

# xLEP Skills

## Local Skills Report and Plan

MARCH 2022



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## OXFORDSHIRE SKILLS STRATEGY 2022-2024

Enabling Oxfordshire's ambition to become a top three global innovation ecosystem by 2040

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# FOREWORD

Oxfordshire is the UK's engine for innovation: ground-breaking research and development (R&D) is driving the creation of new, dynamic businesses, hungry to grow and scale up; cutting edge products and services are solving the challenges in healthcare, mobility, energy and communications; and commercialisation of these new ideas is delivering manufacturing and supply chain opportunities across the length and breadth of our country. This has never been so clearly evidenced as through the recently developed Oxford University/ AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine now being administered globally.

Our Local Industrial Strategy<sup>1</sup> sets out an ambitious plan to build on Oxfordshire's strong foundations and world-leading assets and drive Oxfordshire's ambition to become a top three global innovation ecosystem by 2040. We are at the forefront in Transformative Technologies and sectors such as Fusion Technology, Life Sciences and Space. To achieve this, we will continue to need a highly skilled, adaptable and innovative workforce and to ensure that they, and future generations, have the skills businesses need and value. Three key enabling skills have been identified by all sectors to enable continued growth and development, alongside recovery from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. They are: Artificial intelligence (AI) and Big Data skills; Business and Digital/ ICT skills; and other skills often termed as 'soft' skills such as 'employability'.

Alongside this the 'Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire' report was published in June 21 – ahead of the UK hosting the COP26 climate change

conference in Glasgow, November 2021. The report identifies that 'If the phase-out of carbon emissions is managed effectively, a variety of economic, social and environmental benefits can be achieved. These include the creation of high skilled, well paid jobs in the zero-carbon sector'. Oxfordshire is a global centre for research and innovation, and the 2014 Low Carbon Economy report estimated that the low carbon economy generated £1.15 billion/year in sales, representing 7% of the county's economy<sup>2</sup>. Leading the development of a zero-carbon future is an opportunity which Oxfordshire can grasp and ultimately become a global leader.

With a well-established skills ecosystem, our two world-renowned universities provide a strong pipeline of graduates within a broad range of subjects which are well matched to the local area's specialisms. Technical and Vocational achievements are rising to meet some of the skills and labour shortages, particularly in Health and Social Care, although there has been a decline in Apprenticeship take-up over the last four years, as seen nationally. More learners transition into sustained employment or further education and training than nationally. Our Economic Recovery Plan suggests that Oxfordshire will

bounce back from the impacts of COVID-19 much quicker than many other economies and that is being borne out by the current data. Skills will underpin this recovery and provide foundations for future prosperity.

For an area with a tight labour market and generally low

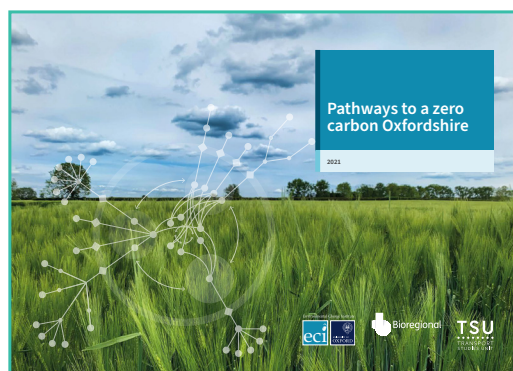


Figure 1 Pathways to a Zero carbon Oxfordshire report (2021)

<sup>1</sup> OxLEP, Local Industrial Strategy (2019) <https://www.oxfordshirelep.com/lis>

<sup>2</sup> Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire report (2021) <https://www.eci.ox.ac.uk/publications/downloads/PazCo-final.pdf>

unemployment, COVID-19 has changed the dynamics, with an initial near threefold increase in unemployment. which remains at double the pre-pandemic levels at 3.3%. However, this is well below the national rate of 5.9% (December 2021) and is reducing month on month. The jobs most impacted by pandemic restrictions have been in service industries - cornerstone businesses such as Wholesale and Retail trades, Accommodation and Food Services and Manufacturing that support the basis of our economy and offer a range of employment opportunities. This impact is seen alongside those roles that support the innovation ecosystem such as Professional, Scientific, Technical and ICT sectors. Although job growth has centred on knowledge intensive professional and technician roles, management and senior leadership roles over the last 15 years, there remains a dichotomy of skills shortages, in high value-added job roles and labour shortages centred on lower value-added roles. Employers report shortages of degree level (Level 4+) candidates for occupations such as programmers and software developers and those with sector specific specialist skills, in contrast to the greatest shortage in elementary roles<sup>3</sup> and long-standing labour shortages, as seen nationally, in the Health and Social Care system.

Alongside this, the county has pockets of significant deprivation and wage disparity that continue to be a concern and that are likely to be further exacerbated by the longer-term impacts of the pandemic. Other skills supply challenges exist, such as an ageing population, and attraction and retention of talent (linked to graduate retention, and housing affordability). There has been a striking fall of 22,500 in the actual number of people in employment in 2021 due mainly to the pandemic restrictions and possibly as an impact of exiting the EU. There

are also gaps in skills supply where learners choose to take-up courses which aren't necessarily relevant to local labour market information, there are active traditional gender role beliefs and greater focus is needed on equality, diversity and inclusion.

One of the positive aspects of 2020 is the way the pandemic unleashed a greater sense of community spirit, of businesses, communities and individuals stepping up to help – for example the region's high-tech manufacturers quickly gearing up to make ventilators during the first wave of the pandemic including Oxford Optronix, Penlon and OES Medical. Prodrive and Williams Advanced Engineering also pivoted their operations to contribute to the effort, while medical device maker Owen Mumford provided 10 million rapid blood testing devices.

We welcome the Government's newly published 'Levelling Up' white paper which acknowledges that 'Institutions such as Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs)' play an important role in bringing together stakeholders from local authorities and businesses' and that 'Skills policy in England has been marked, in the past, by a plethora of short-lived interventions and a centralised approach. The UK Government has therefore, launched a programme of change which fundamentally shifts the way in which skills policy is formulated and delivered which includes 'putting employers at the heart of provision'.<sup>4</sup>

It is against this backdrop that the Local Skills Report has been developed. The report provides a comprehensive overview of our skills and labour market and shines a light on some significant challenges and opportunities for our economy, our communities and our businesses. This includes commissioning a new report on the 'Skills, employment, and

<sup>3</sup> Elementary occupations consist of simple and routine tasks, which typically require the use of hand-held tools and some physical efforts. Examples include street vendors, domestic helpers and cleaners, building caretakers, window cleaners, porters and garbage collectors.

<sup>4</sup> Levelling Up White Paper, HMG, 2022: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1052708/Levelling\\_up\\_the\\_UK\\_white\\_paper.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1052708/Levelling_up_the_UK_white_paper.pdf)

enterprise of Oxfordshire's ethnic minority communities' to inform this strategy.

This approach isn't new – the Oxfordshire Skills Board has, for over a decade, taken the lead role in better understanding the dynamics of our labour market, in developing skills strategies for Oxfordshire and in seeking to develop a more responsive skills ecosystem for the benefit of all who live, learn, invest and innovate in Oxfordshire. The Oxfordshire Skills Board published its first skills strategy in 2013, which set out a high-level vision for skills development in the area. The skills strategy to 2020 set out the key priorities to meet the 'needs of local employers through a more integrated approach to education and training, developed in partnership with our provider network'.

In 2019, the Oxfordshire Skills Board took on the additional responsibilities of the Skills Advisory Panel (SAP) for the Department of Education (DfE) continuing to bring together key partners and stakeholders to strategically plan for an improved skills infrastructure for the benefit of Oxfordshire's communities.

Much progress has been made, with significant investment in our skills infrastructure - including City Deal investment to support Apprenticeships, alongside over £23m capital investment, which has leveraged at least double this amount in partner contributions, in new training facilities, including additional STEM provision, as well as the introduction of the Enterprise Advisor Network embedded in our Careers Hub.

COVID-19 has highlighted some significant challenges facing our skills and labour market but also provides the opportunity for review and reflection. The Local Skills Plans priorities are derived from an extensive evidence and data review. They build on existing skills priorities that the Skills Board and OxLEP has championed and made good progress against for many years.

This report starts to identify some of the initial impacts of the pandemic. Our labour market analytics allows us to review real time data and to put in place programmes and activities to support those most impacted by any changes in our economy.

A better integrated and employer led approach to skills and training development; continued and co-ordinated support for young people at the start of their employment journey (including T Levels and Apprenticeship support for those furthest from the labour market); and improving the retention rate, both vocational and graduate, of those who have learnt in the county to stay and have thriving careers, are amongst the strategic priorities of the Local Skills Plan.

This Local Skills Report and Plan complements and supports the ambitions and priorities of our Economic Recovery Plan over the short term and the Local Industrial Strategy (LIS) over an extended period, to drive recovery and economic renewal, whilst building a resilient and inclusive economy for the future.

We look forward to continuing to work collaboratively to deliver our key priorities for the benefit of our residents, communities and businesses.



**Adrian Lockwood**  
Chair Oxfordshire  
Skills Board

<sup>5</sup> OxLEP, Economic Recovery Plan (2020) <https://www.oxfordshirelep.com/publications>

<sup>6</sup> OxLEP, Local Industrial Strategy (2019) <https://www.oxfordshirelep.com/lis>

## CHAPTER 2 BACKGROUND



OxLEP secured £4m from the Local Growth Fund to create an Advanced Skills Centre with Abingdon & Witney College. It is a high-tech hub dedicated to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Maths) training which has been designed to address the regional skills shortages.

## CHAPTER 2 BACKGROUND

### 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 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).



Department  
for Education

Nigel Huddleston MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Sport, Heritage and Tourism opening the new Hospitality and Catering facilities at the City of Oxford College, with £2.17m Local Growth Fund secured by OxLEP, November 2021.





Oxfordshire's 2019 Local Industrial Strategy has the following ambition:

*'to build a skills system that better responds to local demand, which provides a range of opportunities for all across the county'*

The OxLEP skills agenda is supported and delivered by the Oxfordshire Skills Board (OSB) operating as sub-group of, and under the rules of governance of OxLEP. OSB pre-dates OxLEP and has for over a decade convened key stakeholders and communities of interest to develop a strategic & coordinated approach to skills support activities aligned to Oxfordshire's economic growth ambitions, as articulated in the Oxfordshire Local Industrial Strategy (LIS), and the extant skills strategy. It was from these firm foundations that OSB assumed the responsibilities of the Oxfordshire Skills Advisory Panel (SAP) in early 2019 – a natural evolution of the group and an endorsement of OSB's activities.

OSB/SAP draws representatives from relevant local key stakeholder groups, including (but not limited to); public and private sector employers, further education, higher education, local authorities, schools, private training providers, and other key stakeholders appropriate to the remit. Members are visionary independent thinkers who have a shared ambition to drive change.

The SAP board is chaired by Adrian Lockwood, who for many years had led an innovative Oxfordshire Small Medium Enterprise (SME).

OSB meets quarterly, or more frequently as required at the discretion of the Chair in advance of OxLEP Board meetings. Minutes of meetings are published on the OxLEP website.

The full list of Skills Advisory Panel members can be found here:

<https://www.oxfordshirelep.com/about/our-governance/skills-sub-group>

The Skills Advisory Panel's Terms of Reference, can be found here:

<https://www.oxfordshirelep.com/sites/default/files/uploads/Subgroup%20TofR%20-%20Nov%202021.pdf>

The Skills Advisory Panel meeting minutes can be found here (listed as OxLEP Skills Sub Group meetings): <https://www.oxfordshirelep.com/about/our-governance/meetings>

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## CHAPTER 3

# OXFORDSHIRE'S SKILLS, STRENGTHS AND NEEDS

### Skills Strengths and Needs Summary

*This chapter provides a high-level narrative that builds on the area's pre-existing evidence bases and Annex A and B. Please refer to these annexes and the reference section for underlying data or analysis.*

#### Oxfordshire's Key Skills Strengths

Oxfordshire's strong economy is driven by a high concentration of innovation assets, both through business and academia, which position the County at the forefront of global innovation. Oxfordshire has world-leading strengths in key transformative technologies, with rapidly growing global markets offering significant opportunities for growth. Oxfordshire's unique strengths and capabilities in these industries are of strategic importance to the UK. Our economy is founded on a diverse mix of businesses, which we have grouped into two main categories: cornerstone businesses and breakthrough businesses; both are essential for sustainable future growth in Oxfordshire. 99% of our businesses are Small to Medium Enterprises (SME), of which 89% are micro businesses.

Oxfordshire's innovation and business ecosystem has the following highlights:

- The area has a traditionally tight labour market with generally low unemployment.
- Oxford City is expected to see 3.3% annual growth in employment over the next 12 months.
- A highly skilled, truly global workforce, drawn by a high quality of life, world class research and a range of employment options.
- Earnings for non-residents have risen to similar levels as residents and are around 9% higher than national earnings. Graduates from Oxfordshire are more likely to earn higher salaries than graduates nationally.
- A well-established skills ecosystem has

supported recent growth in our innovative clusters which we need to maintain in the post EU exit and post COVID-19 pandemic.

- The main occupations of employment are high skilled Professional, Associate Professional and Technical roles which the area's specialist research and development sectors need.
- Higher education qualifications generally align well with the economic specialisms of the area.
- Both universities play a key role supporting specialist sectors by providing a strong pipeline of graduates.
- In some of the area's labour and skills shortage sectors, Further Education achievements are rising to meet shortages such as those experienced locally and nationally in the Health, Public Services and Social Care.
- Higher numbers of learners move directly into sustained employment than nationally, with the rest mainly moving into apprenticeships or on the job training.

#### COVID-19 Impact

Our Economic Recovery Plan (2021) suggests that the Oxfordshire economy has been more resilient than elsewhere, and is likely to return to growth sooner, as it has a lower relative dependence on those sectors that have been most impacted (except for the visitor economy).

- There was a threefold increase in unemployment at the height of the pandemic, which still remains at double pre-pandemic levels, but is consistently lower than national levels.
- Unemployment impacts have been highest in Oxford City and Cherwell.
- Young people and over 50s have been impacted most by unemployment.
- Numbers of young people who are NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) has increased and there are more young people electively home educated (EHE).
- Longer term impacts on unemployment may not be as bad as anticipated following the end of the furlough scheme, but it remains too early to confidently account for the c12,000 furlough scheme participants registered when the scheme closed in September.
- 40% of all furloughed staff were from the visitor economy.
- The longer-term impacts for hardest hit sectors (Retail, Hospitality and Visitor Economy) remains to be seen with labour shortages amplified and now acute in sectors such as Hospitality, Health and Social Care and Logistics.
- A fall of 22,500 in the actual number of people in employment in 2021.
- Skills shortages are in higher value-added roles and labour shortages are mainly in lower value-added roles.
- There is evidence of settlement challenges following the UK's exit from the EU and

during and following COVID-19 pandemic travel restrictions. This is particularly relevant for Oxford City and Cherwell.

- Amplified deprivation in terms of financial insecurity and an intensified digital divide.

### **Oxfordshire's Key Skills Needs and Shortages**

**Short Term:** Predicting the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on our labour market is still a challenge, the area has seen a tripling in the Claimant and Alternative Claimant Count rate and remains at double the pre-pandemic levels at 3.5%. The area's economic resilience is evident when comparing this to the national rate of 6.3% (October 2021) and the rate in each district continues to decline, month on month. Highest rates are found in Oxford City and Cherwell.

The labour market remains tight though, as vacancies are difficult to fill despite the number of claimants roughly matching the number of vacancies currently available. Local anecdotal evidence suggests that the longer term unemployed are those furthest from the labour market who need substantive support to access employment. Longer term impacts may not be as bad as anticipated following the end of the furlough scheme, but it remains too early to confidently account for just under 12,000 furlough scheme participants registered when it closed in September, with 40% of all furloughed staff from the hardest hit broad Visitor Economy. The re-introduction of COVID-19 restrictions in early December continues to impact our

economy and international travel such that it is unlikely we'll understand the full impact of the pandemic until summer 2022 at the earliest.

Young people aged 16-24 years and the over 50's have been hit hardest by pandemic related unemployment, older citizens proportionally more than in previous economic recessions. Employers in specialist sectors value recent training/qualification over long term experience creating challenges for those older workers to get back into work. Many of this cohort may not have been in the job market for considerable time and often do not have experience of current recruitment practices and may need support to compete. It is expected that many over 50s will reclassify to retired or full-time students. Youth unemployment has increased and there has been a significant sharp rise in Not in Education, Employment and Training (NEET) young people across the county. Confidence and mental health challenges, including motivation, may also need attention following the pandemic. Highest levels of economic inactivity are most prevalent in Cherwell.

The pandemic has amplified deprivation in terms of food and financial insecurity. This has also intensified the digital divide with many in 'digital poverty'. One Oxfordshire ward is identified as in the 10% most deprived in England and with a further 16 in the 20% most deprived. Most deprivation in these wards is classified under skills, employment and training rather than living environment.

Long term labour shortages have been amplified and are now acute in sectors such as Hospitality, Health and Social Care and Logistics. Settlement challenges following the UK's departure from the EU and during and following travel restrictions have contributed to this amplification. This is particularly relevant for Oxford City and Cherwell.

**Mid/Long Term:** The longer-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic impact for hardest hit sectors remains to be seen, in particular the Retail, Hospitality and Visitor Economy sectors. In 2021, there has been a striking fall of 22,500 in the actual number of people in employment.

Employment in the Wholesale and Professional, Scientific and Technical sectors both fell by 1ppt since 2019.

Much needed Transport and Storage, Business Administration and Support Services have both grown by 1ppt.

Oxfordshire has an increasingly ageing population and a historically tight labour market. Job growth has been focussed on knowledge-intensive, STEM and technology professional, associate professional and technician roles as well as managerial and senior leadership roles between 2004 and 2020. Half of all occupations require degree or higher level (Level 4+) qualifications compared to a third nationally. In striking contrast, there has been a contraction in employment across every other SOC Major Group occupational category including

Elementary occupations where there are also the greatest labour shortages currently.

There is under-representation of FE take-up and achievements in the area's core and specialist subjects given the areas specialisms and planned large scale construction projects. Local colleges report this as take-up choice by students, rather than under-representation of provision. Traditional gender role beliefs were statistically significant in subject choice for both male and female genders, but some headway has been made with females notably achieving more than males in ICT (63%) and Science and Mathematics (58%).

