world of work. To be championed by high profile local business leaders.</li> <li>● Maintain and grow the Solent Careers Hub and Enterprise Adviser Network across the Solent to include our SEND (special educational needs and disability) schools and grow the number of Enterprise Advisers in our key sectors.</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>continued...</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Work with the Careers &amp; Enterprise Company<sup>27</sup> to extend the Enterprise Adviser Network to incorporate primary schools within the Solent, in order to inspire our young learners at an even earlier age.</li> <li>● Expand mentoring schemes and programmes across the region to encourage the interaction and the exchange of knowledge and inspiration between young professionals and older, more experienced workers.</li> <li>● Work in partnership with the Careers &amp; Enterprise company to further develop our local Cornerstone Employer Group to include at least one representative from each key strategic sector in the Solent as a means of showcasing local economic and career opportunities to our young people.</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>continued...</i></p>



25. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/957856/Skills\\_for\\_jobs\\_lifelong\\_learning\\_for\\_opportunity\\_and\\_growth\\_web\\_version.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/957856/Skills_for_jobs_lifelong_learning_for_opportunity_and_growth_web_version.pdf)

26. <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/skills-and-post-16-education-bill-second-reading-opening-speech>

27. <https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/>



# 5. Skills Action Plan

## Priority 1: Awareness and aspirations (continued)

Short Term	Medium Term	Long Term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Capitalise on the recent launch of the Solent Maritime Innovation Gateway to raise awareness of the exciting skills opportunities and pathways available within the region’s world-class maritime sector; to include selection of local maritime employer case studies and success stories.</li><li>● Continue to develop our Careers Hub activity with a specific focus on providing work experience and employer engagement opportunities targeted at key strategic sectors and growth sectors in the Solent and supporting our young people as they transition into the world of work.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Incorporate awareness raising of the many skills pathways available as part of strengthened employer brokerage support (see Priority 2).</li></ul>	



## 5. Skills Action Plan

### Priority 2: Brokerage - matching supply with demand

On this page we detail future actions and interventions to address our second skills priority to enhance employer engagement to better understand and broker local skills needs to ensure that skills provision can respond to local business and sector requirements.

This broadly follows a three-stage approach to reflect short, medium and longer term programmes of activity over the next five years. Further details are included at Annex C.

#### Short Term

- Provide an overarching role in coordinating ongoing labour market intelligence on key sector/employer needs in the Solent and feeding this to local skills providers. To include a 'Solent Summit' with local businesses in spring/early summer 2022 to gather intelligence on key recruitment issues and challenges.
- Continue to develop our local response to the Skills for Jobs White Paper<sup>28</sup> which seeks to put employers at the heart of post-16 skills, including through the Strategic Development Fund pilot projects being delivered by Solent colleges.
- Establish a series of Skills Networks to bring together key Solent employers and education providers across our strategic sectors (including construction, health and social care and visitor economy) to tackle key skills challenges and evolving employer requirements.

*continued...*

#### Medium Term

- Via the Solent Apprenticeship & Skills Hub, provide a single source/point of access for independent skills and apprenticeship brokerage for the Solent, fully integrated with the existing Growth Hub offer in order to more effectively understand local employer requirements and match these with tailored skills provision.
- Maximise opportunities associated with the new Institute of Technology in the Solent to develop an employer-led curriculum that meets the region's future workforce needs across maritime, engineering and digital technologies, connecting learners across our various educational partners through innovative learning opportunities.

*continued...*

#### Long Term

- Undertake a strategic review of skills provision and mix across the Solent to identify gaps and areas of under/over provision. Within the context of the Further Education White Paper, this should also consider future areas of changing skills demand (for instance, around net zero and the transition to a greener economy).
- Continue to expand the resources and remit of the Solent Apprenticeship & Skills Hub to secure a sustainable future that is embedded within the local employer brokerage ecosystem.
- Expand programmes to link local students and graduates with local employers through initiatives to help drive adoption and innovation within key business sectors and Solent SMEs.

*continued...*

----- 2022 ----- 2024 ----- 2026 ----->

28. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/957856/Skills\\_for\\_jobs\\_lifelong\\_learning\\_for\\_opportunity\\_and\\_growth\\_web\\_version\\_.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/957856/Skills_for_jobs_lifelong_learning_for_opportunity_and_growth_web_version_.pdf)

29. <https://solentlep.org.uk/media/4005/solent-lep-10-point-green-plan-v8.pdf>

# 5. Skills Action Plan

## Priority 2: Brokerage - matching supply with demand (continued)

Short Term	Medium Term	Long Term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Explore the range of ‘green skills’ that the Solent’s employer base will require as the local economy transitions to net zero and as we implement our 10 Point Plan for Building Back Greener in the Solent . To include working with the South West Energy Hub on a wider regional green skills project, focusing on the skills market required to support growth in green maritime, hydrogen production and storage, construction, transport and logistics.</li><li>● Receive updates from the Solent Growth Hub to secure live intelligence on skills / recruitment challenges and provide advice on LEP Business Support services.</li><li>● Connect our local resident base with exciting apprenticeship opportunities within the Solent’s maritime sector through innovative initiatives such as the Apprenticeship Clearing project and flagship programmes such as the Solent Freeport.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Strengthen existing pathways between the private sector and academia to increase higher level skills retention by more effectively linking graduates with local firms and providing the forum for Solent employers to promote career opportunities amongst upcoming/recent graduates.</li><li>● Embed employer-led skills provision at the heart of the transformational Solent Freeport through our innovative Skills Charter and Green Growth Institute, working in close partnership with the region’s education and skills partners and the Solent SAP</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Work with local partners to elevate the contribution that the Solent’s social enterprises can make in developing a more dynamic and agile skills ecosystem locally. Linked to this, explore opportunities to develop a dedicated Social Enterprise Hub in the Solent to help signpost skills development opportunities on an ongoing basis.</li></ul>