With employers reporting a shortage of high-level technical skills, an increased take-up of T-Level, high (degree) level vocational/technical courses and apprenticeships which are adapted and aligned to emerging technologies and employer needs, could do much to address this, including more

flexible 'bite-sized' courses for existing workforce to upskill and reskill. The DfE 'Skills for Jobs' White paper highlights the need for FE reform to enable change.

There are differences in ethnic diversity of subject choice and employment in scientific and technical industries and process and elementary occupations. There are differences in ethnic diversity of salaries of graduates.

Existing workforce, graduate and young people retention remains a challenge based on housing affordability and attractiveness of other roles in the South East, particularly London. A greater focus on developing home grown talent with better awareness of local labour market information along with higher levels of upskilling and reskilling within current workforce should lead to better matched skills supply that employers are looking for and stronger retention.



BMW Group, only 1% of businesses in Oxfordshire are large employers (over 250 employees).

## Oxfordshire’s Key Skills Strengths

### Key Sectors – Cornerstone and Breakthrough Businesses

In 2020, Oxfordshire was home to over 691,000 people and more than 34,500 active companies (ONS, 2021). 99% of these businesses are SMEs, of which 89% are micro businesses. It has key urban centres, such as Oxford, Banbury, and Didcot, as well as significant areas of rural landscape. The area is one of the strongest and most resilient economies in the UK and underpinned by one of the highest concentrations of research assets globally alongside pioneering clusters of knowledge intensive firms.

Our economy is founded on a diverse mix of businesses, which we have grouped into two main categories: cornerstone businesses and breakthrough businesses; The high concentration of innovation assets, both

through business and academia, position the county at the forefront of global innovation in Transformative Technologies<sup>7</sup> and sectors such as Fusion Technology, Autonomous Vehicles, Quantum Computing, Cryogenics, Space, Life Sciences, and Digital Health.

Both cornerstone and breakthrough businesses are essential for sustainable future growth in Oxfordshire. The convergence of breakthrough technologies will unlock new industries and global markets in the future. Oxfordshire’s unique strengths and capabilities in these industries are of strategic importance to the UK. There is also a strong Visitor Economy anchored around Oxford, Blenheim Palace and Bicester Village. There is a further strong pipeline of major development, unlocking growth in sectors such as Life Science, Construction and a real opportunity to drive a carbon neutral economy.

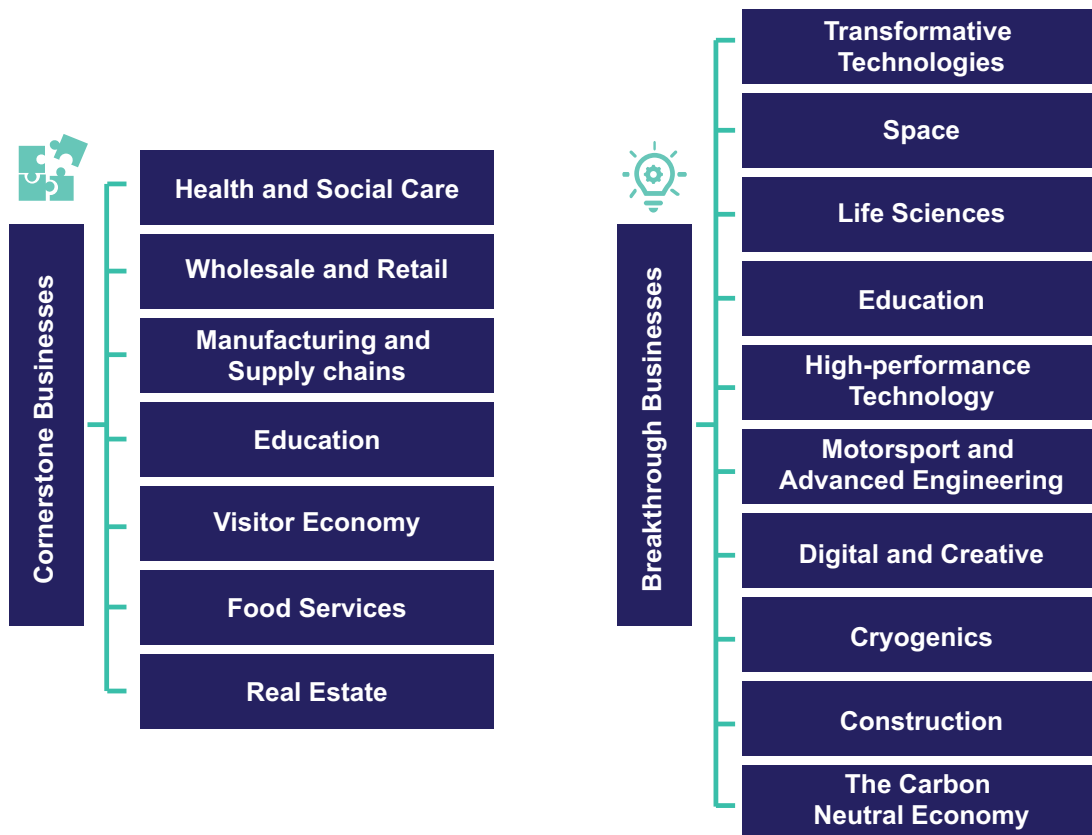


Figure 2 Oxfordshire’s Key Sectors: Cornerstone and Breakthrough Businesses

<sup>7</sup> Transformative technology is hardware- and software-based tools designed to enhance human psychological well-being, cognitive function and physical capabilities.

## Key Sectors – Gross Value Added

**£** Oxfordshire is one of the UK's strongest economies, with sustained annual growth of 3.9 per cent per annum recorded between 2006-2019 and exceeding national and South East averages on most key measures. The economy is underpinned by one of the highest concentrations of research assets globally, including leading Universities of Oxford and Oxford Brookes and pioneering research and innovation hubs.

Our economy is driven largely by five broad sectors, which produce around 60 per cent of the GVA<sup>8</sup> output. These five sectors are shown here by percentage share of total GVA output for the County.

*Irwin Mitchell, 2021, report that 'Oxford and Cambridge are forecast to be among the cities with the highest projected GVA growth at the ends of 2022, at 3.3% each on a year-on year basis.'*<sup>9</sup>



Figure 3 Oxfordshire's Key Sectors – Highest GVA

## Key Sectors – Employment

### Largest Employers

- Education,
- Health and Social Care
- STEM
- Retail
- (Education is represented significantly above the national average, with Manufacturing, Professional/Scientific/Technical activities, and Real Estate also above national averages)



### Employment in High Value Sectors

- Education (and particularly Research and Development (R&D))
- ICT
- Professional Services
- Life Sciences
- Motorsport
- Digital (particularly data & software)
- Science Instrumentation



### Top Job Posting Employers

- NHS
- Oxford University
- Value Retail Management (Bicester Village) Limited
- Oxford Brookes University
- Large supermarket and hotel chains
- Care trusts
- Oxfordshire County Council



Figure 4 Oxfordshire's Key Sectors - Employment

<sup>8</sup> GVA – Gross Value Added - the measure of the value of goods and services produced in an area, industry or sector of an economy.

<sup>9</sup> Irwin Mitchell (2021)

Currently employing 329,600 people, Oxfordshire has had a consistently strong employment rate over time, currently 83% (+7%) higher than the national rate and ranging between 5 and 8% higher than the trend for England over the last ten years. Oxford is expected to show some of the highest annual growth in employment, at 3.3% over the next 12 months.<sup>10</sup> There is high and growing demand for STEM and professional and technical skills to meet the needs of the areas specialist innovation sectors.

Although the employment rates nationally and locally remain stable, there has been a striking fall of 22,500 in the actual number of people in employment in 2021. Nationally similar striking falls have been seen. This fall in actual numbers of employees and self-employed people may be attributed to impact of Brexit, travel restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and unemployment and furloughed employments in sectors most impacted by pandemic associated closures.

Employment by sector in 2020 remained largely similar as 2019 in most sectors in Oxfordshire and nationally. However, in Oxfordshire the impact of COVID-19 can be seen on the hardest hit Visitor Economy sector and the area's specialist and breakthrough sectors, Professional, Scientific and Technical have both fallen by 1ppt. Much needed Transport and Storage, Business Administration and Support Services have both grown by 1ppt.

In contrast, national changes since 2019 have included growth in the Information and Communication and Education and Health sectors, all by 1ppt, whilst a decline by 1ppt was seen in Arts, Entertainment and Other Services.

### A Highly Skilled and Well-Paid Workforce



Supporting Oxfordshire's innovation and business ecosystem is a highly skilled workforce, with generally low unemployment, despite a near three-fold claimant count increase at the height of the pandemic. Oxfordshire has one of the highest skilled workforces in the country, with over half (53%) of its working age population qualified to degree-level or above (compared to 43% nationally). The percentage of people with NVQ4+ qualifications in all districts of Oxfordshire is higher than the national average. There are also fewer people in Oxfordshire with no qualifications than nationally.



Figure 5 Oxfordshire Median gross weekly earnings (2021)

Average earnings have remained strong for both residents and those commuting into Oxfordshire, in comparison to the rest of England. Residents' average earnings are now over £57 per week higher than national.

The Human Health and Social Work Activities sector forms one of the largest and growing sectors in Oxfordshire worth £1.25 billion gross value added (GVA) with over 45,000 jobs. The challenge around this sector is that Caring, Leisure and other services is one of the lowest

<sup>10</sup> Irwin Mitchell, Overcoming Disruption in 2022, UK Powerhouse Autumn/Winter (2021)



paying, with the average salary c.£24,000 per annum (c.£10 per hour) and not generally perceived as a desirable employment pathway by job seekers.

Graduates from Oxfordshire are more likely to earn higher salaries than graduates nationally although there are some differences between ethnicities. Asian graduates are more likely to earn £40k+ per year than other ethnic groups (although differences are not statistically significant).

### An Established Skills Ecosystem



We have a well-established skills ecosystem that has supported recent growth in our innovative clusters which we

need to maintain in the post Brexit era. With a truly global workforce drawn by a high quality of life, world class research and a range of employment options, Oxfordshire must focus on retaining existing skills of our businesses whilst focussing on ensuring the next generation have access to the skills businesses need – both current and projected.

Higher Education qualifications align well with the economic specialisms of the area, particularly breakthrough sectors, as can be seen by recent increases in Creative Art and Design subjects to meet needs of the area's growing Creative Industries sector. However, there have also been recent falls in STEM subjects, Subjects allied to Medicine, Languages and Historical and Philosophical studies.

Both universities play a key role supporting specialist sectors by providing a strong pipeline of graduates. Graduates from the University of Oxford undertake a range of activities, with many graduates continuing to stay in academia and full-time education locally. The two universities remain top

employers and their strong links with the world-leading specialist Professional, Scientific and High Tech sectors in the area should ensure a regular talent pipeline. They are the main employee feed for many of the already established SMEs in the area's specialist sectors and often the inception points of many of the new start-ups.



### Cross Cutting Skills Successes

- **Over half (53%) of the working age population qualified to Level 4 or above.**
- **Most learners (93%) move directly into sustained employment at larger proportions than nationally.**
- **Oxfordshire has a traditionally tight labour market. The area enjoys strong employment and higher than national average wages with a tight labour market.**
- **Job postings have returned to pre-pandemic levels demonstrating a resilient labour market.**
- **Apprenticeship achievements by all age groups increasingly match the area's sector make-up, enabling most (93%) apprentices in Oxfordshire to transition to sustained employment. This mirrors the national picture at all levels of Apprenticeship.**
- **Higher (level 4+) Apprenticeship courses led to 100% sustained employment in Oxfordshire, which is substantially higher than nationally. This might help satisfy some of higher level technical skill required in the county. Achievements of learners aged 25+ tend to be at higher levels in Business and Administration, Health, Public Services and Care. This could be because these sectors represent larger levy paying organisations which use their Apprenticeship levy to upskill and reskill their existing workforce.**

Figure 6 Cross-cutting Skills Successes, Challenges and Barriers



**FE and Apprenticeship Achievements meeting Cornerstone Business Needs over the last 3 years (2018/19 to 2020/21)**



In some of the area's labour and skills shortage sectors, Further Education achievements are rising to meet shortages such as Health, Public Services and Social Care (+36% and +6%)

+57% (19+) FE Retail and Commercial Enterprise achievements, specifically within Hospitality and Catering and Retailing and Wholesaling but -36% Apprenticeships in Hospitality and Catering, -19% Retail and Commercial Enterprise and -35% Leisure, Travel and Tourism (+19) FE and -80% Apprenticeships.

**A third of achievements in these subjects were at Levels 2 and 3.**

Relevant subject take-up at age 25+ suggests employers are using the Apprenticeship Levy to upskill/reskill existing workforce.

**Minimal Apprenticeship Achievements in 2020/21 in High Demand Sectors**

Nursing, Dentistry and Subjects Allied to Medicine

Warehousing and Distribution

Education and Training

Figure 7 Further Education Achievements for Cornerstone Businesses

**Cross-cutting Skills Barriers, Challenges and Gaps**

**Skills Supply for Cornerstone Businesses**



Oxfordshire is globally renowned with a strong international brand and a thriving Visitor Economy pre-pandemic. The sector supported

a wide range of employment opportunities – from elementary to higher value roles and this diversity of employment offer is a great strength. ‘The COVID-19 pandemic has decimated the Visitor Economy with unemployment potentially reaching 10,000 – almost 25% of employment in this sector.’ Prior to the pandemic, Oxfordshire attracted 32 million visitors a year and ‘the sector saw an impressive increase in jobs to just over 42,000 - an increase of 9% on the previous year– accounting for 12% of all employment across the county which resulted in the creation of over 3,000 additional jobs compared to the previous year. Overall, the value of the visitor economy in Oxfordshire grew to £2.5 billion per annum; 9% of total GVA.

However there have been some improvements in FE and Apprenticeship sector subjects which meet the skills needs of sectors like the Visitor Economy, hit hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic (see chart above).

**Skills Supply for Breakthrough Businesses**



Higher Education qualifications align well with the economic specialisms of the area as can be seen by recent increases

in Creative, Art and Design subjects to meet needs of the area's growing Creative Industries sector. There have also been recent falls in STEM subjects, Subjects allied to medicine, Languages and Historical and Philosophical Studies. There are also differences in higher education subject preferences between ethnic groups.

Both universities play a key role supporting specialist sectors by providing a strong pipeline of graduates. Graduates from the University of Oxford undertake a range of activities, with many graduates continuing

to stay in academia and full-time education. The two universities remain top employers and their strong links with the world-leading specialist Professional, Scientific and High Tech sectors in the area should ensure a regular flow of staff. They are the main employee feed for many of the already established businesses in the area's specialist sectors and often the inception points of many of the new start-ups. Employers say that they stay in Oxfordshire because they can build up a highly skilled workforce helped by, but not reliant upon, proximity to Oxford's universities. Employers also demand Level 4+ qualifications or specialist skills which the universities can supply.

Many of the subjects needed for breakthrough sectors are under presented by Achievements in Further Education and Apprenticeships over the last year. In particular, STEM-related achievements are under-represented, given the economic specialisms of the area and most achievements are at Level 2.

## Oxfordshire's Key Skills Needs

### Labour Market Challenges

Employment has fallen by 22,500 in the past year and the ageing population is amplified by falls in the under 16 population, all creating a tighter labour market as the labour pool reduces. Oxfordshire has historically had a tight labour market and current job postings are returned to above pre-pandemic levels. There are challenges meeting this demand despite a similar level of universal credit claimants to vacancies. Highest levels of vacancies are posted in Oxford City or Cherwell.

Broadly speaking, the dichotomy in the Oxfordshire labour market appears to be skill shortages centred on higher value-added job roles and labour shortages centred on lower value-added job roles. Half of occupations require degree or higher level (Level 4+) qualifications compared to a third nationally.

FE and Apprenticeship Achievements meeting Breakthrough Business Needs over the last 3 years (2018/19 to 2020/21)								
Subject	STEM Subjects				Education and Training	Arts, Media and Publishing	Construction and the Built Environment	Business and Administration
	Science and Maths	Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies	ICT	ICT Practitioner				
Decrease in Achievements	- 9%	- 60%	- 40%	+62%	+60% but mainly for support, not teaching	+267%	+39% at (+19) FE +26% Apprenticeships	+43%
Minimal Apprenticeship Achievements in 2020/21 in High Demand Sectors								
Science and Mathematics		Arts, Media and Publishing		Law and Legal Service		Marketing and Sales		

Figure 8 Further Education Achievements for Breakthrough Businesses



Figure 9 Skills Dichotomy

The clear story is that job growth has been focussed on knowledge-intensive, STEM and professional, associate professional and technician roles as well as managerial and senior leadership roles in Oxfordshire between 2004 and 2020. This trend is expected to continue; ‘Harwell Campus is at the heart of transformative technologies and is forecast to grow to over 20,000 people over the next decade from 6,000 today attracting new staff, - and requiring reskilling and upskilling of existing staff and strong links into future talent pipelines.’<sup>11</sup> There is high and growing demand for STEM and professional and technical skills to meet the needs of the areas specialist innovation sectors. The area continues to demand management and director level professionals and candidates with a degree or higher qualifications and Level 4 qualifications.

In striking contrast, there has been a contraction in employment across every other SOC Major Group occupational category, including Skilled Trade Occupations, Sales and Customer Service Occupations and Process Plant and Machine Operatives. Shortages of labour for Health and Social Care, Visitor Economy, Local Logistics, elementary occupations are acute following the impacts of the pandemic. There are also skills shortages in Health (specific skilled nurses), programmers and software developers and sales and business development managers.

Apprenticeship vacancies have hit record highs in 2021, but many are difficult to fill, particularly in labour shortage sectors.

Apprenticeship vacancies at intermediate level are more popular for personal service sector roles such as dental health and hairdressing. Higher level take-up is more popular in professional and technical roles such as IT and digital marketing.

Staffing and graduate retention challenges include housing costs and attractiveness of other regions, particularly linked to London and London Weighting wage expectations.

There are pockets of persistent labour market deprivation, mainly linked to skills, education and training than living environment. One ward is identified as in the 10% most deprived in England and a further 16 in the 20% most deprived.

There are differences in ethnic diversity of education and training subject choice, employment in scientific and technical industries and process and elementary occupations. There are also differences in ethnic diversity of salaries of graduates.<sup>12</sup>

### COVID-19 Impact on the Local Labour Market

Our Economic Recovery Plan (2021) suggests that the Oxfordshire economy has been more resilient than elsewhere, and is likely to return to growth sooner, as it has a lower relative dependence on those sectors that have been most impacted – notwithstanding the challenges faced by our Visitor Economy.

However, given the ongoing challenges arising from the pandemic, it is difficult to predict the full impact on our labour market. Whilst the ending of CJRS<sup>13</sup> has been a key barometer of ongoing employment impact it will undoubtedly be many months before the full impact can be accurately reflected. It remains too early to confidently account for the 12,000 furloughed employments who remained on the CJRS scheme at the end of September

<sup>11</sup> OxLEP, Oxfordshire: a trailblazer for the UK economy, 2018 Economic Review: Baseline (2018) <https://www.oxfordshirelep.com/lis>

<sup>12</sup> OxLEP, OxLEP Skills, Skills, Employment and enterprise of Oxfordshire’s ethnic minority communities Report, key Findings (2021) NB. several sections rely on data from the Census 2011 survey, which was the latest at the time of writing. Data from the 2021 Census is expected to be published from mid-2022. Because Oxfordshire’s ethnic minority population is relatively small it has not always been possible to look at differences by ethnic group. In some cases, we have included national data to illustrate key (potential) issues for Oxfordshire.

<sup>13</sup> Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme

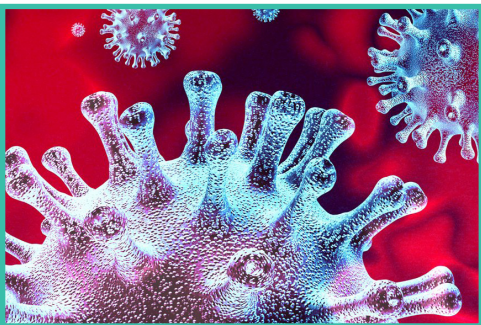


Figure 10 COVID-19 Pandemic

2021 particularly as Plan B restrictions further impacted the economy until very recently, with 40% of those

furloughed in September from the Visitor Economy and around 46% from Cherwell and Oxford local authority districts.

In line with national reporting, however, it appears that many employments will be reemployed with their original employer and few will be made redundant. The unemployment rate has continued to decrease since the end of the scheme up to December 2021. It is clear that many of the employments on furlough would have been made redundant if the CJRS scheme had not been in place, and that the CJRS has limited the impact of the pandemic on the labour market, as the claimant count has not seen significant rises since its closure.

Continued support is needed still, as the area saw a tripling in the Claimant and Alternative Claimant Count during the COVID19 pandemic to 18,000 claimants. The count remained at just under 12,000 in December 2021, still double pre-pandemic rates. Young people aged 16-24 years and the over 50's have been hit hardest; importantly, older citizens proportionally more than in other previous economic recessions. One quarter of all claimants are aged 50+ and this rate continues a slower decline than other age groups. In particular, the rate for young people, aged 16-24, is falling fastest, indicating that Government schemes such as Kickstart and pandemic recovery support may be working for this group. However, concerns remain as to whether the Kickstart employments will be sustained following the end of the programme on 31st March 2022, or whether participants will return to the claimant count. Employers in specialist sectors still

value recent training/qualification over long term experience creating challenges for those older workers to get back into work. Youth unemployment is highest in Cherwell and there has been a significant sharp rise in not in Education, Employment and Training (NEET) young people across the county. Traditionally there has been a lack of flexible provision start dates and appropriate offers of EET learning, compounded by increased competition for employment and Apprenticeships.

Pre-existing labour shortages in Health and Social Care, the Visitor Economy and Logistics have been amplified in these sectors and are now acute. The worst impacted sector has been the broad Visitor Economy, accounting for of 50% of the earliest pandemic period redundancies and 40% of furloughed employments at the end of the CJRS scheme. Other sectors impacted by restrictions are the Health and Social Care and Logistics, particularly at local warehousing and delivery level.

Correspondingly, there has been a striking fall of 22,500 in the actual number of people in employment in 2021 with;

- Employment in hard hit Wholesale, Professional, Scientific and Technical sectors both falling by 1ppt since 2019.
- Much needed Transport and Storage, Business Administration and Support Services have both grown by 1ppt.

It is likely that settlement challenges have also reduced the size of the pool of labour available to meet Oxfordshire's skills needs. These challenges are most likely due to the UK's exit from the EU combined with travel restrictions associated with the pandemic. There has been a significant reduction in the number of national insurance registrations by EU nationals in all Oxfordshire local authority districts in year ending March 2021. This is particularly relevant for Oxford City and Cherwell local authority areas.

A declining trend in Apprenticeship Achievements of 22% over the five years to 2019/20 may have been amplified by the pandemic. In common with the rest of the country, the number of Apprenticeships undertaken has declined over the last four years. However, in 2020/21 Apprenticeship Achievements have risen by 20% back to pre-pandemic levels (national rise only 6.5%). Intermediate Level Apprenticeships Achievements have fallen by 14% from pre-pandemic levels (2018/19) whilst Higher Apprenticeship Achievements increased by 13%.

Achievements in funded Adult Education and Training fell by 17% in the first year of the pandemic but have increased by 33% over the last 3 years.

More KS4 and KS5 leavers now remain in education whilst those moving directly into employment have fallen, following the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions and disruptions to education and crucial careers guidance. NEET (Those young people not in, or at risk of not being in, education, employment and training) statistics in the area have risen sharply as a result of COVID-19.

Pivoting skills demands because of COVID-19 have been seen in the last 12 to 24 months. Top skills demanded reflect those occupations most needed during pandemic recovery with finance auditing, accounting and warehousing high on the agenda alongside nursing. The need for employers to adjust and pivot their business models for growth or recovery linked to the pandemic is also reflected with business development, agile methodology, pharmaceuticals and mental health appearing frequently in job-posting requirements.

### Cross-cutting Enabling Skills



Local Employer Skills Survey focus groups identified three particular sets of cross-cutting

‘enabling’ skills. Digital Skills are a key skill that is in demand nationally and locally with spreadsheet and Microsoft Excel skills particularly required. Given the increase in 50+ claimants – many of whom are entering the labour market for the first time in many years, it is likely many of this group lack the range of IT skills required by most employers. Oxfordshire is investing significantly in our IT infrastructure and have now achieved excellent coverage across the county. We must ensure that the IT skills of residents keeps pace with the requirements of both the education sector – which is likely to see an increased blend between on-line and onsite provision and the rapidly changing requirements of businesses.

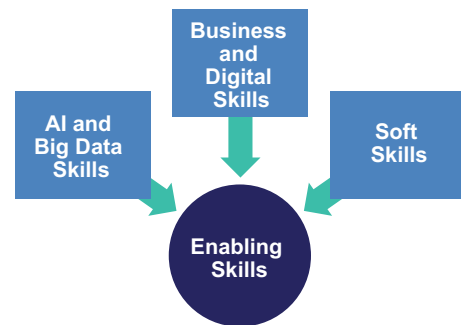


Figure 11 Cross-cutting Enabling Skills

## Skills and Labour Shortages

### Cross-cutting Skills Gaps and Challenges:



#### Apprenticeship Achievements:

In common with the rest of the country, the number of Apprenticeships has declined over the last four years. However, Apprenticeship achievements have risen by 20% back to pre-pandemic levels (national rise only 6.5%).

**Achievements Levels:** The number of unqualified people is not decreasing. One quarter of Oxfordshire’s population with a Level 1 qualification or unqualified are resident in Cherwell local authority district. Most achievements are at Level 2. Level

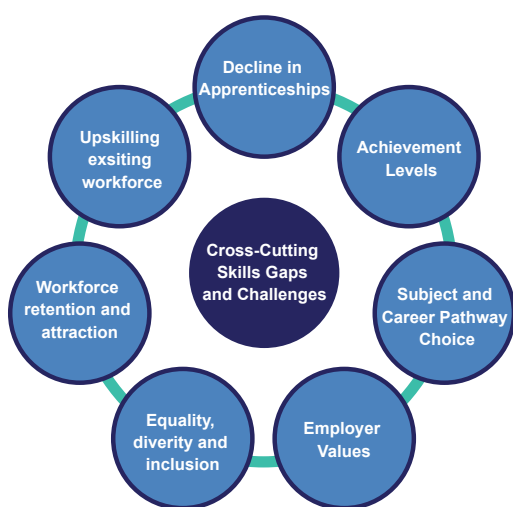


Figure 12 Skills Gaps and Challenges

3 qualifications and trade Apprenticeship achievements continue to fall.

Adult (19+) FE appears to be increasingly seen as the route for lower-level education and training, whilst Apprenticeships are increasingly seen as the route for higher level achievements. 50% of Adult (19+) further education and training achievements were below Level 2, 48% of achievements were at Level 2 and only 2% were at Level 3 or above. Whereas Apprenticeship achievements have increased by 13% at higher levels and fallen by 14% at intermediate levels.

**Subject Choice:** Apprenticeship achievements demonstrate how technical qualifications, which provide more on the job training, might align with the area's skills needs at degree level. Despite the Government offering Apprenticeship bursaries to employers; low take-up persists in some of the area's key specialisms and cornerstone businesses, such as the broad Visitor Economy, Nursing and Subjects allied to Medicine, Education subjects and Science and Mathematics. An increased take-up of vocational courses and broader level of Apprenticeships, up to and including Level 6 (degree) equivalent Apprenticeships, locally could do much to address technical skill shortages.

T-Levels are being introduced initially at three of the main FE providers with a limited roll-out, in line with Government policy. Capacity to support placements both now and in future will be better supported by SME employers if they can see that the T-Level subjects offered are well matched to the area and are a potential pipeline for future workforce and Apprenticeship take-up.

**Employer values:** The value of technical qualifications may not be seen as equal to a degree by employers. Stronger employer engagement in the development of new T-Levels and Apprenticeships could help change this view. 'Skills' was identified as the second most important issue to enabling growth in businesses associated with net carbon growth and development. While access to skilled employees scored highly, Apprenticeships was not identified once by any respondent.

A greater focus on developing home grown talent who have accurate knowledge of the careers pathways available to them in their local area through better awareness of local labour market information should lead to better matched training take-up, and in turn a larger pool of employees with the right skills that employers are looking for.

#### **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion:**

- **Pockets of deprivation exist across the county:** The pandemic has led to heightened financial insecurity, food deprivation and digital deprivation which can impact on health and wellbeing and in turn readiness for work. One Oxfordshire ward is identified as in the 10% most deprived in England and 16 wards are in the 20% most deprived. Higher levels of deprivation for these wards are classified under education, skills and training rather than living environment.
- **Gender differences:** Of the Adult achievements at (19+) FE below Level 2, 62% were female achievements and at

Level 2, 67% were female achievements. Traditional gender beliefs appear to be embedded in female subject choice at (19+) FE. More females' achievements were in subjects such as animal care, crafts and creativity, education and training, administration, health and social care and hospitality, whilst male achievements were more noticeable in building and construction, engineering and manufacturing, public services, ICT, sport and leisure and warehousing and distribution.

- **LLDD**<sup>14</sup> strongest achievements are generally in well matched subject areas, such as Science and Mathematics.
- **Ethnic minority community differences:** At FE (19+), there was higher than average achievements by BAME learners in ICT (30%), Science and Mathematics (30%) meeting the demands of local specialist STEM sectors. There are also differences in subject choice by ethnic minority communities which largely reflects that seen nationally, where according to the ESFA data, just under a fifth of Apprenticeships achieved by Oxfordshire residents between August 2017 and January 2021 were by people from an ethnic minority background. White British Apprentices in England achieved across the most diverse set of sectors and were more likely to achieve Apprenticeships in Engineering and Manufacturing. Asian groups were more likely to achieve Apprenticeships in Business and Health. The Black African group was much more likely to achieve a Health Apprenticeship. At HE level A higher proportion of Asian students studied computing subjects. Black students were more likely to study subjects allied to medicine (includes nursing and midwifery courses). Both White and Mixed ethnicity students were more likely to study subjects traditionally considered 'humanities'.

- **Service children:** Oxfordshire has the highest levels of service children in primary and secondary schools (3055 children across 200 schools) compared to eight other regions in the South East. Many Service children are disadvantaged in their access to and experiences through education and less likely to transition to HE.

#### **Workforce retention and attraction:**

Existing workforce, graduate and young people retention remains a challenge. Many of the universities' graduates move directly into research and development or further academia. There is also a strong trend for movement to London alongside high levels of mixed commuting to other areas such as Reading. The challenge being unaffordability of housing in Oxfordshire and the attractive salary opportunities in these other areas as well as the attraction of the London weighting scale. Housing affordability for those on lower incomes or in lower skilled roles is also contributing to the area's shortage of elementary skilled labour. The impacts of the UK leaving the European Union for foreign students and existing workforce retention are yet to be seen.

**Upskilling the existing workforce:** Employer investment in skills is relatively high, with over two thirds of Oxfordshire employers having provided a combination of off-job and on-job training over the last 12 months (above that provided nationally). However just over one third of employers provided no training at all. The number of days provided by employers should be improved and higher proportions of staff should receive them. The cost to employers and ongoing impact of COVID-19 is likely to have affected this provision given the wider economic uncertainty.

**Green Skills and Net Zero** remain a focus in our skills work although recent research tends to indicate that a lot of the low and intermediate skills are transferrable from

<sup>14</sup> LLDD – learners who identify as having a learning difficulty or learning disability.



skills already within the system. Green Skills are effectively an amalgamation of environmentally conscious knowledge, strategies and abilities to support a sustainable and resource efficient manufacturing sector. Green Skills are often the same engineering, construction and project management skills we already

have, but applied and / or directed to 'Green' projects. However, the real challenge is with higher level skills, in the training of degree & PhD students in fundamental concepts of sustainability at the core, training engineers / physicists / researchers and other allied disciplines, so that they can continue to deliver new technologies to advance this agenda.

The Local Landscape and Labour Pool	Impact of COVID-19
99% SME businesses including 89% micro businesses struggle to support skills initiatives.	✓
An increasingly ageing population particularly amongst white ethnic population, with a decreasing 16-24 age band.	
Threefold increases in unemployment but consistently more resilient than national impact.	✓
Youth unemployment rises and significant rise in NEET young people.	✓
The over 50's have also been hit harder by unemployment than in previous recession with a reliance on the furlough scheme. This brings an expectation that long-term unemployment or reclassification for those over 50s to retired or student status.	✓
High levels of economic inactivity in Cherwell local district.	✓
The impact of the end of the furlough scheme remains to be seen in terms of increased universal credit claimants and the longer-term impact for hardest hot sectors, in particular hospitality and visitor economy sectors.	✓
Amplified deprivation and intensified 'digital poverty' and financial insecurity.	✓
Pivoting skills demands as business models pivot to meet demands of pandemic.	✓
A striking fall of 22,500 in the actual number of people in employment in 2021 and EU settlement challenges due to pandemic restrictions and possibly as an impact of exiting the EU.	✓
Pockets of persistent labour market deprivation, mainly linked to skills, education and training rather than living environment.	✓
Education inequality, particularly in areas of the City of Oxford and Cherwell.	✓
Amplified deprivation in terms of financial insecurity and including an intensified digital divide.	✓
Earning disparities.	✓

Skills Needs	Impact of COVID-19
Skills dichotomy - Skills shortages are in higher value-added roles and labour shortages are in lower value-added roles.	✓
Long standing labour shortages amplified and now acute in sectors such as hospitality health and social care, visitor economy, local logistics and elementary roles.	✓
Skills shortage in health (specific skilled nurses), programmers and software developers and sales and business development managers.	✓
Degree or higher qualifications and Level 4 qualifications in high demand.	
'Skills' languages used by employers needs to map to that used by educators and providers.	
Specialist sectors skills needs evolve rapidly and course content/teachers are unable to keep up. Providers want to provide more flexible 'bite-sized' courses to meet employer and skills needs but are limited by funding restrictions.	✓
SMEs and Micro businesses are unable to provide enough learners to create a course cohort big enough for providers to deliver a course.	✓
Cross Cutting Enabling Skills Needed in Oxfordshire: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AI and Big Data Skills</li> <li>• Business and Digital Skills</li> <li>• Soft Skills.</li> </ul>	✓

Skills Supply	Impact of COVID-19
Limited T-level rollout.	
Capacity of mainly SME businesses to support work and industrial placements is tight.	✓
More KS4 and KS5 leavers now remain in education whilst those moving directly into employment have fallen, following the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions and disruptions to education and crucial careers guidance.	✓
The number of Apprenticeship starts and achievements continues to decline.	✓
Level 3 qualifications and trade Apprenticeship achievements continue to fall.	
The number of unqualified people is not decreasing.	
More relevant subject take-up at age 25+ suggests employers are using the Apprenticeship Levy to upskill/reskill existing workforce.	
Traditional gender role beliefs in FE and Apprenticeship Achievements.	
HE qualifiers traditionally have aligned well with the economic specialism of the area but there are more non-science subjects taken-up than science.	
Recent falls in STEM subject qualifiers at HE level and in subjects allied to medicine, languages and historical and philosophical studies.	
Staffing and graduate retention challenges including housing costs and attractiveness of other regions, particularly linked to London and London Weighting wage expectations.	
Work readiness is a reported skills gap in the area.	✓

## CHAPTER 4 SKILLS STRATEGY



There is high and growing demand for STEM and professional and technical skills to meet the needs of the areas specialist innovation sectors.

# CHAPTER 4


## SKILLS STRATEGY

As previously detailed the Oxfordshire Skills Board has made great strides in supporting skills and training development over the past decade, having led the development of three skills strategies prior to the emergence of Local Skills Plans and Reports.

Good progress has been in many areas, with OxLEP and OSB/SAP at the heart of a more collaborative approach to skills development, including significant investment in our strategic skills infrastructure. This provides firm foundations to develop our latest skills priorities and to encourage and engage a wide range of stakeholders in delivery and discussion.

Our priorities are set in in six broad thematic areas but of course there are interdependencies and many points of cross reference between each and as such they should not be taken in isolation.