## 5. Skills Action Plan

### Priority 3: Core sectors and competencies

On this page we detail future actions and interventions to address our third skills priority which reflects the unique economic characteristics of the Solent and representation of key sectors that are driving demand for skills over the short, medium and longer term.

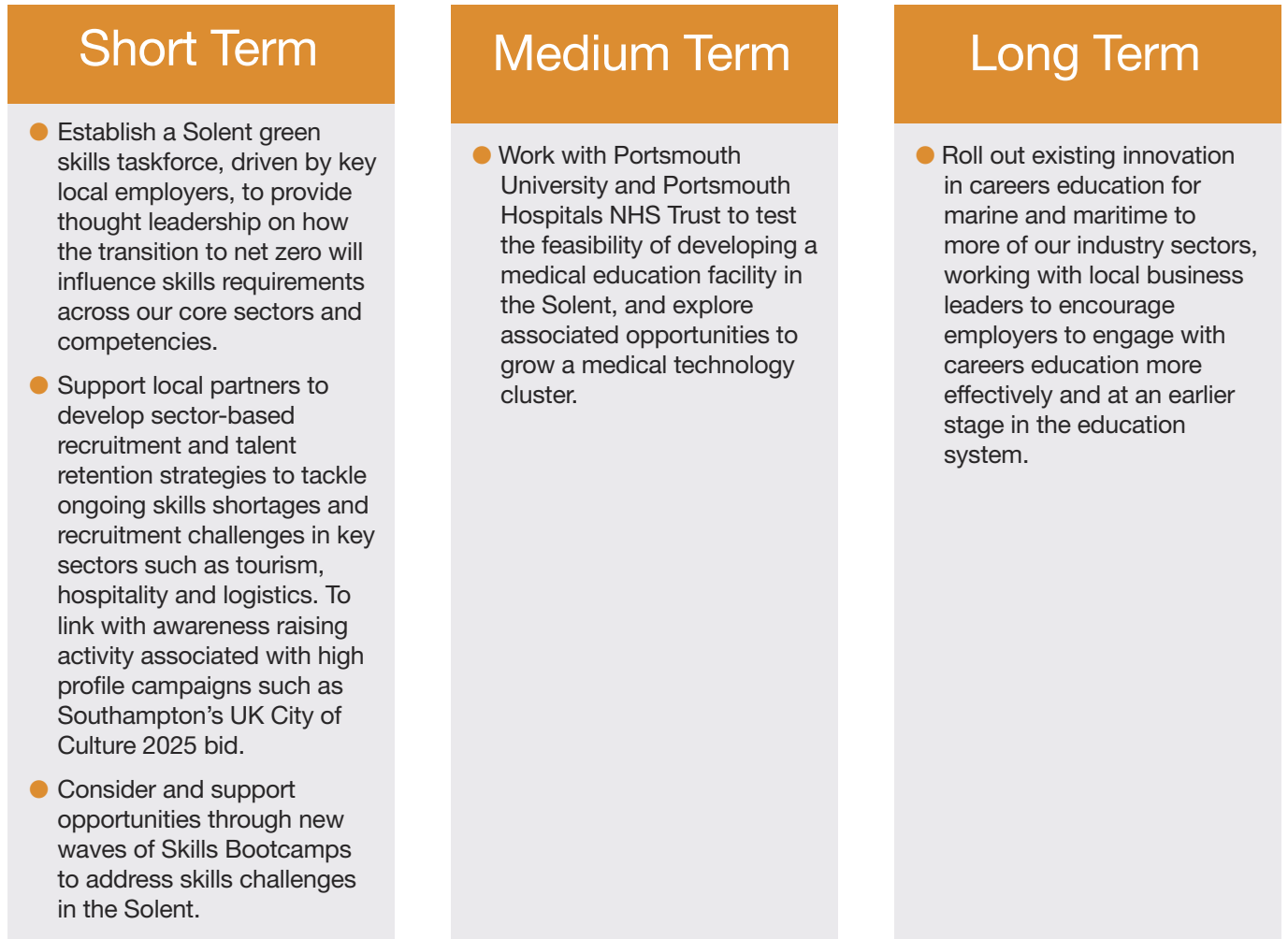
This broadly follows a three-stage approach to reflect short, medium and longer term programmes of activity over the next five years. Further details are included at Annex B.

Short Term	Medium Term	Long Term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Continue to co-ordinate the real-time collection of labour market information for the Solent, informed by employers and local-level data, to monitor change and inform local and national programme partners as we work through the next stages of the Covid-19 pandemic.</li> <li>● Work closely with Solent Freeport partners and employers to develop skills pathways for our local residents to access the 26,000 new job opportunities directly created through Freeport activity, with particular focus on those in adjacent disadvantaged communities.</li> <li>● Working with our partners, develop a bespoke package of skills interventions to respond to cross-cutting priorities accelerated by Covid-19, to include:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Digital capability</li> <li>○ Leadership and management</li> <li>○ Business resilience</li> <li>○ Entrepreneurship</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>continued...</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Work with schools and FE/HE providers across the Solent to enhance employability skills development to get our young people work ready.</li> <li>● Deliver world-class employer-led training facilities for our key growth sectors as part of our successful bid to secure a Freeport in the Solent, which includes an ambition to develop a Green Growth Institute.</li> <li>● Work with Maritime UK and the newly established Solent Maritime Enterprise Zone to develop a careers outreach programme for the maritime sector.</li> <li>● Establish an Institute of Technology to secure employment and training opportunities within the marine and maritime sector.</li> <li>● Maximise retention of unspent apprenticeship levy locally to support the development of talent in priority sectors.</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>continued...</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Build on our existing Solent Apprenticeship Hub to deliver 500 apprenticeships in the visitor and hospitality sector in the period to 2024, providing the vital entry to employment as our young people transition from education to employment in a highly competitive post Covid-19 labour market.</li> <li>● Establish an industry-led Centre of Excellence for Environmental Technologies in the Solent to develop programme pathways post-16 and support small businesses to 'green up'.</li> <li>● Pilot a 'Management 4.0' programme in the Solent to understand what the Fourth Industrial Revolution will mean for new and existing management skills.</li> <li>● Support and accelerate the delivery of skills and training infrastructure projects, for example Warsash School of Maritime Science and Engineering, and the construction of Fareham College's new Civil Engineering Training Centre.</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>continued...</i></p>



# 5. Skills Action Plan

## Priority 3: Core sectors and competencies (continued)



# 5. Skills Action Plan

## Priority 4: Digital inclusion

On this page we detail future actions and interventions to address our fourth skills priority to reduce barriers to accessing education and learning opportunities through a more inclusive skills environment supported by world-class digital infrastructure across the Solent.

This broadly follows a three stage approach to reflect short, medium and longer term programmes of activity over the next five years. Further details are included at Annex B.

### Short Term

- Undertake targeted research to better understand issues of skills inclusion in the Solent, focusing on barriers to skills participation, how these might have changed as a result of Covid-19, and which of our communities face the most acute challenges.
- Linked to Priority 3, develop a free to access package of support to enhance digital skills and literacy in the community, offering basic through to advanced training for all ages.
- Building on the government's Lifetime Skills Guarantee and digital entitlement for adults who need essential digital skills for work, make essential digital skills provision more accessible and flexible by building on the innovation in online learning implemented during the Covid-19 pandemic such as the national Skills Toolkit <sup>30</sup>.
- Explore the scope to expand the emerging Southampton City of Learning<sup>31</sup> digital skills framework to more of the Solent, with a key focus on designing and issuing digital credentials to capture the skills, capabilities, and competencies that residents acquire through training and lifelong learning provision.

### Medium Term

- Explore the potential to establish a Local Digital Skills Partnership in the Solent to improve digital capability across the whole skills spectrum - from the essential skills that help reduce digital exclusion, to the skills workers need in an increasingly digital economy, and through to the advanced skills required for specialist roles. This should build on investments already made in digital skills infrastructure such as the Centre for Creative and Immersive eXtended Reality, and high profile aspiration raising activity associated with Southampton's UK City of Culture 2025 bid.
- Establish a dedicated Task Force to examine digital skills of the future (inc AI, big data, cyber security, robotics) and how the Solent's skills landscape should respond. To be closely integrated with the Solent Freeport, reflecting the scale of opportunity this presents to transform demand for digital technology skills locally.
- Increase the delivery of digital T levels and associated provision of work placements across the Solent, and work with local employers to develop and promote clearer pathways to digital apprenticeships.
- Building on lessons learned from recent Government funded digital skills bootcamps, explore scope to develop a Solent-wide model of delivery with added job brokerage support to improve progression outcomes for residents.

### Long Term

- Work with local partners to accelerate delivery of a comprehensive strategy to test-bed before fully rolling out 5G and gigabit fibre throughout the region, and in particular, explore the development of a full-fibre strategy to better connect our coastal communities.
- Linked to Priority 1, work with local skills providers to boost apprenticeship participation as a means of supporting social mobility through pathways already in place, for instance by facilitating progression from craft to technician, to professional and managerial job roles. This should maximise the significant apprenticeship opportunities generated through the Solent Freeport in close proximity to areas of socio-economic disadvantage.
- Develop a series of infrastructure investment plans across the Solent to better understand how existing infrastructure is preventing skills inclusion and prioritise investment to overcome these barriers to skills participation where possible.

2022

2024

2026

30. <https://theskillstoolkit.campaign.gov.uk/>

31. <https://www.thersa.org/cities-of-learning/cities/southampton>

## 6. Assessment of progress

The Solent Skills Advisory Panel plays a leading role in championing the skills agenda across the Solent, underpinned by our growing collective understanding of key skills gaps and needs locally.

### Taking a local leadership role

Since its formation in 2019, the Solent SAP has forged a strong leadership role on skills in the local area, engaging extensively with Panel members, employers and providers and linking educational institutions with the local labour market to advise on and help implement funding and investment decisions for local skills provision.