### Oxfordshire Skills Priorities

Number	Priorities
<b>1</b> 	<b>Supporting the reform of vocational and technical skills provision, which includes promoting Apprenticeships and T Levels offers:</b> to meet the area's skills needs is a priority echoed by the Department of Education's (DfE) 'Skills for Jobs' White paper published in January 2021 and mirrors longstanding ambition set out in our previous strategies, including unlocking the Apprenticeship Levy in order to support the growth of new Apprenticeships within Oxfordshire.
<b>2</b> 	<b>Help to provide clear, diverse and inclusive career pathways for young people and adults to ensure they are aware of the Oxfordshire Labour Market and sectors:</b> The current careers landscape is confusing, fragmented, and unclear for many. We need to ensure that young people and adults obtain appropriate qualifications, together with the ability to develop the career management skills and attributes required to compete in a rapidly changing labour market.
<b>3</b> 	<b>Managing Oxfordshire's consistently tight labour market:</b> whilst we saw more flexibility in the labour market because of the COVID-19 pandemic, economic analysis suggests that our labour market has rapidly returned to near full employment. Whilst this is generally a positive position it does create some challenges for both residents and businesses and potentially hinders long term economic prosperity.
<b>4</b> 	<b>Graduate Promotion and Retention:</b> Both universities play a key role supporting specialist sectors by providing a strong pipeline of graduates. As Oxfordshire continues to demand management and director level professionals and candidates with a degree or higher qualifications, the area needs to better help undergraduates understand the scale and breadth of career opportunities that exist once graduated to support talent retention.
<b>5</b> 	<b>Business Skills Provision and Support:</b> Meeting the skills demands of Oxfordshire's Cornerstone and Breakthrough employers, including those sectors most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic which can include the promotion of upskilling and reskilling and supporting the development of enabling and 'softer' skills that employers demand. We also work with Government and FE providers in anticipating the occupational standards needed by the zero-carbon economy.
<b>6</b> 	<b>Ensure training and re-skilling provision in identified priority sectors:</b> High level and specialist skills can be more important than length of experience. To maximise the opportunities across current and projected growth sectors, we need to continue to work collaboratively with the main delivery partners through our Provider Network to support the development of the skills infrastructure.

1



**Supporting the reform of vocational and technical skills provision (Focus: Level 3 and Level 4+ qualifications) which includes promoting Apprenticeships and T Levels offers:** to meet the area's skills needs is a priority echoed by the Department of Education's (DfE) 'Skills for Jobs' White paper published in January 2021 and mirrors longstanding ambition set out in our previous strategies, which includes unlocking the Apprenticeship Levy, in order to support the growth of new Apprenticeships within Oxfordshire.

- **Make the Apprenticeship landscape easier to navigate.** Oxfordshire is seeing increased Apprenticeship vacancies yet there is a declining trend in the number of apprenticeships undertaken. The future of the £3,000 Apprentice hiring incentive scheme offered to employers by DWP is uncertain.
- **Raising the profile, value, and status of higher technical level qualifications** as equivalent to a degree, would enable businesses to have stronger talent pipelines with a more developed skill set to meet their business needs. Oxfordshire has a high concentration of employment in high value sectors, with half of occupations requiring degree level (or higher) qualifications. Breakthrough businesses requiring niche subject content in technical provision often look to headhunt talent from rival organisations, rather than approaching providers to develop courses for small cohorts or pooling needs with others.
- Supporting the **FE sector to broaden partnerships** that put employers at the heart of the system will enable Oxfordshire's residents to obtain the skills – both current and projected that our economy needs. Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) are being piloted nationally to ascertain what the opportunity is to work collaboratively with multiple stakeholders. While the results from the LSIPs are being evaluated, we will continue working strategically with our FE and HE partners in evaluating the impact our multiple skills infrastructure investments are having on our local communities and industry sectors. For example, the '**Pathways to a zero carbon Oxfordshire**' report was published in June 2021. It identifies the 'need for a skilled workforce of installers, advisors and other intermediaries' in order to retrofit current buildings and having the right skilled workforce in order to meet the challenging 'net zero' emission target by 2050.
- **Seek reforms of skills and training funding** as the current system is often seen as being too **formulaic and prescriptive**. It lacks the flexibilities that providers, learners and employers often seek and, in many cases, leads to disengagement and disinvestment. The 'Skills for Jobs' white paper suggests there is consistently significant underspend in the current Adult Education Budget allocations, and this is the experience in Oxfordshire, yet that cannot be utilised to support training and upskilling of new adult entrants to the labour market, where there is significant demand.
- Ensure that **micro and small SMEs** are supported to participate in **employer-led Apprenticeship and T-Level standards** which better meet their needs. Many employers are finding it difficult to recruit, particularly those in sectors experiencing skills shortages. Increasing the range of Apprenticeships and T-Level offers and uptake is a key element of reform and encouraging more qualifications that work for all employers, particularly Higher Technical Level qualifications.
- **Create clear engagement and communication channels** in order to engage the skills community, which can be described through five main stakeholder groups (i) residents – both pre and post 16; (ii) schools and colleges – both state and private; (iii) further and higher education providers (including private providers); (iv) businesses; and (v) strategists, business representative organisations and sector groups. Each will have differing priorities, ambitions, challenges and opportunities and each will require differing engagement and communication channels in order for reform to be successful.

## 2



### Help to provide clear, diverse and inclusive career pathways for young people and adults to ensure that they are aware of the Oxfordshire Labour Market and sectors:

- The **current careers landscape is confusing**, fragmented, and unclear for many. Job roles and skills needs are rapidly evolving. We need to ensure that young people and adults obtain appropriate qualifications, together with the ability to develop the career management skills and attributes required to compete in a rapidly changing labour market. School career leaders find it difficult to provide concise information about Apprenticeships and local job vacancies. The national Apprenticeship website does not have every vacancy for the area, so career leaders are having to signpost young people to two or three websites to get the information required.
- There is a consistent level of long-term unemployment for those who are furthest from the workforce, which continues despite various interventions. Particular support should be given to the 17 most deprived wards in Oxfordshire as it has been identified that the most deprived areas tend to be especially deprived in terms of education, skills and training, rather than living environment. It is imperative that job seekers **do not become long term unemployed** and are guided by organisations who have knowledge and understanding of the **local labour market**. This will ensure that redeployment will not be in roles which are at risk of **future redundancy or automation**.
- **The number of unqualified people is not decreasing**. A third of the population live in rural areas, creating challenges for many in accessing education provision and take-up of Apprenticeships, T-Levels and Traineeships.
- There is the need to inspire a greater number of young people, particularly women and **Black Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME)** groups into roles within our growth sectors, as currently they are more pre-disposed to learn such subjects as Health and Social Care, rather than STEM.
- Numbers of young people who are **Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETs)** has increased, together with increased numbers of young people in **elective home education** that is becoming very hard to track. It is being reported that young people are increasingly wanting full online learning only/reduced study time due to mental health concerns and increased numbers of parents/carers are declaring situations such as anxiety and are awaiting a CAMHs assessment for their child.
- **Ensure all young people have the right information and support required, for them to make successful and informed decisions about their next best step, in line with the Oxfordshire Labour Market:** through free resources, training and tools for school Careers Leaders, enabling them to access real time Labour Market Information (LMI) that sets out current and future employment and career opportunities and pathways. We must further develop a blend of physical and virtual opportunities for young people, including those Elective Home Educated (EHE), to experience the workplace in preparation for future employment which is a key part of the transition from education into employment.
- **Digital exclusion** was already prevalent in Oxfordshire but has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the ten food larder locations run by South Oxfordshire Food and Education Alliance (SOFEA), we understand that a significant proportion of low-income clients are digitally excluded because they lack internet access and/or have **low levels of digital literacy**. They are also more likely to be significant users of government services and need support on welfare and employment benefits. As resources (including government services and skills training) are being delivered by self-serve online platforms, it is this group who could become increasingly isolated and 'hard-to-reach'. **Motivation** also seems to be the largest barrier to overcome for those affected by digital inclusion, particularly **for low-income groups**.
- **A Unit for Future Skills** is being created by the DfE, which will work with 'BEIS and DWP to bring together the skills data and information held across government, and enable its use across central and local government, as well as by providers and the general public. The Unit will produce information on local skills demand, future skills needs of business, the skills available in an area and the pathways between training and good jobs'.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Levelling Up White Paper, HMG, 2022: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1052708/Levelling\\_up\\_the\\_UK\\_white\\_paper.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1052708/Levelling_up_the_UK_white_paper.pdf)

### 3



**Managing Oxfordshire's consistently tight labour market:** whilst we saw more flexibility in the labour market because of the COVID-19 pandemic, economic analysis suggests that our labour market has rapidly returned to near full employment. Whilst this is generally a positive position it does create some challenges for both residents and businesses and potentially hinders long term economic prosperity. Older workers are increasingly important due to the aging population and businesses need to look at all ages when recruiting.

- **Develop home grown talent** who have accurate knowledge of the career pathways available to them in their local area through better awareness of local labour market information.
- **Business agility** is crucial for business survival; the ability to respond and adapt faster to change, with many more businesses now conducting their business solely online. Employers need to be encouraged to invest in training and upskilling of employees to succeed in the new digital workplace and in return, employees need to be prepared for life-long learning.
- Help and **support for employers to better understand the tight labour market** and the impact it has on recruitment is needed. For example: the benefits of offering traineeships, industrial placements, work experience opportunities through technical qualifications and increasing their talent pipeline; how to **effectively advertise entry level vacancies** at a local level (particularly Apprenticeships); the need to be **flexible** to recruit and retain staff in a competitive labour market; and **investing in creating a strong talent pipeline** through working with local secondary schools and colleges. This is particularly important for national multiple-branched businesses and those who may not have previously experienced a tight regional labour market in other regions of the UK.
- There are **significant skills shortages** in identified sectors and roles including, Health and Social Care, Visitor Economy, Logistics and Construction and Elementary occupations. For many years these roles have largely been supported by overseas workers, and the labour shortages have been amplified by settlement challenges resulting from the UK leaving the EU, which has also been amplified by the travel restrictions throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Oxfordshire has 25% of the RAF workforce based in the county. Many do not remain in the county, preferring to return back to family locations elsewhere in the UK. However, we need to ensure that those **military personnel who remain in the county are supported in finding future employment** and second career pathways.

### 4



**Graduate Promotion and Retention:** Both the University of Oxford and Oxford Brookes University play a key role supporting specialist sectors by providing a strong pipeline of graduates. Employers say that they remain in Oxfordshire because then can build a highly skilled workforce, due in part to being close to Oxford's universities.

- There have been **recent falls in the take up STEM subjects** and Subjects Allied to Medicine. We need to ensure that these subjects remain relevant to meet local demand.
- The two universities remain top employers and their strong links with the world-leading specialist professional, scientific and high-tech sectors in the area should ensure a **regular flow** of staff.
- The two universities are the main employee feed for many of the already established businesses in the area's specialist sectors and often the **inception points** of many of the new start-ups.
- Oxfordshire needs to **find mechanism/s to retain national and international talent**. Barriers to longer term graduate retention include salaries compared to the London Weighting allowance and the cost of housing (especially in the city of Oxford due to it being as high as in London).
- The **Levelling Up White Paper** states that the Office for Students (OfS) 'will require all English universities to refocus their Access and Participation Plans on true social mobility, making getting on at university as important as getting in, and emphasising activities which have a direct impact on student attainment. Activities could include tutoring, running summer schools or helping schools and colleges with curriculum development. These changes will help to raise the quality of local education and training providers.

## 5



**Business Skills Provision and Support:** Oxfordshire's economy is founded on a diverse mix of businesses, which we have grouped into two main categories: cornerstone businesses and breakthrough businesses. Both are essential for sustainable future growth. There is also a strong visitor economy and growth in sectors such as life sciences, construction, and the ability to drive the carbon neutral economy both nationally and globally. Oxfordshire's has one of the highest skilled workforces with 53% working age population qualified to degree-level or above.

- **Few redundancies due** to the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS). It has ensured that many will be reemployed with their original employer and few will be made redundant. This has limited the impact of the pandemic on the labour market as the claimant count has **not seen significant rises** since closure of the CJRS scheme in Autumn 2021.
- A focus on **retaining existing skills** of our businesses whilst focussing on ensuring the next generation have **access to the skills** which businesses need.
- A **shortage of high-level technical skills** is being reported by employers, together with the need to focus on the following: **AI and Big Data Skills, Business and Digital Skills:** AI and Big Data Skills offers massive gains in efficiency and performance to most or all industry sectors, from drug discovery to logistics and could add an additional £630bn to the UK economy by 2035. With Business and Digital Skills, employers indicate that about one-third of vacancies they find difficult to fill are, to some degree, attributable to a lack of appropriate digital skills amongst applicants. By entering a role that requires specific digital skills, workers can reduce their risk of automation by a dramatic 59%.<sup>16</sup>
- If businesses can map or quantify **soft skills** when they are assessing their recruitment and reskilling requirements, it will enable them to lead on the race for talent.
- Ensure staff are computer literate with strong requirement for good Microsoft Office skills, including Microsoft Excel spreadsheets.
- Employers need to **prepare the workforce for increasing levels of automation and digitalisation**, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic. Oxfordshire has a strong focus on transformative technologies, so it is important to ensure that all workers can benefit from these new opportunities.

## 6



**Ensure training and re-skilling provision in identified priority sectors:** Meeting the skills demands of Oxfordshire's Cornerstone and Breakthrough employers, including those sectors most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which can include the promotion of upskilling and reskilling and supporting the development of enabling skills. Oxfordshire has one of the highest concentrations of innovation assets in the world with universities and science, technology and business parks which are at the forefront of global innovation in transformative technologies and sectors such as fusion technology, autonomous vehicles, quantum computing, cryogenics, space, life sciences and digital health'.<sup>17</sup> Oxfordshire is at the forefront of innovation in these industries but faces stiff competition from other leading global innovation ecosystems. If the UK is to continue to be a world-leader in science and technology innovation we need to provide training opportunities to upskill the existing talent and ensure access to a future talent pipeline.

NB. Sectors experiencing acute labour shortages are: Health and Social Care, Local Logistics and Elementary Occupations.

- We will continue to **influence investment** in skills infrastructure and training across Oxfordshire, to be ahead of the global competition in the transformative technologies sector and green skills.
- **Influence and support higher take up and achievements in under-represented subjects** which underpin Oxfordshire's sector specialisms at FE level for STEM, education subjects, construction, leisure, travel and tourism and manufacturing.
- FE providers have created an '**Industry Specialist Teaching and Knowledge Exchange Programme**' which aims to support both teachers and students in understanding industry and skills needs in the local economy. SME's have been invited to work with teachers to co-create the curriculum to ensure that teaching meets employer's needs.
- Promote Wave 3 expansion of the National Skills Fund '**Skills Bootcamps**' to deliver flexible training to meet in demand skills for the +19-age group. Bootcamps can support employed, unemployed, re-skilling and retraining needs. There is a cash contribution required by employers if used for staff training and a requirement to ensure staff progression as a result.
- We will work with our Provider Network on the skills infrastructure and training requirements for current and projected growth sectors, which maximises on HMG's funding opportunities. The COVID-19 pandemic has decimated the Visitor economy sector, creating high levels of unemployment.

<sup>16</sup> Department of Media, Culture, Digital and Sport (June 2019) No Longer Optional: Employer Demand for Digital Skills – [Gov.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

<sup>17</sup> OxLEP, LIS (2019)



## CHAPTER 5 SKILLS ACTION PLAN









Employers such as Blenheim Palace have developed a strong talent pipeline through their Apprenticeship programme.

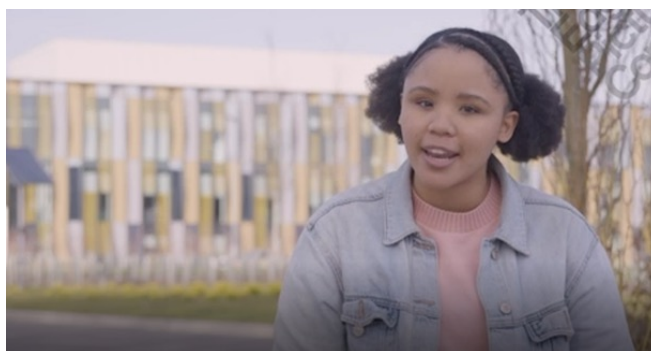
## CHAPTER 5

# SKILLS ACTION PLAN

In this chapter we start to reflect on the key messages and to think about a range of activities that will contribute towards the delivery of our strategic objectives. SAP members and providers are encouraged to develop further thinking on how they might continue to contribute towards these objectives and to explore where we can collaborate to maximise investment, reduce duplication and amplify messaging to employers, providers, learners and stakeholders with an interest in skills development. The table below articulates a range of activities we can prioritise to drive change. We need to continue to engage a wider range of stakeholders to support its delivery but are equally cognisant that many are still focussed on the immediate post-COVID landscape and potential changes in focus and delivery. It is not definitive and will be further shaped in the November 21 refresh when we will have a better understanding of the labour market implications of COVID.

Number	Priorities
<b>1</b> 	<b>Supporting the reform of vocational and technical skills provision, (Focus: Level 3 and Level 4+ qualifications) which includes promoting Apprenticeships and T Levels offers:</b> to meet the area's skills needs is a priority echoed by the Department of Education's (DfE) 'Skills for Jobs' White paper and mirrors longstanding ambition set out in our previous strategies.
<b>2</b> 	<b>Help to provide clear, diverse and inclusive career pathways for young people and adults to ensure they are aware of the Oxfordshire Labour Market and sectors:</b> The current careers landscape is confusing, fragmented, and unclear for many. We need to ensure that young people and adults obtain appropriate qualifications, together with the ability to develop the career management skills and attributes required to compete in a rapidly changing labour market.
<b>3</b> 	<b>Managing Oxfordshire's consistently tight labour market:</b> whilst we saw more flexibility in the labour market because of the COVID-19 pandemic, economic analysis suggests that our labour market has rapidly returned to near full employment. Whilst this is generally a positive position it does create some challenges for both residents and businesses and potentially hinders long term economic prosperity.
<b>4</b> 	<b>Graduate Promotion and Retention:</b> Both universities play a key role supporting specialist sectors by providing a strong pipeline of graduates. As Oxfordshire continues to demand management and director level professionals and candidates with a degree or higher qualifications, the area needs to better help undergraduates understand the scale and breadth of career opportunities that exist to support talent retention.
<b>5</b> 	<b>Business Skills Provision and Support:</b> Meeting the skills demands of Oxfordshire's Cornerstone and Breakthrough employers, including those sectors most impacted by COVID-19 which can include the promotion of upskilling and reskilling and supporting the development of enabling and 'softer' skills that employers demand. We also work with Government and FE providers in anticipating the occupational standards needed in order to meet the energy performance of a zero-carbon economy.
<b>6</b> 	<b>Ensure training and re-skilling provision in identified priority sectors:</b> High level and specialist skills can be more important than length of experience. To maximise the opportunities across current and projected growth sectors, we need to continue to work collaboratively with the main delivery partners through our Provider Network to support the development of the skills infrastructure.