Over this time, our work has focused on:

- Ongoing intelligence gathering and review to maintain an up-to-date and clear understanding of current and future local skills and labour market needs, particularly during recent months in response to the evolving labour market impacts of Covid-19, Brexit and growing skills shortages across many of our key sectors.
- Co-ordinating the work of the SAP with the LEP's wider delivery plans and strategy, and providing a focal point for future skills funding opportunities. For instance, the SAP has played a leading role in developing a locally bespoke skills and workforce development plan for the Solent Freeport to help ensure this transformational programme targets skills challenges and opportunities of most relevance for levelling-up our region.
- Through our role in championing the skills agenda in the Solent, liaising with government to raise awareness of particular skills issues affecting our area and seeking to secure support for our skills priorities. This Local Skills Report provides valuable insight and evidence to support this lobbying role going forward.
- Continuing to liaise with government in respect of new skills and employability related funding initiatives, including those announced in the Autumn Budget and Spending Review<sup>32</sup>, such as the UK Shared Prosperity Fund with its key focus on coastal communities and deprived towns.
- Convening local networks of employers, education and skills providers to come together to discuss, explore and tackle key skills challenges and issues affecting the Solent's labour market and wider economy. Following the success of Maritime UK Solent, a new network of employers, education and training providers has recently been initiated to facilitate collaboration to solve some of the main challenges facing the region's construction industry. Plans are underway to establish similar employer networks for the Solent's other key strategic sectors including health and social care and the visitor economy.
- The SAP has been asked by Solent Freeport to provide

the steering group to support its work to develop a Full Business Case and the skills and workforce development plan.

- The SAP has taken an increasing interest in the careers activity of the LEP and its contract with the Careers and Enterprise Company, providing value advice and scrutiny.

Through this activity the SAP has led the regional debate on the skills dimension of the levelling-up agenda, bringing partners together to tackle issues of skills and digital inclusion across our communities (see priority 4 of our Skills Strategy) and through our strong links with local education and training providers we work extensively with local schools to influence the future talent pipeline and raise aspirations at an early age.

Looking ahead, our SAP will lead the way in embedding reforms to post-16 technical education and training, as set out in the emerging Skills and Post-16 Education Bill<sup>33</sup>, within the Solent's skills ecosystem, and early stage discussions are already underway to begin to take this forward locally.

### Enhancing local knowledge

Through preparation of our comprehensive local skills and labour market evidence base, the SAP has been able to develop a forensic understanding of the existing and future skills gaps and employment priorities in our area.

This has been supplemented through more recent research and intelligence gathered from key skills partners, employers and stakeholders as we have refreshed our Local Skills Report for the Solent, set out in this document.

Feedback from our partners has helped to shape our key skills priorities for the coming years and we look forward to working with the Solent's skills community to collectively transform the region's skills base as we realise our potential to become a world-renowned economic cluster by 2050.

Forthcoming SAP meetings will be used as a key opportunity to monitor and gather latest intelligence and feedback from the Solent's skills community regarding current and future skills needs, and how these are changing in response to the ongoing macro-economic changes and pressures. This will be accompanied and informed by dedicated engagement events with the Solent's business community including as part of a planned 'Solent Summit' in Spring/early Summer of 2022 to gather intelligence on key recruitment issues and challenges from across our local business base and key sectors.

32. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/autumn-budget-and-spending-review-2021-documents>

33. <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/skills-and-post-16-education-bill-second-reading-opening-speech>

## 6. Assessment of progress

Shaping more responsive skills provision locally lies at the heart of the Solent Skills Advisory Panel's leadership role, and we are actively influencing skills and training provision through the Panel's collective responsibilities.

### Shaping local skills provision and support

A key part of the Solent SAP's leadership role has focused on engaging with our Panel members and wider networks of skills providers to share information and intelligence on changing skills and labour market requirements across the Solent with the aim of shaping more responsive skills provision locally.

In particular, the SAP has been working closely with the Solent LEP Growth Hub to develop and deliver a series of programmes and initiatives to engage local businesses with their future workforce through links with schools and colleges in the area, and to support the up-skilling of existing staff through funded projects. These build on and look to maximise the opportunities offered by the Solent's four universities, centres of academic and vocational excellence, high quality private training providers and many colleges equipped to support business demand for a highly skilled local workforce, professional development opportunities and access to world-class research facilities and knowledge.

Some key examples of locally responsive skills provision and support developed in partnership with the Growth Hub over the last 12 months are set out below.

- **Digital Accelerator Programme<sup>34</sup>** – supporting high growth SME start-ups in the Solent to transform their digital presence with 1-1 expert skills support to integrate "digital" throughout their business model. Eligible businesses receive 12 hours of tailored business support with highly qualified experts to improve their digital capability and build a Digital Integration Plan for their business. 45 local businesses are currently being supported through the programme.
- This is complemented by further digital skills support available via **Digital Boost<sup>35</sup>**, a free online platform that provides essential digital advice, skills and guidance to grow small businesses and charities. The Solent LEP now offers this government-funded programme with 1-2-1 expert mentoring support on 50 subjects including branding, digital marketing, customer service, infrastructure, data analytics, security and data protection, payments and money management.
- **Going Green<sup>36</sup>** - in response to the ongoing labour market transition to net zero, the Solent Growth Hub has developed a sustainable business support programme providing 1-2-1 expert advice, guidance and skills support to help local businesses to decarbonise their activities, operate more sustainably, and to grow through developing low carbon, clean technologies. Solent businesses also have access to intensive advice, support and grant funding through the **Low Carbon Across the South and East (LoCASE) Programme<sup>37</sup>**, delivered via the Solent Growth Hub, to improve their competitiveness and create jobs through increased energy efficiency and developing new low carbon business solutions.
- **Peer Network Programme<sup>38</sup>** - over 200 Solent business owners have been supported through the Local Business Networks Programme to connect to other local business owners who are facing similar challenges and opportunities. Groups of up to 11 business owners meet over a series of 2-hour sessions in an expertly facilitated environment to support and develop business leadership skills.
- **Help to Grow<sup>39</sup>** – to date, 70 local businesses have enrolled on the Help to Grow: Management programme, delivered by the University of Portsmouth and Solent University, designed to help business leaders learn new skills, reach more customers and take their business to the next level. Following its success, the Solent Growth hub will be supporting the launch of Help to Grow: Digital in early 2022, offering businesses free, impartial advice on how technology can boost business, delivered through a new online platform.

34. <https://solentlep.org.uk/growth-hub-business-support/digital-accelerator/>

35. <https://solentlep.org.uk/what-we-do/news/solent-lep-offers-businesses-a-digital-boost/>

36. <https://www.solentgrowthhub.co.uk/home/business-services/going-green/>

37. <https://locase.co.uk/>

38. <https://solentlep.org.uk/growth-hub-business-support/solent-lep-local-business-network-programme/>

39. <https://solentlep.org.uk/growth-hub-business-support/help-to-grow/>



## 6. Assessment of progress

Through the Skills Advisory Panel, the Solent's skills community has come together to develop a skills strategy and action plan with key activities already underway and successes to celebrate as the region implements a more integrated business and skills offer.

### Skills action plan

Many of the specific actions and interventions identified within our skills action plan are already underway following initial publication of our skills strategy and Local Skills Report in March 2021.

In many cases, we have been able to make early progress by building on existing, successful partnerships such as the Solent Careers Hub and Solent Growth Hub and mobilising through the LEP's £1bn economic recovery road map to prioritise key investments to stimulate skills development, business growth and innovation. This has driven and underpinned the direction of travel to a more integrated business and skills offer for the area over the course of the last 12 months, as a direct result of responding to the ongoing economic and labour market impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. Some particularly noteworthy successes are showcased below.

#### A new Institute of Technology for the Solent

The Solent has recently been successful in securing an Institute of Technology (IOT) through the Wave 2 opportunity. The £13m Maritime Engineering and Digital Institute of Technology will ensure the Solent region transitions to a higher technically skilled economy. It will fuel the growth of the UK's globally leading Solent maritime cluster as it makes a paradigm shift towards autonomy and green fuels, delivering the Government's ambitions in the Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution, Freeports, MoD investment, Maritime 2050, and the levelling-up agenda.

To do this, curricula will focus on the STEM higher technical skills required across digital technologies, engineering and marine, offering the opportunities our communities deserve and a pipeline of skills employers need for continued success. Rooted in demographic and labour force analysis, this will provide a pipeline of talent to offset an ageing demographic, persistent deprivation challenge and to improve job opportunities. The new IOT will focus on:

- Automation skills to play a part in new port technologies and automation efforts;
- Data analytics and cyber security skills, to generate

business insights and upkeep cyber security of the fleet and automated systems;

- Leadership, team-working and management skills, to grow the Solent zone as an international maritime centre;
- Complex engineering skills for MASS manufacturing and maintenance;
- Reskilling and post-qualification opportunities to ensure seafarers can retrain to work ashore; and
- Operation of AI and simulation technology for the 4th industrial revolution.

We have seen the Covid-19 pandemic accelerate longer term economic drivers of skills demand (for instance around increased autonomy and greater digitisation) so looking ahead this underlines the important shift towards an increasingly highly skilled technical workforce that our skills community in the Solent must respond to. Our IOT will be a key enabler in this respect, and we look forward to working in partnership with Solent University, Fareham College and key local employers such as ABP, Teemil and The Royal Navy to deliver this transformational opportunity for the Solent.

### Solent Apprenticeship & Skills Hub

The Solent Apprenticeship & Skills Hub<sup>40</sup> is an essential resource for employers wishing to find out how apprenticeships and skills training can benefit their organisation and where to find advice and guidance. Over the past 12 months, the service has evolved from the successful Solent Apprenticeship Hub to provide a broader, more holistic and simplified point of access for employers, parents/guardians, training providers and individuals interested in starting an exciting new career, with Hub advisers providing impartial advice around all things apprenticeships and skills.

It has helped to establish a 'no wrong door' approach to business engagement and skills development across the Solent that can support lifelong learning and address issues of aspiration and awareness, as highlighted in this Local Skills Report and accompanying skills strategy.

40. <https://www.theapprenticeshiphub.com/meet-the-team/>

## 7. Case studies and positive impact stories

Here in the Solent we have a strong track record of collaboration across the public, private and third sectors to respond to our changing skills needs and develop innovative delivery models.