## Your Fabulous Future – Careers in Oxfordshire Promotion Film – Businesses Engaged




### Action Plan Supporting Information


The tables below provide supporting information for the ‘Partners, Stage and Timescale’ columns of the Cross Cutting Skills Priorities Action Plan below.

Timescales		Stage of activity			
Short term	Up to 1 year	Stage 1	Preparation	Stage 4	Advanced/Ongoing
Medium term	1-2 years	Stage 2	Start	Stage 5	Completed
Long term	2 year or more	Stage 3	Early		

Organisation/Stakeholder	Abbreviation	Organisation/Stakeholder	Abbreviation
Abingdon & Witney College, Further Education Provider (State)	A&W	Oxford Advanced Skills	OAS
Activate Learning, Further Education Provider (State)	ATV	Oxford Brookes University	OxBU
Advanced Scientific Training Centre	ASTC	Oxfordshire Apprentice Ambassador Scheme	OAA
Adviza	Adviza	Oxfordshire Association of Care Providers	OACP
Armed Forces Covenant	AFC	Oxfordshire Business Representative Organisations (BRO's)	OxBROs
Aspire	Aspire	Oxfordshire Civilian Military Partnership	OCMP
Back on Track Programme, Activate Learning/ National Lottery	BKOT	Oxfordshire Community Foundation	OCF
Building Better Opportunities, Workers' Educational Association	BBO	Oxfordshire County Council Employment, Education and Training Team	OCCEET
Careers and Enterprise Company	CEC	Oxfordshire District Council Economic Development Officer	EDOs
Chambers of Commerce	ChOfC	Oxfordshire Employers	OxEmps
Construction Industry Training Board	CITB	Oxfordshire Learning Network	OLN
Construction Sector Developers	ConstDev	Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership	OxLEP
Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy	BEIS	Oxfordshire Provider Network (State and Independent FE)	OPN
Department of Health and Social Care	DHSC	Oxfordshire State Secondary Schools and Colleges	SecSch&Col
Department of Works and Pensions	DWP	OxLEP Growth Hub	OxGH
District Council Senior Planning Officers	OACP	OxLEP Innovation and Inward Investment	OxIII
Education and Skills Funding Agency	ESFA	OxLEP Skills Team	OxSkills
ESF Skills Support for the Unemployed, Activate Learning	SSU	OxLEP Skills Team - Social Contract Programme	OxSCP
EST Skills Support for the Workforce	SSW	OxLEP Social Contract Visitor Economy Programme	SCVE
Getting Oxfordshire Online	GOO	Restart programme, Fedcap for DWP	RSP
Global Talent Network, Her Majesty's Government	HMGGTN	SAP Board, OxLEP	OxSAP
Harwell Campus Skills Strategy	HCSS	Scale Up Visa, Her Majesty's Government	HMG SUV
Harwell Next Generation Programme	HNxG	Sector Based Work Academies, DWP	SWAPS
Health Education England	HEE	South Central Institute of Technology (IOT) - Activate Learning/Milton Keynes College	IoT
Henley College, Further Education Provider (State)	HC	South Oxfordshire Food and Education Alliance Community Larder	SOFEA
Inclusive Economy Commission	IEC	Springpod Virtual Work Experience Platform	SVWEX
Industry Specialist Teaching and Knowledge Exchange Programme	TKEP	Study Higher	SH
JETS Programme, Seetec/Activate Learning	JETS	The Apprenticeship Support and Knowledge for Schools and Colleges (ASK) programmes	ASK
Jobcentre Plus, DWP	JobC+	The Orders of St. John Care Trust	OSJCT
Medical Research Council Advance	MRCA	UK Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA) Graduate Scheme	UKAEAGS
National Careers Service	NCS	University of Oxford	OxUni
National Skills Fund	NSF	Oxford Advanced Skills	OAS

## Cross cutting skills priorities (far reaching, cross-sector)

Priority Action	Partners	Stage	Time scale	
<p><b>1</b></p>  <p><b>Supporting the reform of vocational and technical skills provision, which includes promoting Level 3 and Level 4+ Apprenticeships and T Levels offers:</b> to meet the area's skills needs is a priority echoed by the Department of Educations (DfE) 'Skills for Jobs' White paper and mirrors longstanding ambition set out in our previous strategies, which includes unlocking the Apprenticeship Levy, in order to support the growth of new Apprenticeships within Oxfordshire.</p>				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Make the Apprenticeship landscape easier to navigate:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o The two-year Social Contract programme helps increase the number of Levy paying businesses to unlock their levy in order to support non-levy paying SME's who want to start or expand their apprenticeship programme.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	SCP	1	Medium/ Long term
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o <b>Information about Apprenticeships</b> and vocational pathways with all local job vacancies need to be succinct and easily accessible on one website.</li> </ul>	SCP / OCC SecSch&Col / ASK OCCEET FE / OPN PxBROs OxEMPs	1	Medium/ Long term
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Through the Social Contract funding, OxLEP will expand the Oxfordshire <b>Apprenticeship Ambassador Network (AAN)</b> by 20%, to be able to work with CEC networked schools/colleges to further promote Apprenticeships and vocational qualifications to young people.</li> </ul>	SCP OxEMP SecSch&Col	3	Medium/ Long term
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o A ESF part-funded programme to 'simplify the skills system for local SME's' is being offered by Abingdon &amp; Witney College in order to promote Apprenticeships and green skills in the STEM sector.</li> </ul>	A&W	3	Medium
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Raise the profile, value and status of higher technical level qualifications:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Through the Social Contract programme, a social media campaign will be created to promote Apprenticeships and technical qualifications to business and jobseekers. This will include sharing resources created through National Apprenticeship Week (NAW) and National Careers Week (NCW).</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	SCP	1	Medium/ Long term
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o In collaboration with business who utilise and who want to promote how Apprenticeships have benefitted their company, we will deliver the <b>Oxfordshire Apprenticeship Awards in May 2022 &amp; 2023.</b></li> </ul>	SCP	1	Medium/ Long term
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Support the FE sector to broaden partnerships</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o The SAP will work with local further education and independent training providers through our Oxfordshire Training <b>Provider Network</b> to identify and meet skills gaps in priority sectors, including the development of <b>Low Carbon/Green Skills Apprenticeship training programmes</b>, aimed at supporting the county's drive towards a <b>zero-carbon future.</b></li> </ul> </li> </ul>	SAP OxEMPs OPN	2	Long term
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Further Education teacher recruitment - <b>Share Your Skills</b> is a new campaign that calls on skilled professionals to share their valuable expertise and train the next generation of workers in their field by teaching in further education: <a href="https://www.teach-in-further-education.campaign.gov.uk/Seek">https://www.teach-in-further-education.campaign.gov.uk/Seek</a> <b>reforms of skills and training funding:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o We will continue to <b>lobby HMG</b> for greater local influence and potential co-commissioning of HMG investment to better align provision with demand.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	HMG	4	Long term
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o We will continue to <b>lobby HMG</b> for greater local influence and potential co-commissioning of HMG investment to better align provision with demand.</li> </ul>	SAP, HMG	1	Long term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Ensure that micro and small SMEs are supported to participate in employer-led Apprenticeship and T-Level standards:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o With the SAP, employers and Oxfordshire's Business Representative Organisations, OxLEP will explore a mechanism for SMEs to feed their skills needs into our training provider base in order to help training providers create the appropriate content and develop viable cohorts – including for sector specific training needs.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	SAP, OxBROs ChOfC OxLEP OPN	1	Medium/ Long term	

Priority Action	Partners	Stage	Time scale
<p><b>2</b></p> 	<p><b>Help to provide clear, diverse and inclusive career pathways for young people and adults to ensure that they are aware of the Oxfordshire Labour Market and sectors:</b> The current careers landscape is confusing, fragmented, and unclear for many. We need to ensure that young people and adults obtain appropriate qualifications, together with the ability to develop the career management skills and attributes required to compete in a rapidly changing labour market.</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The current careers landscape is confusing:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o <b>For young people</b> aged 14-19, Get the Jump brings together, for the first time, all education and training choices for young people to help them get skills for life, so we will be signposting them to new pages on the National Careers Service website at <a href="https://gov.uk/get-the-jump">gov.uk/get-the-jump</a>.</li> <li>o From September 2022, three F.E. providers in Oxfordshire; Activate Learning, Henley College and Abingdon and Witney College will be offering the two-year <b>T-Level courses</b> which follow GCSEs and are equivalent to 3 A levels. The courses have been developed in collaboration with employers and businesses so that the content meets the needs of industry and prepares students for work, further training, or study. T-Levels offer students a mixture of classroom learning and ‘on-the-job’ experience during an industry placement of at least 315 hours (approximately 45 days).</li> <li>o The national <b>Skills for Life</b> campaign aims to help people access the skills they need to get the job they want – whatever their stage in life. It aims to enable adults to compare and contrast their options, helping them to understand what each offer entails and how it could suit their personal circumstances: <a href="https://gov.uk/skillsforlife">gov.uk/skillsforlife</a></li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>There is a consistent level of long-term unemployment for those who are furthest from the workforce:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o <b>Job Entry Targeted Support (JETS)</b> is a light touch employment programme for people who have been out of work and claiming either Universal Credit or New Style Jobseeker’s Allowance for at least 13 weeks, operated by Seetec until April 2022.</li> <li>o The <b>Restart</b> scheme operated by FEDCAP Employment, enables Universal Credit claimants who have spent 12-18 months claiming universal credit in the Intensive Work Search regime (IWSR) to find jobs in their local area. Eligible and suitable claimants who have been in the IWSR for a minimum of 9 months uninterrupted can now also be referred to the scheme.</li> <li>o <b>Aspire Oxford</b> supports those furthest from the workforce into employment through person centred employment, work experience, training and support opportunities. In 2020/21 it supported 1,700 people through the ‘Unlocking Potential’ programme. Aspire is working with Oxford City Council on the <b>Community Employment Support Project (CESP)</b> to support residents in areas of deprivation such as Barton, Blackbird Leys and Rose Hill who have been impacted by unemployment due to the COVID-19 pandemic.</li> <li>o The European Social Fund (ESF) <b>Skills Support for the Unemployed (SSU)</b> is delivered by Activate Learning and funded until June 2023. SSU is a training project to support unemployed people to up-skill and progress into employment or further education.</li> <li>o The <b>Pathways</b> programme at Abingdon and Witney College has been designed for young adults who have an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) who wish to develop their independence and explore adult working life and gain qualifications, including the opportunity for work experience and to transfer the skills gained in the classroom to a work environment.</li> <li>o Improving <b>Social mobility</b> through access to affordable transport to employment can be a challenge. Through OxLEP’s Social Contract funding, we will seek to help those who are being impacted by ‘Travel to Learn’ or ‘Travel to Work’ challenges.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>NSF NCS</p> <p>A&amp;W, ATV, HC</p> <p>NSF</p> <p>JETS/DWP</p> <p>RSP/DWP</p> <p>ASP/OCC</p> <p>SSU / JCP OCC OCCEET BBO</p> <p>A&amp;W</p> <p>SCP</p>	<p>1</p> <p>4</p> <p>1</p> <p>4</p> <p>4</p> <p>4</p> <p>4</p> <p>4</p> <p>1</p>	<p>Long term</p> <p>Long term</p> <p>Long term</p> <p>Short term</p> <p>Long term</p> <p>Medium/ Long term</p> <p>Medium term</p> <p>Long term</p> <p>Medium Term</p>


Priority Action	Partners	Stage	Time scale	
<p><b>2</b></p> <p><b>Continued</b></p>				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The number of unqualified people is not decreasing:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o <b>Sector-based Work Academy Programme (SWAPs)</b> are being offered by the DWP in collaboration with employers and providers in labour shortage sectors i.e., Health and Social Care. SWAPs provide an opportunity for people to learn new skills and get experience of working in a particular industry, for example Care, Construction, or Warehouse work.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	DWP	4	Long term
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o The <b>Fast Forward</b> programme through Abingdon &amp; Witney College offers a personalised approach to learning for school leavers who have left school without formal qualifications. It offers a broad range of vocational skills which enables students to decide on their future career and training path. The course runs alongside a range of additional accreditation including English and Maths according to students' previous achievements, needs and interests. Students leaving the course go on to Level 1 and 2 qualifications, Apprenticeships, and employment.</li> </ul>	A&W	4	Long term
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o To support those impacted by <b>Digital deprivation and Digital literacy</b>, a multi-agency partnership led by OxLEP, SOFEA, Activate Learning, Oxfordshire Learning Network (OLN), have come together to support this disadvantaged hard to reach group.</li> </ul>	OxLEP, SCP, SOFEA, ATV, OLN,	2	Medium/ Long term
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Run as a pilot, light touch digital IT support has been offered to food larder recipients at SOFEA, it also aims to signpost learners to accredited <b>Digital Skills for Life</b> courses at local adult learning centres. Through OxLEP's new Social Contract programme, limited IT equipment and internet access bursaries will be offered to those impacted by digital deprivation and support given to help upskill.</li> </ul>	GOO, OCF	3	Long
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o The UK Government has announced the expansion over the next three years of a <b>In-Work Progression</b> offer. This will extend work coach support to people on low incomes across Great Britain to address any skills or wider barriers to progression.</li> </ul>	HMG	3	Long
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>There is a need to inspire a greater number of women and Black Asian Minority Ethnic groups (BAME) within our growth sectors:</b></li> </ul>			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o <b>Data evidence</b> from OxLEP's recently commissioned <b>Skills, Employment and Enterprise of Oxfordshire's Ethnic Minority Communities</b> will direct activities to ensure that ethnic minority groups have better access to employment and progression opportunities in Oxfordshire's growth sector.</li> </ul>	SAP, OxLEP, OCC	2	Medium/ Long term
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o <b>Oxfordshire Advanced Skills (OAS)</b> is a partnership between the UK Atomic Energy Authority and the Science &amp; Technology Facilities Council. It is working with BEIS, UKAEA and the Manufacturing Training Centre (MTC) to develop a new <b>Access and Awareness</b> initiative. The aim is to engage with a more diverse range of potential learners and increase access to apprenticeships at OAS to include more people from hard-to-reach groups and provide extra support for OAS Apprentices who face disadvantages or challenges, empowering them to successfully complete their apprenticeship, and then to remain in employment.</li> </ul>	OAS	3	Medium/ Long term
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET) numbers of young people are increasing and those in Elective Home Education (EHE):</b></li> </ul>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o The <b>Back on Track</b> programme which Oxfordshire County Council's Education Employment and Training (EET) team delivers, supports identified NEET young people (including those who are home schooled). It is funded to June 2022 and works with partner organisations to help transform the lives of youngsters at risk of becoming NEET.</li> </ul>	OCC	1	Short term	

Priority Action	Partners	Stage	Time scale	
<p><b>2</b></p> <p><b>Continued</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o To enable young people who were unable to visit physical careers events, the <b>OxLEP Find Your Future</b> virtual careers platform was launched in March 2021. It is available 24/7 and showcases 80 employers and 20 providers through virtual pods with accompanying resources for young people, parents and teachers. Temporary information domes are also created at key times during the academic year, for example GCSE and A' Level results week, National Apprenticeship week and National Careers Week. From Spring 2022, the platform will be expanded by a further 50 employer pods (totalling 150 pods) and will be fully resourced to March 2024.</li> <li>o <b>Virtual Work Experience</b> will be offered through Springpod to schools in the CEC network in Summer 2022. Schools will be able to undertake virtual work experience at any time over a one-month period. Schools find this is a good preliminary introduction to a physical work experience week undertaken by students. Virtual engagement includes live discussions with Cornerstone employers, skills and industry insights.</li> <li>o <b>The Gateway programme</b> operated by Abingdon and Witney College helps 14–18-year-olds who are not currently in education, employment, or training (NEET). It is an inclusive and supportive environment that helps young people get back into education.</li> <li>• <b>Ensure all young people have the right information and support required for them to make successful and informed decisions about their next best step, in line with the Oxfordshire Labour Market:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o OxLEP's continued partnership with <b>the Careers and Enterprise Company* (CEC)</b> will continue to strengthen across more schools and colleges. We will continue the upwards trajectory in improving social mobility for all young people, including those with special educational needs, by ensuring that they will have a better understanding of the career pathways and recruitment by local employers, including opportunities in the low carbon economy sector. From the 2022/23 academic year, the CEC Careers Hub will expand to potentially include 55 schools/colleges. We will ensure the local Labour Market Information is embedded, building links with local businesses that represent the range of opportunities in the area, including the growth sectors and 'promote opportunities for young people to hear about Apprenticeships and vocational training and track and monitor Apprenticeship take-up'<sup>18</sup>.</li> <li>o For the 2021/22 academic year, OxLEP is one of 10 LEP's receiving <b>CEC Hub Incubation Project</b> funding to deliver a research project investigating 'Will teacher's increased knowledge of the local labour market, lead to improved outcomes for young people'. The project is working with 16-18 STEA*M (Digital Arts) teachers and employers to create classroom resources for Year 8 students. The aim of the project is to increase teachers' local employer networks and raise awareness of the local labour market connected to their curriculum. The project will be evaluated and submitted to the DfE in August 2022.</li> <li>o OxLEP Skills aims for all <b>Careers Hub schools</b> to achieve an average of 5 Gatsby Benchmarks (and all networked schools to obtain an average of 4), out of 8, by the end of the 2021/22 academic year. This will be supported through further recruitment of volunteer Enterprise Advisors, matched to each of the secondary schools/colleges within the network.</li> <li>o OxLEP will identify ways to bring the <b>labour market to life</b>, with accessible and current labour market information for schools and colleges particularly on our growth sectors, and that organisations working in the educational career environment also have an understanding including Adviza, Study Higher and ASK.</li> <li>o In the 2022 Summer term, the CEC through their 'Ahead of the Game' funding will enable 100 <b>Elective Home Educated (EHE)</b> young people to receive career guidance interview/s. The support offered can include one-off interview or a series of interventions which will be delivered by Career Advisers from Adviza.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>OxSkills, CEC/SCP</p> <p>OxSkills, CEC, SVWEX</p> <p>A&amp;W</p> <p>OxSkills, CEC</p> <p>OxSkills, CEC, OxEmps, OAA</p> <p>OxSkills, CEC</p> <p>OxSkills, CEC, OxSkills, CEC, ASK, Adviza, SH</p> <p>OxSkills, CEC, Adviza</p>	<p>4</p> <p>1</p> <p>4</p> <p>4</p> <p>4</p> <p>4</p> <p>4</p> <p>3</p>	<p>Long term</p> <p>Short term</p> <p>Long term</p> <p>Medium term</p> <p>Medium term</p> <p>Short term</p> <p>Medium term</p> <p>Short term</p>