### CASE STUDY: Solent Maritime Innovation Gateway

This ground-breaking collaboration between Maritime UK Solent, Solent Maritime Enterprise Zone and Connected Places Catapult seeks to ensure the Solent's maritime cluster maximises its full potential on the global stage. The Solent Maritime Innovation Gateway (Solent MIG) has been designed to act as a catalyst for transforming the Solent Maritime region, and co-ordinate the business ecosystem by connecting and interacting regionally, nationally and internationally with investors and innovators.

The Solent MIG will have a sharp focus on an enterprise approach to maritime research, innovation and emergent technologies, with education, skills and training firmly at the heart of the collaboration to maximise socio-economic benefits and deliver prosperity and growth. This represents a key catalyst in raising awareness of the exciting skills opportunities and pathways available within the region's



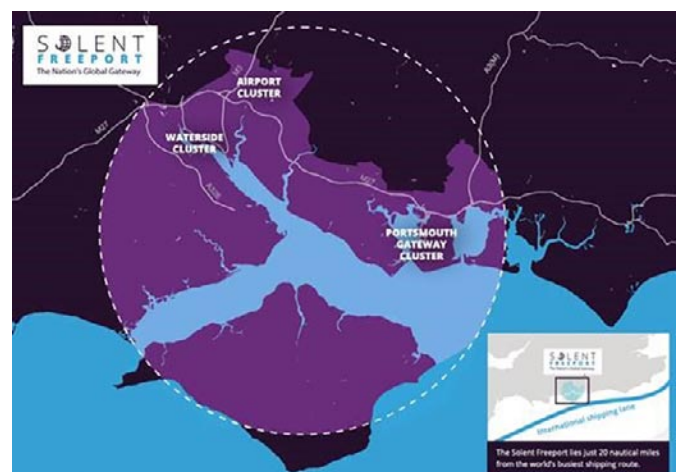
world-class maritime sector and building aspirations amongst local people to take part in this truly global industry.

### CASE STUDY: Solent Freeport Skills Charter

As part of the transformational Solent Freeport, a flagship Skills Charter is being established to set out the overall principles and commitments that will be delivered by the Freeport in respect of skills and learning. It represents a critical mechanism for realising our ambitions to kick start regeneration and levelling-up of the Solent region through a dedicated focus on upskilling local residents and developing their capacity and capability to take-up and benefit from the significant economic opportunities that will be unlocked through Freeport investment.

All future occupiers and businesses within the Solent Freeport will be expected to contribute to the Skills Charter's successful delivery, and overarching principles are anticipated to focus on:

- Local people benefitting from new job opportunities created through investment in the Solent Freeport;
- Providing local people with opportunities to gain skills needed to access employment in key growth sectors associated with the Freeport such as marine, maritime,



net zero and logistics; and

- Local people having access to lifelong-learning and the promotion of "learning communities".

## 7. Case studies and positive impact stories

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### CASE STUDY:

#### Centre for Creative and Immersive Extended Reality



Based at the University of Portsmouth, the Centre for Creative and Immersive Extended Reality (CCIXR) is the UK's first integrated facility to support innovation in the creative and digital technologies of virtual, augmented and extended realities. Part funded by the Solent LEP, CCIXR will deliver immersive and creative extended reality (XR) facilities which enable, support and grow the significant digital creative industries sector. The state-of-the-art facility lowers the barrier to entry for businesses who are looking to understand what immersive XR is and how it can benefit their business, giving organisations access to world-leading facilities that would otherwise be out of their reach, or

require significant budgets.

In particular, CCIXR intends to address the critical shortage of digital skills, providing access to facilities and technologies, and allowing students to enter the workplace with the skills industry needs in these cutting-edge technologies. By building on the University's excellent reputation and record for graduate employability and employment, CCIXR aims to create a step-change in skills training and development, which will in turn support the creation of high-value jobs within the region, and beyond.

## 7. Case studies and positive impact stories

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### CASE STUDY: Pioneering green skills in the Solent

As we look to build back greener in the Solent, we need to expand and diversify our employment and skills base to be able to service and deploy increasingly complex technology to drive a green, net zero economy. The Low Carbon Across the South and East (LoCASE) Programme, delivered via the Solent Growth Hub, provides focused, individual business support to SMEs (including social enterprises) to improve their competitiveness and create jobs through increased energy efficiency and developing new low carbon business solutions.

Green skills also feature strongly as part of the Solent Freeport, where partners are establishing a Solent Green Growth Institute to specifically pioneer green growth skills and innovation, drawing on the region's existing expertise in low carbon technology and recent investment into pioneering innovations. The Institute will play a major role in developing a pipeline of high-tech talent and skills for the region and delivering world class employer-led training facilities to provide the green growth leaders and green entrepreneurs of the future.



### CASE STUDY: Solent Skills Construction Network

A new network of employers, education and training providers has been initiated by the Solent LEP to facilitate collaboration to solve some of the main challenges facing the region's construction industry. By bringing these key partners together, the dedicated network is intended to make sure the construction industry can train and retain the people it needs to continue to thrive in the Solent, allowing network members to hear about new developments in the sector, share challenges and collaborate to find solutions. Complementing work our local authority partners are already doing with large employers, we have established this network specifically for small and medium sized businesses and start-ups within construction and related supply chain business. Construction employers, colleges and local authorities who attended the inaugural network meeting at Fareham College in November discussed challenges



around apprenticeships, traineeships and industry placements, how to bring in new talent and how best to engage with schools and colleges. The LEP aims to establish similar employer networks for the Solent's other key strategic sectors including health and social care and the visitor economy.

## 8. Looking forward

### Tackling ongoing labour market challenges

Much has changed within the Solent's labour market since we published our first Local Skills Report in March 2021. Whilst the immediate labour market impacts of Covid-19 continue to ease, many of our sectors are now experiencing longer term disruption, severe labour shortages and recruitment challenges in response to Brexit-related labour supply changes. Combined, this has resulted in significant labour market volatility within the Solent which is starting to have knock-on implications for operational capacity and business performance. This only adds to pre-existing pressures and challenges associated with skills gaps within higher technical levels, and we recognise that investing in these skills at a local level will be critical to improving our productivity and maintaining our international competitiveness.

The fast-changing nature of this situation underlines the importance of collecting and monitoring real-time labour market information and intelligence across the Solent, and using the SAP's collective leadership role to intervene with swift, innovative responses to address and alleviate these growing skills shortages. This is reflected within the short-term priorities set out in this refreshed skills action plan.

### National policy direction

As part of the Autumn Budget and Spending Review (SR21)<sup>41</sup>, Government set out how its Plan for Growth<sup>42</sup> is being put into action to deliver on the Prime Minister's vision for a high-wage, high-skilled, high-productivity economy. This includes additional funding for Skills Bootcamps, to expand the Lifetime Skills Guarantee on free Level 3 qualifications, improving numeracy skills through the new Multiply programme and providing extra classroom hours for T Level students. SR21 also confirms funding to open 20 Institutes of Technology and for upgrades to the Further Education college estate across England.

The Plan for Growth identifies three core pillars of growth: Infrastructure, Skills, and Innovation, demonstrating the

important role skills will play in supporting economic recovery. In relation to skills, the Government propose to support productivity growth through high-quality skills and training:

- Transforming Further Education through additional investment and reforming technical education to align the post-16 technical education system with employer demand.
- Introduce the Lifetime Skills Guarantee to enable lifelong learning through free fully funded Level 3 courses, rolling out employer-led skills bootcamps, and introducing the Lifetime Loan Entitlement.
- Continue to focus on the quality of apprenticeships and take steps to improve the apprenticeship system for employers, through enabling the transfer of unspent levy funds and allowing employers to front load apprenticeship training.

The Skills for Jobs White Paper<sup>43</sup> sets out how Government proposes to reform Further Education so it supports people to get the skills the economy needs throughout their lives, wherever they live in the country, increase productivity, support growth industries, and give individuals opportunities to progress in their careers. This is proposed to be delivered by:

- Putting employers at the heart of the system so that education and training leads to jobs that can improve productivity and fill skills gaps.
- Investing in higher-level technical qualifications that provide a valuable alternative to a university degree.
- Making sure people can access training and learning flexibly throughout their lives and are well-informed about what is on offer through great careers support.
- Reforming funding and accountability for providers to simplify how funds are allocated, give providers more autonomy, and ensure an effective accountability regime which delivers value for money.
- Supporting excellent teaching in further education.

41. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/autumn-budget-and-spending-review-2021-documents>

42. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/build-back-better-our-plan-for-growth>

43. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/957856/Skills\\_for\\_jobs\\_lifelong\\_learning\\_for\\_opportunity\\_and\\_growth\\_web\\_version.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/957856/Skills_for_jobs_lifelong_learning_for_opportunity_and_growth_web_version.pdf)

## 8. Looking forward

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This policy direction aligns strongly with our updated skills action plan and provides a guiding framework for the SAP as we look forward. In particular, the four skills priorities underpinning our skills strategy for the Solent are strongly aligned with overarching themes set out in the emerging Skills and Post-16 Education Bill<sup>44</sup> around the role of skills in strengthening local economies, productivity, stabilising the labour market, and global competitiveness.

Improving our skills is also central to levelling up economic opportunity across the Solent to ensure that everyone can benefit from a more prosperous and productive regional economy. This is reflected within our fourth strategic priority; to tackle barriers that many of our communities continue to face in accessing education and learning opportunities. We know that differences in skill levels provide a key part of the explanation for differing output across the Solent – for example, productivity per worker varies across the Solent from £39,700 in the Isle of Wight (some 17% below the national average) to £53,900 in Eastleigh (12.7% above the national average)<sup>45</sup>.

We eagerly await publication of the forthcoming Levelling Up White Paper and look forward to exploring how further policy interventions and funding opportunities can be leveraged here in the Solent to transform skills and develop a world-class talent base. This includes opportunities associated with the £2.6 billion UK Shared Prosperity Fund which was

launched as part of the Autumn Budget and Spending Review.

Our refreshed Local Skills Report and accompanying skills action plan also specifically respond to the recent shift in national policy focus to reduce carbon and develop a coherent pathway to net zero by 2050. This is emphasised at the UK level through new Government policy set out in the Net Zero Strategy<sup>46</sup>, Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution<sup>47</sup> and the Industrial Decarbonisation Strategy<sup>48</sup>, amongst others.