<sup>18</sup> Employer Engagement Enterprise Coordinator Job Description (2021), Career and Enterprise Company (CEC)

\*DfE funding of the CEC expected to continue for the 2022-23 academic year



Priority Action	Partners	Stage	Time scale
<p><b>3</b></p>  <p><b>Managing Oxfordshire's consistently tight labour market:</b> whilst we saw more flexibility in the labour market because of the COVID-19 pandemic, economic analysis suggests that our labour market has rapidly returned to near full employment. Whilst this is generally a positive position it does create some challenges for both residents and businesses and potentially hinders long term economic prosperity.</p> <p>o <b>Help and support for employers to better understand the tight labour market and the impact it has on recruitment:</b></p> <p>o Continue to work in partnership with <b>OxLEP's Growth Hub and Innovation and Inward Investment teams</b> to support locally based employers and those relocating from outside of the UK, in navigating the skills landscape in order to obtain a highly skilled workforce.</p> <p>o To raise awareness of the new <b>Join the Skills Revolution campaign</b> which aims to increase employers' awareness of government training and employment schemes, to help businesses gear up for economic recovery by skilling up their workforce. Find out more at <a href="https://gov.uk/skills-support">gov.uk/skills-support</a></p> <p>o The SAP to further embed working with <b>local business organisations</b> such as Thames Valley Chambers of Commerce to ensure awareness of the challenges and signpost to support and networks.</p> <p>o Oxfordshire needs to find ways to <b>retain older talent</b>. We will investigate business support for those employers considering offering mid-career conversation with their <b>50+ aged</b> employees, which could include options for flexible working or support in developing digital IT skills.</p> <p>o Raise awareness with local employers of <b>Armed Forces Covenant, Employer Recognition Scheme</b>, to support fair recruitment policies for service personnel/ armed forces community.</p> <p><b>o There are significant skills shortages in identified sectors and roles:</b></p> <p>o Advise and guide the transformative technologies sector in accessing skilled people and develop the existing skill base to ensure the future pipeline of talent.</p> <p>o Employers are reporting a shortage of high-level technical skills, this could in part be met through an <b>increased take-up of T-Level, high (degree) level vocational/technical courses and Apprenticeships</b> which are adapted and aligned to emerging technologies and employer needs, including more flexible 'bite-sized' courses for existing workforce to upskill and reskill. The SAP will work to raise the profile of these career pathways.</p> <p><b>o The Industry Specialist Teaching and Knowledge Exchange Programme</b> was created by Activate learning which works to address the existing gap between curriculum design and industry requirements.</p> <p>o There is a significant skills shortage in the <b>construction industry</b>, which in part is to be met through Abingdon &amp; Witney college's newly created (and OxLEP funding to support) <b>Green Construction Skills Centre</b>, although there needs to be a more focussed provision for site roles required by developers and through the expansion of <b>Community Employment Plans (CEP's)</b> through OxLEP's Social Contract programme. CEPs are employer-led initiatives which can form part of S106 planning obligations for significant developments. Through the Social Contract programme, OxLEP will fund a CEP Co-ordinator to work with local authority partners, developers and stakeholder to develop and agree CEPs on all strategic housing or employment generating developments. They will ensure that local communities, especially those furthest from the labour market are able to access a range of skills and training outcomes, such as Apprenticeships, work experience placements and Sector Based Work Academies.</p>	<p>OxGrHub OxIII</p> <p>NSF</p> <p>SAP OxSkills, ChofC, OxBROs</p> <p>SCP, OxGrHub, ChofC,</p> <p>AFC</p> <p>OxBROs OxEmps SAP, OxSkills, HCSS, ASTC</p> <p>A&amp;W, ATV, HC</p> <p>ATV, ACET A&amp;W, OxLEPSkills, SCP, LA, ConstDev, OCMP, DSPOs, SWAPs</p>	<p>4</p> <p>3</p> <p>4</p> <p>2</p> <p>2</p> <p>4</p> <p>TBC</p> <p>4</p>	<p>Long term</p> <p>Long term</p> <p>Long term</p> <p>Long term</p> <p>Long Term</p> <p>Long term</p> <p>TBC</p> <p>Long term</p>

Priority Action	Partners	Stage	Time scale
<p><b>3</b></p>	<p><b>Continued</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o <b>The Inclusive Economy Commission's</b> potential priority areas for the Inclusive Economy Agenda in Oxfordshire include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Increase local spend and enhancing local businesses through procurement,</li> <li>o Place-based programmes / investment to targeted areas (e.g., high deprivation)</li> <li>o More targeted investment in skills-based training, education, and access to jobs</li> <li>o Linking social/community outcomes and benefits as part of infrastructure investments</li> <li>o Encourage more socially and environmentally responsible businesses</li> </ul> </li> <li>o <b>The Visitor Economy</b> has noted a lack of digital skills in the sector, which can be used to respond to the new, and changed, demand for online services due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Through OxLEP's new Visitor Economy Renaissance programme, OxLEP will aim to support businesses to improve digital presence in order to be successful in this challenging environment.</li> <li>o To help recruit and support the <b>Health and Social Care Sector</b> a multi-agency approach led by Oxfordshire County Council's (OCC) Corporate Workforce Services is being undertaken with Skills for Care and the Oxfordshire Association of Care Providers. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The OCC has launched a £1.5m <b>Workforce Recruitment and Retention Fund</b> to attract the right talent to the sector.</li> <li>■ Activate Learning's <b>Health care suite</b> at its City of Oxford Campus could be used to train current staff and enable progression and thereby support retention.</li> <li>■ <b>Are you a Hidden Hero</b> digital video and Facebook campaign by The Orders of St John Care Trust (OSJCT) to promote the Health and Social Care sector will be shared to schools and colleges.</li> <li>■ <b>Social mobility</b> can be a challenge particularly when needing to access rural communities. The <b>Wheels to Work</b> programme and travel bursaries might be a suitable option to help through the OxLEP's Social Contract programme.</li> <li>■ Through OxLEP's new Social Contract programme, Apprentice Advisors can offer information to Social Care businesses about how to develop their talent pipeline by offering Level 2 and 3 Apprenticeships, T-Level Health placements and Traineeships.</li> </ul> </li> <li>o <b>Diversity and Inclusion:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o To help identify the <b>Skills, Employment and Enterprise of Oxfordshire's Ethnic Minority Communities</b> OxLEP commissioned a report by Oxfordshire County Council Analysts, to help direct activities focused on clear evidence. We will support better access for ethnic minority groups to employment and progression opportunities which will in turn improve their physical and mental health. The following will be supported through <b>OxLEP's Social Contract programme:</b></li> <li>o A <b>Social mobility 'Travel to Work'/'Travel to Training'</b> bursary programme to help those experiencing barriers to work due to travel limitations.</li> <li>o <b>Bridging the digital divide</b> bursary programme for those requiring entry level IT skills, computer equipment and/or internet access.</li> <li>o Encourage a <b>wider take-up of careers</b> in key sectors i.e., Construction and Health and Social Care.</li> <li>o Working with the <b>OxLEP Growth Hub team</b> and other employer network groups, we will support employers to develop and/or improve their diverse and inclusive recruitment and we will create and deliver a social media campaign to promote the benefits of being a diverse and inclusive employer.</li> <li>o Work with FE providers to support refugees from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) to access English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses, in order to support their access to employment opportunities.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>		
	IEC	2	Long term
	OxLEP	4	Medium/ Long term
	OCC, OACP, SFC	4	Long term
	ACTV OCC,	2	Long term
	OACP, SFC	2	Medium Long term
	OSJCT, OxSkills, CEC SecSchs& Col WTW	2	Medium/ Long term
	SCP, OPN, OxEMPs,	2	Long term
	OCC OxSkills	4	Long term
	WTW	2	Medium/ Long term
	SAP, OxSkills, OCC, WTW, SOFEA, GOO, OLN, OxGrHub, OxBROs, A&W	4	Medium/ Long term


Priority Action		Partners	Stage	Time scale
<p><b>4</b></p> 	<p><b>Graduate Promotion and Retention:</b> Both universities play a key role supporting specialist sectors by providing a strong pipeline of graduates. As Oxfordshire continues to demand management and director level professionals and candidates with a degree or higher qualifications, the area needs to better help undergraduates understand the scale and breadth of career opportunities that exist once graduated to support talent retention.</p>			
	<p>o In collaboration with University of Oxford and Oxford Brookes University, <b>The Keys to Your Future</b> video has recently been created with OxLEP to promote Oxfordshire as a place for education and employment for H.E. students and graduates: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X1MQIivIOa4">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X1MQIivIOa4</a></p>	OxSkills, OxUni, OxB	4	Long term
	<p>o Both the <b>University of Oxford and Oxford Brookes University</b> have a <b>strong careers service</b>, through offering a sector-based portfolio of Careers Fairs, support guides and Internship opportunities for students. The SAP will support both universities to promote understanding of the local labour market and promote opportunities from local employers for HE students.</p>	SAP, OxUni, OxB, OxBROs	3	Long term
	<p>o With the University of Oxford, OxLEP has invested in a new <b>Centre for Applied Super Connectivity</b>. The centre will train people with necessary skills in superconductivity which can be transferable to other relevant industries:</p>	OxLEP	3	Long term
	<p>o University of Oxford and Oxford Brookes are obligate to the Office for Students (OfS) <b>Access and Participation Plans</b> to improve equality of opportunity for underrepresented groups to access, succeed in and progress from higher education.</p>	OxUni, OxB, CEC	2	Long term
	<p>o Work with Harwell Campus Skills Strategy Group to ensure a <b>future pipeline of diverse talent</b> to meet future needs. OxLEP will maintain membership and engagement with organisations such as Connect Harwell Nxt Gen which nurtures and supports early career professionals.</p>	HCSS HNxtG	4	Long term
	<p>o Promoting <b>employer ‘good practice’</b>, such as employer sponsored university places leading to graduate employment.</p>	OxEmps	3	Long term
	<p>o Promoting local graduate schemes such as the UKAEA Graduate Scheme, Culham which focusses on Engineering graduate support.</p>	UKAEAGS	4	Long term
	<p>o Promoting <b>Internship programmes</b> to encourage work experience during undergraduate programmes, such as the University of Oxford’s Crankstart Internship Programme. Such schemes might offer updates on internship and career opportunities, one to one CV and Internship advice, access to funds to support unpaid/poorly paid work experience and research placements and career mentoring.</p>	OxUni	4	Long term
<p>o Championing breakthrough career pathways, such as those supported through <b>Knowledge Transfer Partnerships</b>, (KTPs) which link businesses with expert academic teams which are led by talented graduate and post-graduates, particularly linked to innovation sectors. Key contributions include mentoring and development and expansion of skills.</p>	KTPs	4	Long term	

5



**Business Skills Provision and Support:** Meeting the skills demands of Oxfordshire’s Cornerstone and Breakthrough employers, including those sectors most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic which can include the promotion of upskilling and reskilling and supporting the development of enabling and ‘softer’ skills that employers demand.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Skills Bootcamps</b> are flexible training programmes lasting up to 16 weeks, based on employer / sector ‘in-demand’ skills needs which may be either regulated (i.e., qualification based) or non-regulated (e.g., based on alignment with industry standards). It enables adults to complete training around work and other commitments. Businesses utilising Skills Bootcamps to train staff need to pay a percentage of the training costs and must prove an employees’ role progression on completion of the course.</li> </ul>	NSF	3	Medium/ Long term TBC
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employers are reporting a shortage of high-level technical skills, particularly for the innovation sector. Labour shortages are also amplified by settlement challenges resulting from the UK leaving the EU. The 2021 Spending Review announcement included various schemes to support businesses to access overseas talent. These include:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o A new <b>Scale-up Visa</b> will be open to applicants with a high-skilled job offer of at least £33,000 (also needs to pass a language proficiency test).</li> <li>o the launch of a <b>Global Talent Network</b> in Spring 2022, to bring highly skilled people to the UK in key science and technology sectors.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	HMGSUV	3	TBC
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Digital skills</b> are becoming near-universal requirements for employment. The move up the career ladder from low- to high-skill jobs comes with increased demand for specific digital skills. Acquiring specific digital skills makes career progression as well as a pay increase more likely. The Levelling Up White Paper states that there are seven <b>Local Digital Skills Partnerships</b> operating across England and that the Government is working with devolved administrations to consider how best to share the insights and evaluation of the programme to help build digital skills capability across the UK.</li> </ul>	HMGGT NHMG HMG	3	TBC
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Digital skills</b> are becoming near-universal requirements for employment. The move up the career ladder from low- to high-skill jobs comes with increased demand for specific digital skills. Acquiring specific digital skills makes career progression as well as a pay increase more likely. The Levelling Up White Paper states that there are seven <b>Local Digital Skills Partnerships</b> operating across England and that the Government is working with devolved administrations to consider how best to share the insights and evaluation of the programme to help build digital skills capability across the UK.</li> </ul>	HMG	4	Long term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Business and Digital skills development will be primarily led through the DfE Skills for Jobs White Paper:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o ‘Digital skills will be introduced for adults who need essential digital skills for work, giving free access to new digital skills qualifications based on employer-supported national standards’.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	HMG	3	Long term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Establish pathfinder <b>College Business Centres</b> concentrating on local priority sectors, and we will offer support through the ‘Strategic Development Fund’.</li> </ul>	HMG	3	Long term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o To ensure that <b>adult education budget</b> funding rules continue to allow a mix of face-to-face learning and online education to support providers to capitalise on the potential of digital learning.</li> </ul>	HMG	3	TBC
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The SAP will work with the Government and FE providers in anticipating the occupational standards needed in order to meet the energy performance of a zero-carbon economy.</li> </ul>	SAP, HMG, OPN	2	Medium/ Long Term

Priority Action	Partners	Stage	Time scale		
<p><b>6</b></p>  <p><b>Ensure training and re-skilling provision in identified priority sectors:</b> High level and specialist skills can be more important than length of experience. To maximise the opportunities across current and projected growth sectors, we need to continue to work collaboratively with the main delivery partners through our Provider Network to support the development of the skills infrastructure.</p>					
<p>To support the need from employers to provide increased numbers of Higher-Level technical provision, OxLEP has invested <b>£23m in skills capital infrastructure</b>, which has leveraged at least double this amount in partner contributions, to support a range of provision aligned to key sectors and priorities including Apprenticeships and T-Levels. Most of these courses are now delivering additional specialist skills and training outcomes across the county and offer the most up-to-date facilities and equipment. This will help students move successfully into employment or on to further technical education.</p> <p>We are working collectively with providers: University of Oxford, Activate Learning, Abingdon and Witney College, Oxfordshire Advanced Skills and Henley College to 2025, in order to maximise student demand, continue employer engagement and to use these investments to deliver a step change in specialist provision. The SAP Board and OxLEP will identify, explore and address any barriers to Higher Level Apprenticeships perceived by SME employers.</p> <div data-bbox="199 831 1082 1227" style="background-color: #e6f2ff; padding: 10px;"> <p><b>Additional provision includes:</b></p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> <p><b>Digital and ICT</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Centre for Applied Super Conductivity</li> <li>• Livestock Technology Centre</li> <li>• Advanced Skills Centre</li> <li>• Advanced Digital &amp; Science Centre</li> <li>• Oxford Centre for Technology and Innovation</li> </ul> </td> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> <p><b>Health and Social Care</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Care Skills Training Centre</li> </ul> <p><b>Construction</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Construction Skills Academy</li> <li>• Green Construction Skills Centre</li> <li>• Earth lab and Innovation Hub</li> </ul> <p><b>Visitor Economy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hospitality Training Centre</li> </ul> </td> </tr> </table> </div> <p style="text-align: center; background-color: #1a3d54; color: white; padding: 5px;">Figure 13 Additional Provision</p>	<p><b>Digital and ICT</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Centre for Applied Super Conductivity</li> <li>• Livestock Technology Centre</li> <li>• Advanced Skills Centre</li> <li>• Advanced Digital &amp; Science Centre</li> <li>• Oxford Centre for Technology and Innovation</li> </ul>	<p><b>Health and Social Care</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Care Skills Training Centre</li> </ul> <p><b>Construction</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Construction Skills Academy</li> <li>• Green Construction Skills Centre</li> <li>• Earth lab and Innovation Hub</li> </ul> <p><b>Visitor Economy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hospitality Training Centre</li> </ul>	<p>OxLEP, A&amp;W, ACV, HC</p>	<p>4</p>	<p>Medium term</p>
<p><b>Digital and ICT</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Centre for Applied Super Conductivity</li> <li>• Livestock Technology Centre</li> <li>• Advanced Skills Centre</li> <li>• Advanced Digital &amp; Science Centre</li> <li>• Oxford Centre for Technology and Innovation</li> </ul>	<p><b>Health and Social Care</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Care Skills Training Centre</li> </ul> <p><b>Construction</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Construction Skills Academy</li> <li>• Green Construction Skills Centre</li> <li>• Earth lab and Innovation Hub</li> </ul> <p><b>Visitor Economy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hospitality Training Centre</li> </ul>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o <b>The Oxfordshire Advanced Skills (OAS)</b> facility sited at Culham opened in 2019 and offers high quality training for Apprentice engineers and technicians at technology businesses. Their aim is to develop the next generation of manufacturing engineers to support the future skills needs of business.</li> <li>o Activate Learning is working in collaborative partnership with Milton Keynes College to deliver a new South-Central <b>Institute of Technology</b> at its Blackbird Leys campus offering Higher National Certificate (HNC) digital qualifications that include Cyber security, Software development, Programming and coding, Data analytics, Cloud networking, Games and animation, Innovation and digital transformation and Big data and visualisation.</li> <li>o <b>The University Technical College (UTC) Oxfordshire</b> opened in 2015, for students aged 14 to 19 years of age, specialising in life sciences, physical sciences and engineering. It has support and backing from the local business community and has high profile industry partners involved in the development of the curriculum.</li> <li>o The newly built <b>Advanced Scientific Training Centre</b> at MRC Harwell is a state-of-the-art scientific training centre dedicated to training and skills transfer within the life sciences. The centre is purpose built to deliver high-quality scientific training develop skills in life sciences by expanding training and education opportunities for researchers and technicians.</li> </ul>	<p>OAS, UKAEA</p> <p>IOT, ACV</p> <p>UTC</p> <p>MRCA</p>	<p>4</p> <p>4</p> <p>4</p> <p>4</p>	<p>Long term</p> <p>Long term</p> <p>Long term</p> <p>Long term</p>		

# CHAPTER 6

## ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS

### Taking a local leadership role

The SAP is one of six business sub-groups that support the delivery and governance of the LEP.