It is essential that the Solent's workforce has the correct skills for net zero to take advantage of the jobs which will be created by new projects and initiatives, building on our ambition to be at the vanguard of environmental innovation and decarbonisation. This means that our existing employment and skills base will need to expand and diversify over the coming years to be able to service and deploy increasingly complex technology to drive a green economy, as reflected within our Ten Point Plan for Building Back Greener in the Solent<sup>49</sup> which is being led by a newly established Solent Net Zero Commission.

Work is already underway across the Solent to build the skills infrastructure required to support this green transition locally, for instance through our new Institute of Technology and the Solent Freeport's Green Growth Institute, and this provides a key focus for SAP activity going forward.

44. <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/skills-and-post-16-education-bill-second-reading-opening-speech>

45. <https://solentlep.org.uk/media/2691/16346-solent-economic-profile-report-final-july-2019.pdf>

46. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/net-zero-strategy>

47. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-ten-point-plan-for-a-green-industrial-revolution/title>

48. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/970229/Industrial\\_Decarbonisation\\_Strategy\\_March\\_2021.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/970229/Industrial_Decarbonisation_Strategy_March_2021.pdf)

49. <https://solentlep.org.uk/media/4005/solent-lep-10-point-green-plan-v8.pdf>

## 8. Looking forward

### Opportunities as we look forward

The actions set out in this Local Skills Report refresh and the Solent LEP's wider Economic Recovery Plan<sup>50</sup> align strongly with the areas Government is targeting to ensure skills provides a core pillar of recovery. The focus on addressing significant skills gaps at higher technical levels to provide the technicians, engineers, health and social care professionals to meet the many vital challenges we face, from building a green economy to meeting the health and care needs of our ageing population, is clear. Investing in these skills at both a local and a national level is critical to improving our productivity and international competitiveness.

The Solent Freeport represents a transformational economic opportunity in this regard, creating 52,000 jobs across the UK – including over 26,000 direct new jobs in the Solent - through tax reliefs, simplified customs procedures and streamlined planning processes to promote regeneration and innovation. Focused on some of the Solent's most disadvantaged communities, the Freeport will see high quality employment space created, with investment specifically targeted at state-of-the-art growth sectors and ground-breaking approaches to decarbonisation. The Solent SAP is currently providing the steering group to support a Full Business Case for the Solent Freeport, ensuring this transformational programme targets skills challenges and opportunities of most relevance for levelling-up our region.

Critical to the success of the Freeport, and the additionality that it can bring to the region, is that skills provision is aligned to meet this opportunity over the years ahead. Our pioneering Freeport Skills Charter will work with local skills and training providers to promote the take-up of relevant skills and learning pathways such as apprenticeships, building on the Solent's track record of success including through the Solent Apprenticeship & Skills Hub. Collectively, we estimate that at least 1,000 local people could benefit from apprenticeship opportunities created through the Solent Freeport over the first few years of operation. Work is also underway with the area's three world-class universities and research assets to establish a dedicated Solent Freeport Green Growth Institute to provide a centre of excellence in green skills and jobs to enable the Solent to provide a talent pipeline of the green engineers and entrepreneurs of tomorrow.

Our recent success in securing an Institute of Technology in the Solent also marks a major opportunity to fuel the growth of the UK's globally leading Solent maritime cluster and play a major role in helping our region to prosper, in levelling up,

green innovation and developing the full potential of the Solent Freeport. By focusing on higher technical skills across digital technologies, engineering and maritime, it offers the opportunities our communities deserve and a pipeline of skills employers need for continued success. It exemplifies the forward-thinking approach and innovative collaboration in place between education providers and employers across our region, committed to providing people in the Solent with ambitious career pathways into high skilled jobs. The SAP will play an important role in supporting the development and delivery of the IoT over the coming months and years.

The forthcoming Solent 2050 strategy<sup>51</sup> will be a key document, setting the economic strategy for the Solent economy as it looks to re-position itself within a post-pandemic world and post EU trading landscape. The work we have done to date to develop Solent 2050 identifies the following seven strategic priorities of the Solent LEP:

- **Priority 1:** A world-leading marine and maritime economy
- **Priority 2:** Pioneering approaches to climate change adaptation and decarbonisation
- **Priority 3:** The UK's capital of coastal renaissance
- **Priority 4:** A thriving visitor, creative and cultural economy
- **Priority 5:** Developing a world class talent base
- **Priority 6:** An outstanding business environment
- **Priority 7:** Health and wellbeing at the heart of economic success

Whilst developing a world-class talent base is, rightly, a priority of its own, securing the skills employers need will be critical to driving forward all other priority areas.

Over the last 12 months we have also been working with Government on the national review of Local Enterprise Partnerships. As we await key conclusions and outcomes from this process, as well as the evaluation of Local Skills Improvement Plans Trailblazers ahead of their national roll out, the Solent SAP remains committed and well positioned to lead our regional response to local skills challenges and opportunities. We look forward to working with our many skills partners and stakeholders as we look to deliver our exciting pipeline of skills development activity over the coming months.

50. <https://solentlep.org.uk/media/3663/solent-economic-recovery-plan-v2.pdf>

51. <https://solentlep.org.uk/what-we-do/planning-for-solent-2050/>



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