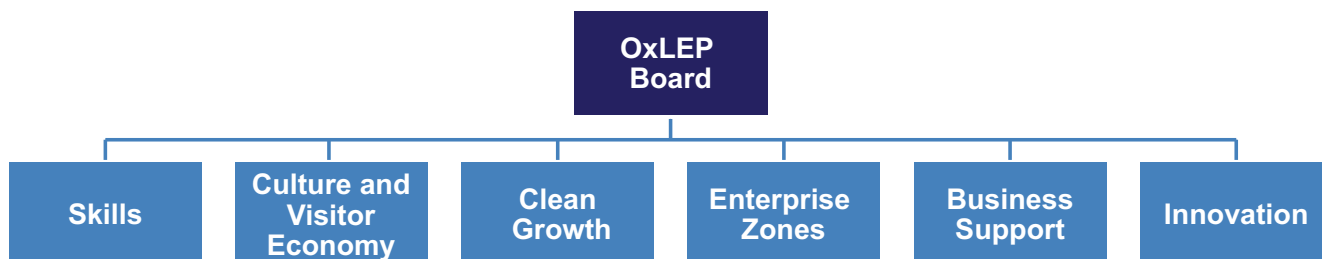


Figure 14 OxLEP Sub-Groups

Whilst convening industry expertise these sub-groups also allow the SAP to reach into an ‘extended family’ of c100+ key stakeholders and engage a broad range of employers from a variety of industry sectors.

The Oxfordshire Skills Board (OSB) was established in 2011. It brought together a wide range of public and private employers, secondary, further and higher education skills providers and stakeholder groups. Working closely with the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, it is driven to achieve improvements in the skills available to Oxfordshire’s employers and the learning opportunities available to students, residents and workforce. In many ways OSB was an early Skills Advisory Panel (SAP) but without the formal recognition of Department of Education (DfE). As the Oxfordshire Skills Board has taken on the additional responsibilities of the SAP for the DfE, this Local Skills Report and Plan will continue the ambition to develop a more collaborative and co-ordinated approach to strategic skills development.

Skills development has always been a core priority for Oxfordshire; in recognition that skills play a critical role in economic growth. A well-trained workforce is a pre-requisite for a strong and sustainable economy and the life blood of every business and organisation.

The Oxfordshire Skills Board published its first skills strategy in 2013 which set out a high-level vision for skills development in the area. It noted that the pace of change since its launch has been significant across many areas – delivering against its City Deal funded Apprenticeship programme, commissioning elements of the European Social Fund programme to help those furthest from the workforce and capital investment in the skills infrastructure through the Local Growth Fund.

The implementation of the 2016 ‘Building a 21st century skills ecosystem’ set out key priorities to address the skills challenges until 2020 and recognised that,

‘Oxfordshire’s people are the county’s principal resource in supporting the next phase of economic growth. They are versatile, adaptable, generally highly skilled and in great demand by our vibrant and virtual economy’.<sup>19</sup>

A key element of our leadership role has been to use the skills strategy priorities to invest in our skills infrastructure and to that end we have overseen c£23m investment, which has leveraged at least double this amount in partner contributions, in the creation of new skills centres across Oxfordshire. With many operational and accepting new students, it is over the next few years that we’ll start to see real step change as student numbers grow. By

<sup>19</sup> OxLEP, Skills Strategy (2016) <https://www.oxfordshirelep.com/about/our-strategies/skills-strategy>

2025, these new facilities will develop and train 7000 learners annually in a variety of full and part time courses, including higher and degree level Apprenticeships in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM), Health and Social care, Visitor Economy, Digital, Agri-Tec and Construction sectors. Training courses available include Robotics, Power Engineering and Space Science.

Our SAP is built on the employer led Skills Board which brings employers, providers, education leaders and policy makers together with a common aim. There are around 350+ providers active in Oxfordshire. Around 18 providers deliver in excess of 90% of all outcomes. We have been working with many providers through a tri-annual 'Provider Network' meeting where information is exchanged, policy reviewed, and strategy is developed. This has been a great success and will continue to be a focus for us moving forward. This group has a nominated 'seat' on the SAP adding value to our leadership role.

Over the past six years, we have worked closely with providers and employers including Activate Learning, Abingdon and Witney College, The Henley College and UKAEA to jointly fund new facilities which meet the local skills need and training in the following sectors: STEM (which includes Advanced Digital and Science, Robotics, Power Engineering and Space Science), Health and Social Care, Agri-Tech, Visitor Economy and Construction. Employers have been at the heart of these developments – helping shape the infrastructure required and course content when developed.

We regularly engage our local Members of Parliament and Business Representative Organisations to share knowledge and understanding of the business and skills support landscape, to reflect key messages and to better align economic recovery planning support to businesses. We also contribute to employer and provider skills

strategy groups, such as the Harwell Campus Skills Strategy, Advanced Scientific Training Centre and the Abingdon and Witney College's Curriculum Oversight Strategy Group.

The SAP regularly engages in OxLEP's meeting and events cycle – including virtual Q&A's bringing thought leaders, businesses and providers together to discuss key skills challenges and opportunities. The frequency of these events has intensified during the pandemic to ensure a regular information flow between the SAP, OxLEP and our business communities that helps shape economic recovery planning.

From its inception as OSB, over a decade ago, the SAP is continuing to develop its understanding of the changing dynamics of our economy. We have led the development of, or supported, numerous strategies that ensures an up to date understanding of the key challenges – including Skills Strategies, Strategic Economic Plans, ESIF strategies, Local Growth Fund strategy, the Local Industrial Strategy and Economic Recovery Plans and more recently the Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire report. Each recognises the value of people and skills and each build understanding of current and future skills opportunities and challenges.

Our knowledge base has been further developed through the creation of a Labour Market Information (LMI) webtool. It has enabled us to more easily track 'real-time' skills and employment data which allows us to inform and influence a wide range of stakeholders. However, we recognise the need to make the local LMI more accessible over the medium to long-term, for young career seekers, their families and school/college career leaders which is also embedded with curriculum resources, especially in sectors with high skills and labour demand. We are investigating the best way this can be delivered from April 2024.

## OxLEP Skills Hub wider programmes



Figure 15 OxLEP Skills Hub wider programmes

There are several programmes being delivered by the OxLEP Skills Hub which support the development of skills across Oxfordshire and that the SAP have been instrumental in developing. This includes working in partnership with the Government sponsored Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC) to create an Enterprise Advisor Network and Careers Hub, the Oxfordshire

Apprenticeships initiative (including an Ambassadors programme and annual awards ceremony) and developing Community Employment Plans (CEPs) on strategic developments – a vital opportunity to maximise opportunity for all.

Engaging and supporting SMEs on navigating the skills landscape remains one of the SAP's key priorities. We had hoped to extend the ESF Skills for Business programme delivery for a further 12 months until 31st July 2022. Due to being unable to receive the necessary assurances of ongoing support from the DWP, the decision was made to close the programme. It does however leave a fantastic legacy. Since the launch in the winter of 2019, we supported over 360 businesses and 30 new Apprenticeships were created – from a variety of sectors – to evaluate their skills and learning needs, creating practical solutions as well as upskilling hundreds of business employees from right across the county.

The knowledge and experience gained through the delivery of the ESF Skills for Business programme will be fully utilised in a new £1.7m Social Contract programme to support those communities most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Programme delivery starts Spring 2022 and runs until 31st March 2024. The supported community groups across Oxfordshire include young people, minority ethnic communities, those furthest from the labour market and the Over 50's. The Social Contract programme links directly to the Oxfordshire COVID-19 Economic Recovery Plan (ERP) which is the comprehensive and co-ordinated whole system economic route map response to the COVID-19 pandemic.



## Significant Skills and Capital Investment

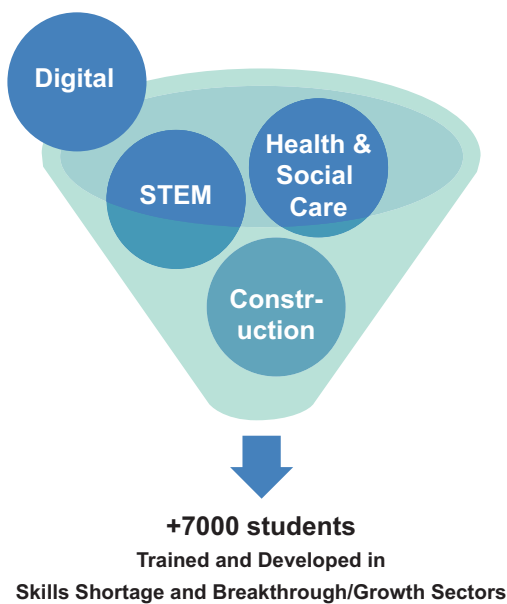


Figure 16 Skills Capital Investment Out-turn

We are hugely proud that we have been at the heart of significant skills capital investment in Oxfordshire. This is delivering top quality physical infrastructure in key sectors identified through our strategy's developed over the past decade - including City Deal and Local Growth Funds.

These facilities – developed with employers at their heart will accommodate the training and development of over 7000 students in identified growth sectors and areas of skills shortages, including STEM, Health and Social Care, Construction and Digital. This level of co-ordinated and collaborative investment in the physical skills infrastructure aligned to identified place based economic strategy was unheard of pre OSB and OxLEP and has helped shape new provision for generations of learners to come.

Our regular engagement with the main providers aligned to real time Labour Market Information ensures we continue to help shape provision – including community-

based learning and the deployment of Adult Education Budget although we hope that SAPs in non-MCA areas can increase influence over budget allocations to similar levels seen in MCA area perhaps through some form of co-commissioning protocols. That will help embed SAPs nationally as one of the key bodies responsible for skills strategy and delivery and provide greater influence over funding and ultimately delivery than is currently the case.

An example of where the SAP has helped shape provision based on identified areas of shortage is in construction. Oxfordshire has significant growth ambition yet there is insufficient delivery of construction training to meet current and projected demand. To address this skills gap, the SAP and OxLEP worked in collaboration with Abingdon and Witney College utilising Local Growth Funding to refurbish four former warehouse units in Bicester. The facility now provides opportunities for Apprentices to train for the fast-growing property maintenance sector, alongside traditional professional trades in plumbing, electrical installation, carpentry and joinery.

The Oxfordshire Energy Strategy sets out an ambitious framework to enable the county to be at the forefront of energy innovation to foster clean growth. The strategy aims to 'spearhead a further £1.35bn annually to the local economy, creating over 11,000 new jobs by 2030'<sup>20</sup>. In order to provide the skilled workforce for the zero-carbon sector, we need to ensure that there is the skills capital investment in place to meet this increasing demand.

OxLEP's Skills Hub has created a strong working relationship with both cornerstone businesses and breakthrough businesses in order to inspire young people to access local employment opportunities. Through the Skills for Business programme alone we have

<sup>20</sup> Oxfordshire Energy Strategy, OxLEP 2019 <https://www.oxfordshirelep.com/sites/default/files/uploads/Oxfordshire%20Energy%20Strategy.pdf>

## Oxfordshire Apprenticeship Awards 2022 Sponsors and supporters



supported over 360 businesses and created 30 new Apprenticeships and promoted 21 businesses and organisations through the newly created ‘The Keys to Your Future’ video for HE students. We work with businesses to inspire Oxfordshire’s young people and the breadth of opportunities available to them. Through our Careers and Enterprise Company partnership, Apprentice Ambassador Scheme, Oxfordshire Apprenticeship Awards and Community Employment Plans (CEP’s) we are raising aspirations and helping young people understand the skills needed, so that they can fully participate in Oxfordshire’s economic growth and understand the career pathways open to them.

The SAP has been an integral part of ERP development and will be at the heart of supporting recovery moving forward.

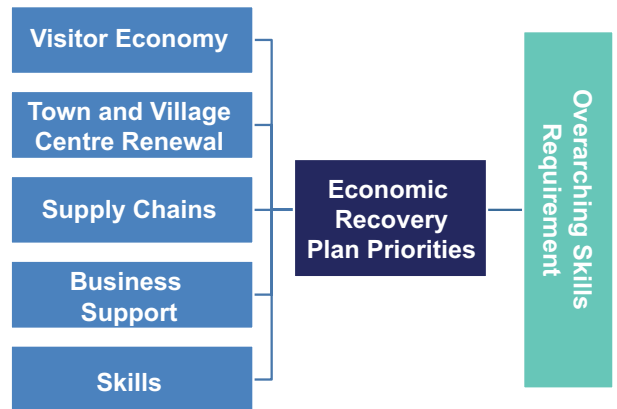


Figure 18 OxLEP Economic Recovery Plan Priorities

### COVID-19 recovery and renewal plans

Our Economic Recovery Plan (ERP) identified five priorities to support economic recovery.

Each of these five high level priorities have a skills requirement and each is working up initial priorities over the short term.

### What has happened so far

The SAP identified the need to support employers to navigate and understand the various new government skills schemes and funding initiatives announced by the Chancellor in 2020, many of which had extended end dates announced in the 2021 Autumn Spending Review. This included the new Kickstart Scheme, and bursaries for employers offering new Apprenticeships.

OxLEP in collaboration with the DWP and ESFA hosted virtual breakfast and lunchtime employer Q&A webinars which were hugely well received and helped support many employers to better understand the various schemes.

The ESF Skills for Business (S4B) team, and Growth Hub team worked closely together, particularly over April 2020 to August 2021, which was perhaps the most challenging period in living memory for SME's due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They provided much needed support, which included providing an excess of 2670 businesses with 12,000 hours of support, safeguarding or creating 1267 jobs<sup>21</sup>. The S4B programme enabled SMEs to analyse their skills needs and create a training and development plan which supports their business needs. Launched in Spring 2020, outcomes from this programme led to over 600 businesses engaged in education.

Two skills projects, defined in the OxLEP Economic Recovery Plan, have been created in response to COVID-19, one focussed on the labour and skills shortage in the Health and Social Care sector, and how to support those impacted through digital poverty and digital exclusion. The plans highlight, the lack of public transport and car ownership to access rural areas as a significant barrier to those who are interested in entering the Health and Social Care sector. The digital divide has become starkly transparent due to COVID-19 and the multiple lockdowns. Low-income groups are being challenged with not only with digital poverty i.e., the lack of computer equipment and internet, but also digital exclusion through lack of confidence in utilising the equipment once provided. Both skills projects will be delivered through the new Social Contract programme starting in Spring 2022.

Through OxLEP's tri-annual 'Provider Forum' meetings there has been the opportunity to engage with all providers about the work

of the SAP (DfE gave a presentation), LIS and broader skills work with government departments, for example the promotion of T-Levels for the Education Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). We will also be presenting the data from our new report, commissioned through Oxfordshire County Council's data team on the 'Skills, employment, and enterprise of Oxfordshire's ethnic minority communities'. The findings of the report have been used in this strategy.

We have built strong collaborations formed with other stakeholders to meet mutual outcomes including to support those furthest from the workforce, elementary workers, unemployed and young people claiming Universal credit. This has been achieved through engaging with Fedcap/Restart, Seetec/JETS programme, Adviza who holds the NCS contract for Oxfordshire, Activate/SSU and Aspire. Stakeholders also include government departments i.e., DWP, ESFA and DfE and local and county councils. This work has included hosting webinars and co-promoting virtual careers events and workshops.

Helping every young person take their next best step has been a key priority with our partnership with the Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC). Starting with the Enterprise Advisor Network, and more recently through the Careers Hub, we are close to meeting the Gatsby Benchmark targets in ensuring that all young people leaving secondary school in Oxfordshire understand the career pathways open to them.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we recognised that young people were being significantly impacted, through being unable to access employers for face-to-face activities, for example, traditional work experience and/careers fairs. Through working with our Cornerstone employers and the Springpod careers platform, schools and colleges were offered a virtual work experience week. Many

<sup>21</sup> OxLEP Impact report, 2021 <https://www.oxlepbusiness.co.uk/2020-21-impact-report>



Figure 19 OxLEP Skills, Find Your Future virtual careers platform

of the educational establishments engaged felt that the virtual work experience week would help students be better prepared for the actual physical work experience week. So, in 2022 rather than just one week of activity, schools and colleges will have the opportunity to utilise the Springpod platform for a whole month.

To replace the traditional face to face careers fair, we launched the 'Find Your Future' virtual careers platform in March 2021. It is available to view for free 24/7. It hosts 100 business and provider 'pods or virtual exhibits, which has links to their websites and vacancies. It is free for businesses to host a pod, and all agreed to be contactable by either a young person or Careers Leader. Accompanying the careers platform is the lively 'Your Fabulous Future' Oxfordshire labour market video with accompanying Labour Market classroom resources: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i5FcJAfeXWc&feature=emb\\_title](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i5FcJAfeXWc&feature=emb_title).

The 'Find Your Future' platform has been so successful, that we will be expanding it by a further 50 pods (150 in total) and will be fully funded to March 2024. The platform has also been designed to enable temporary information domes, one of which has been created to provide information during National Apprenticeship Week (NAW).

Oxfordshire has one of the highest concentrations of innovation assets in the world, however many young people (and adults) are not aware of the employment opportunities within the transformative technologies sector. In order to fully embed our 'Find Your Future' Labour Market resources, we are aware of the challenge to inform and engage curriculum teachers in bringing careers education into their teaching. To achieve this, we successfully applied to the CEC for Hub Incubation Project funding (HIP) for the 2021/22 academic year, to pilot our research question 'Will teacher's increased knowledge of the local labour market, lead to improved outcomes for young people'. Businesses working with teachers in creating three curriculum resources include: Rebellion, Catapult, RAF Brize Norton, Radioactive Waste Management, Unipart Group, NHS



Figure 20 Oxfordshire Careers and Enterprise Company Hub Incubation project participants

Health England, Pivot Power, UKRI Science and Technology Facilities Council, NAG, Ignite Sport and Ministry of Defence. At the start and end of the pilot, students, teachers and employers will complete questionnaires in order to ascertain the project impact. A final report will be created by the CEC for the DfE with recommendations as to how it could be rolled out nationally.

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a significant sharp rise in ‘Not in Education, Employment and Training’ (NEET) young people across the county. OxLEP delivered the Careers and Enterprise Company funded ‘My Choices’ programme which provided 1-2-1 careers advice to young people who were identified ‘at risk’ of becoming NEET, as well as working closely with the Oxfordshire County Council EET team. Further 1-2-1 support was offered to Year 11 students who were unsure of their career destinations, during the GCSE results week (August 2021).



Figure 20 Oxfordshire Careers and Enterprise Company Hub Incubation project participants

Since the Apprenticeship Levy was introduced in 2017, we have seen a year-on-year decline in Apprenticeship starts. One of the SAP’s long-standing priorities has been to support the Government’s agenda to increase the number of Apprenticeships being offered and starts. To promote Apprenticeships as an alternative career route to higher education; OxLEP Skills manages the annual Oxfordshire Apprenticeship Awards with Cornerstone and Breakthrough being the financial sponsors and supporters. The strength of the awards, which have been running over the past six years, is that they are sponsored, judged and awarded by the category business sponsor. Despite the challenges faced of moving the awards from a face-to-face event to a recorded/live broadcast

due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we saw an overwhelming increase in the amount of social media content about Apprenticeships that was shared across multiple platforms. The 2022 Apprenticeship Awards is well underway, with the Awards final being broadcast on the 19th May (the 2021 Award highlights can be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/IQjUOn-Wrk8>.)

Across Oxfordshire, there are multiple large-scale infrastructure projects being developed or planned. To maximise the benefits of the developments on communities, we aim to ensure that local people can better access job opportunities. This is achieved through the development of Community Employment Plans (CEPs) – sometimes referred to as Employment and Skills Plans (ESPs). OxLEP Skills aim to support major employers in creating their CEP alongside district economic development leads and local planners. We then provide support and resources to set up and ensure success of appropriate steering groups and quarterly monitoring meetings. CEPs are key to maximising the social value of large developments, minimising social impact, and can help bring those hardest to reach closer to our vibrant economy - a key part in delivering an inclusive economy. CEPS can form part of S106 planning obligations and are currently in progress for 9 significant developments across Oxfordshire with a potential pipeline of 30 future CEP opportunities at construction and end-use phase. They encourage local spend/ procurement, place-based programmes, investment supporting educational achievements, skills-based training, access to employment, and growth of a future workforce with the necessary skills needed for future development. They provide positive social and community outcomes and benefits in areas impacted by strategic development and promote responsible business.

## The ‘Skills for Jobs’ and ‘Levelling Up’ White Papers

### DfE ‘Skills for Jobs’ White Paper, January 2021

Employers are being given a central role in designing almost all technical courses by 2030, aiming to ensure that the education and training that people receive is directly linked to the skills needed for real jobs. This will help address the mismatch between Further Education provision and those skills required by Oxfordshire’s cornerstone and breakthrough employers.

We are keen to support the delivery of the white paper, however the challenge exists in how to enable micro businesses (with up to 9 employees) that form 89% of employers in Oxfordshire, to engage in the course re-design. Most micro businesses have limited capacity and are focusing on day-to-day activity, particularly while operating within a pandemic/post EU transition environment.

Due to the wide range of specialist sectors operating in Oxfordshire, it might be challenging to create training courses for such small numbers of attendees. A more effective approach might be to ‘train the trainers’ who could then internally train and upskill staff to meet their specialised needs.

The ‘Skills for Jobs’ white paper has identified the need to improve the delivery of careers advice in schools and colleges. One of the proposed measures to achieve this includes ‘We will invest in more high-quality training for Careers Leaders, who have proven to be knowledgeable and effective in leading a careers programme’<sup>22</sup>

Through our CEC programme delivery, we have promoted and encouraged Career Leader training to schools and colleges. Career Leaders are typically teachers who have taken on the additional responsibility of leading Careers education within their school/college. The hours they have off-timetable devoted to careers, can vary from between two hours per week to full time. To ensure a more generalised time scale focused on careers, across all state secondary schools and colleges, we have developed the ‘Careers Innovation Gateway’ project in our Local Industrial Strategy Investment Plan<sup>23</sup>. The project enables all career leaders’ to be off curriculum for the same amount of time i.e., 0.5fte per week. This would allow all career leaders to participate in careers training, become confident in navigating and sharing local labour market intelligence, devote more time in employer engagement and become proficient in utilising the CEC’s Compass+ and CRM tool to share progress on the Gatsby Benchmarks.

### UK Government ‘Levelling Up’ White Paper, February 2022

‘Improving people’s health, education, skills and employment prospects to ensure that everyone, wherever they live, has the opportunity to live fulfilling, healthy and productive lives’, is a central ambition of the new ‘Levelling Up’ white paper.

From Spring 2022, OxLEP will be delivering our Social Contract Programme. Through clear evidence from both Oxfordshire’s Economic Recovery Plan (ERP) and Labour Market Intelligence, the Social Contract

<sup>22</sup> DfE (2021) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/skills-for-jobs-lifelong-learning-for-opportunity-and-growth>

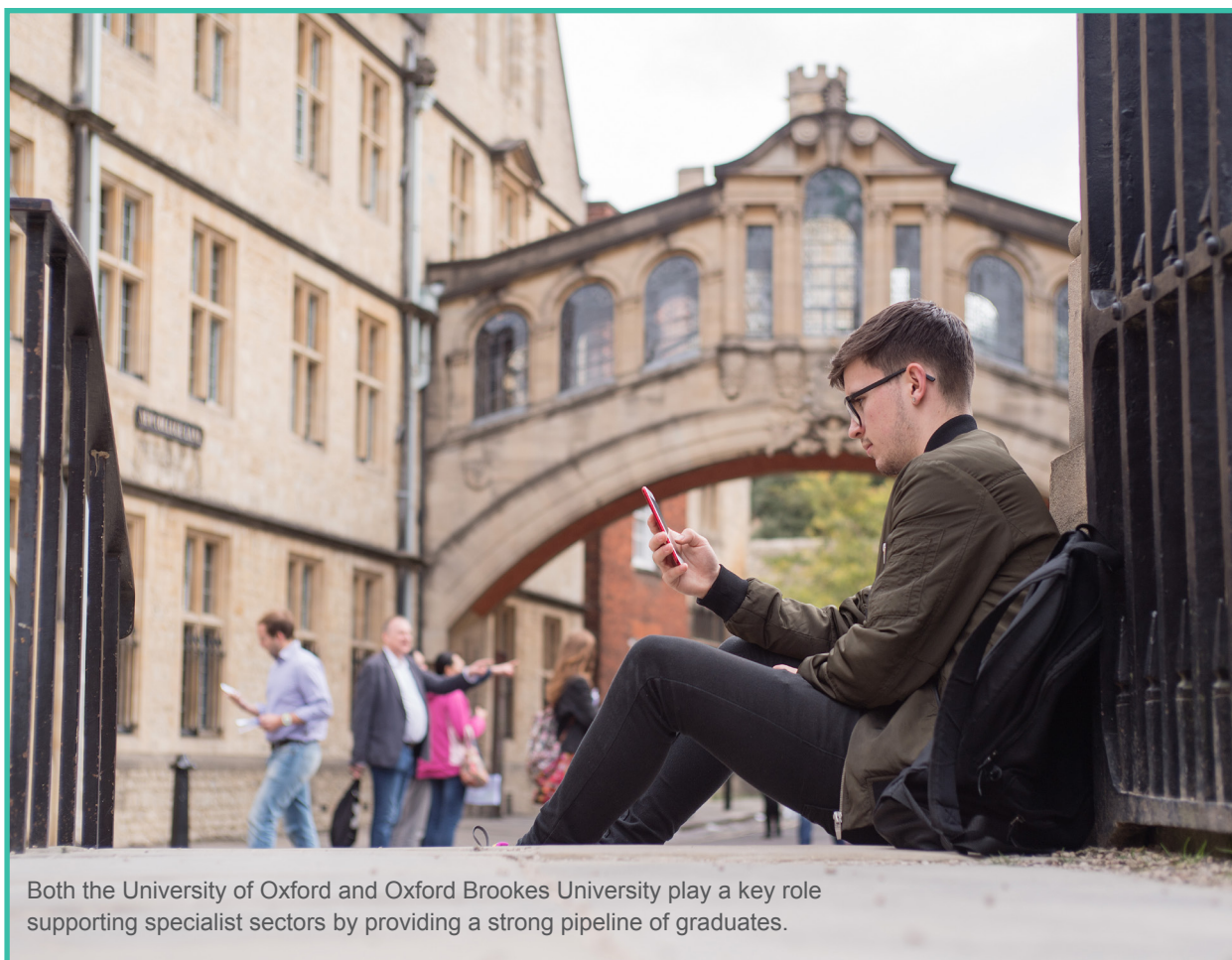
<sup>23</sup> OxLEP, The Investment Plan (2020) <https://www.oxfordshirelep.com/lis>

programme will address impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic related to unemployment or barriers to employment, education, and training and the impact these factors have on health and wellbeing – for individuals, for communities and for businesses.

Some of the ambitions of the Social Contract programme are to return Apprenticeships starts to pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels, increase Apprenticeship completions by a minimum of 10%, double the number of employers that utilise the Apprenticeship Levy. It will also offer travel bursaries to aid Social Mobility, IT bursaries to address digital poverty and social media campaigns to encourage businesses to employ local talent and become inclusive and disability confident.

OxLEP is keen to learn to more about the Government's new '55 Education Investment Areas (EIAs)' and the 'UK National Academy'

which were highlighted in the Levelling Up white paper. We await further guidance on the thresholds which will define these geographical areas. As both initiatives are particularly important for Oxfordshire due to having one ward identified as in the 10% most deprived in England and 16 wards in the 20% most deprived. The EIA's are to be places where educational attainment is currently weakest and will ensure 'that talented children from disadvantaged backgrounds have access to a post-16 provider with a track record of progress on to leading universities by opening new 16-19 free schools targeted in areas where they are most needed, such as high priority EIAs'. The UK National Academy is a new free digital education service which will help pupils from all backgrounds to succeed and acquire additional advanced knowledge and skills.



Both the University of Oxford and Oxford Brookes University play a key role supporting specialist sectors by providing a strong pipeline of graduates.

# CHAPTER 7

## CASE STUDIES/POSITIVE IMPACT STORIES

### Index of Case Studies

Case Study Index	Case Study Subject	Partner
CS1	Activate Learning Hospitality Suite	Activate Learning/OxLEP
CS2	Industry Engagement with Education throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic	The HENLEY College, CISCO
CS3	Oxford North Community Employment Plan – Training, Employment and Business Strategy	Oxford North, Thomas White Oxford (TWO), Hill Group,
CS4	Employer Engagement with Education	BMW Group
CS5	Broadening horizons with new talent	OxLEP ESF Skills for Business, Fischer Studios
CS6	'The Keys to Your Future' Video Collaboration	University of Oxford, Brookes University



## CS1. Supporting key sectors through industry insight - Activate Learning



Supported by the Local Growth Fund

In November 2021, OxLEP announced the opening of the new Hospitality and Catering facilities at Activate Learning's City of Oxford College, with £2.17million funding secured by OxLEP through the government's Local Growth Fund.

The new facilities include state-of-the-art training kitchens, featuring industry-standard equipment that was identified in partnership with Michelin star chef Heston Blumenthal, who also redesigned the content of the college's Catering and Hospitality courses.

Heston, whose restaurant, 'The Fat Duck', in Bray, Berkshire, is one of only five restaurants in the UK to have three Michelin stars, has worked with Activate Learning to reposition their offering to ensure learners are equipped to meet the demands of modern kitchens.



The facilities were officially opened on 4 November by Nigel Huddleston MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Sport, Heritage and Tourism.

Overall, the total cost of the project was over £3m, with the investment into the new facilities in line with both local and national demands for highly skilled and work-ready staff to take on roles within a sector that is vitally important for the local economy.

This development is a major feature outlined within the business-driven economic recovery plan led by OxLEP, released in February 2021 to support key sectors and industries hardest-hit by the pandemic, with the ambition of securing investment to encourage talent into the Leisure, Hospitality and Tourism sectors – inspiring young people to take-up careers in an industry that remains one of the biggest not just in this county, but across the UK too.

Nancy Buckley, Director of Career Pathways at Activate Learning, said: 'We work with hundreds of employers in the Hospitality and Catering sector across the Thames Valley and we know that people are desperate for good staff.'

'Here in Oxford the situation is no different. There are exciting opportunities out there for people with the right skills and we've worked hard to develop a curriculum that delivers this, and now we have amazing facilities for students to work in too.'

For the past seven years, Activate Learning have also worked to develop meaningful industry links with the NHS trusts in the area, working closely with them to develop teaching for Health and Care learners.

The 2019/20 academic year saw a new industry placement programme rolled out in preparation for the launch of the new Health T-Level that has come into place in 2021/22, along with a new 'Access to HE Nursing and Midwifery' programme, with the NHS trusts in the area directly contributing and feeding into the courses being run - to ensure these work to produce the type of high-quality talent needed to meet their recruitment needs.

In 2019/20 Activate Learning saw 249 students progress directly into employment within their local Healthcare sector at the end of their programmes, along with 273 nurses, midwives and Allied Health Professionals working locally who progressed from Activate Learning's Access to HE Programme running across the group of colleges.

## CS2. Industry engagement throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic - The Henley College and CISCO

Over the last couple of years – with the COVID-19 Pandemic striking – providers have had to get creative with the ways in which they deliver employer engagement opportunities, to ensure students still get the most out of such relationships with employers.



Last year saw CISCO – global leaders in IT, networking and cybersecurity solutions – facilitate a number of virtual workshops for students at The Henley College, utilising staff ‘volunteer days’ to engage with students. Pre-Covid 19, these days would mostly be utilised in places such as Kenya, volunteering to build schools or community projects - but as travel restrictions came into place preventing opportunities to support these communities, CISCO had to look closer to home to find somewhere that they could continue to still make a real difference to. With CISCO’s Vice President – Alistair Wildman – on the college’s Board of Governors, the opportunity for the college to engage with a crucial sector arose – highlighting to students the value of a career in IT, coding or cybersecurity – but also softer and more transferrable professional skills as outlined by the Gatsby Benchmarks.

CISCO created a curriculum specifically for the college, whereby employees from different departments used their 5 volunteer days

to meet students and share their industry experiences and knowledge – in order to help enhance students’ development and future employability.

Eamonn Egan, Vice Principal at the college, said of the partnership: ‘We consulted Alistair (Wildman) as to how we could work more closely with industry and he put us in touch with Claire Bovill, Director of Sales Enablement at CISCO – who we worked closely with to create an engagement programme for the students. ‘This programme took place as part of students’ enrichment hours – and consisted of six sessions based on CISCO’s own professional development programme, with relevant CISCO employees and senior leaders allocated to each session. Initially, the sessions were delivered at the college, but as the pandemic worsened, became virtual – however maintained the same interactive, informative structure as those delivered in-person. Obviously, as I think all organisations have found, virtual working has its challenges, but it was important – in order to ensure students received the same quality of learning and engagement with industry – that these sessions continued to go ahead. Each session focused on something different, giving an insight into working for such a large organisation – but was also a great opportunity for students to find out about CISCO’s Apprenticeship scheme, the roles they offer and practical steps to apply, for those interested. Though aspirational – our students really engaged and came to see how this may be achievable for them (7 of CISCO’s 70-degree apprentices taken on in 2019 came through the college) – and seeing a more senior leadership figure such as Alistair and what he has achieved really inspired them.’

Rijuvani Shrestha, who studied BTEC Level 3 Business at the college, successfully secured her placement at CISCO following the programme, spending 2 days a week there for up to 12 months over the past year.

Rijuvani said: ‘Alistair gave a really helpful insight into what kind of candidates CISCO are looking for, not just in terms of education but the kind of attributes a person needs. I’m really pleased about being selected for the placement as it will be incredibly beneficial to my career in the future.’

Swapna Jare - Curriculum Leader for Business Studies, Economics, Politics, IT and Travel & Tourism at the college, who worked alongside Eamonn and Claire to facilitate the engagement for the students – added: ‘When I think back to that first session taken by Alistair and the way the students were engaging it was really powerful – also to see how genuinely impressed he was with our students, encouraging them to apply for Apprenticeship opportunities, it shows how vital industry engagement can be.

‘This isn’t going to be a one-off programme, having seen how successful it has been it is definitely something we will look to continue and repeat – maintaining such a positive relationship with CISCO is so important to us.’

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### **CS3. Community Employment Plan (CEP): Training, Employment & Business Strategy - Oxford North**

Oxford North is the development aiming to realise the vision of Thomas White Oxford (TWO), on behalf of St John’s College, Oxford, to build a new sustainable innovation district on 64 acres of land, creating 480 homes for 1,500 people, 1 million sq. ft of labs and offices for 4,500 jobs, three new public parks and shops, bars and restaurants for Oxford.

Working with a highly skilled team of masterplanners and architects, landscape designers and consultants, and in discussion with Oxford City Council, Oxfordshire County



Council, and Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP), Oxford North will see the transformation of a significant part of Oxford.

As a large-scale infrastructure project, Storey Consulting has been working with key parties including OxLEP on the development of the Oxford North Community Employment Plan (CEP) on behalf of TWO – titled the ‘Training, Employment & Business Strategy for Oxford North’.

A key part of the Oxford North CEP focuses on improving employability within the area – engaging with individuals that the council identify with shared protective characteristics, in order to establish their career objectives and identify routes into employment for them. TWO has committed to this through engagement with OxLEP, Oxford City Council, the voluntary/community sector and training providers, to establish the creation of a talent pool of local residents that can be linked to the opportunities created.

Through the CEP, Oxford North has committed to working with local training providers to develop short courses linked to skills gaps, maximising opportunities for individuals to re-train or be re-deployed that come from sectors adversely affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic. This collaboration and engagement will also provide Apprenticeship opportunities – all along the supply chain – for local people, through both the development of Oxford North and the resulting community created.

‘Being on-site and seeing what’s happening each day is really exciting – Oxford North is a big site, and it is great seeing a large infrastructure project coming together.’ Alex Morley, Trainee Site Manager, Hill Group, working at Oxford North.



Tom Storey, Founder of Storey Consulting, said: ‘The difference between Oxford North and other large developments is the attitude taken to the project; their approach is about maximising positive impact - rather than just mitigating the negative effects of development. ‘We have done a great deal of in-depth labour forecasting, which has been shared with the local councils to ensure there is time to source the labour required, including a detailed training need analysis.

‘Not only is this project about providing opportunities to improve employability for those in the county that may otherwise struggle to enter the labour market – but it’s also about upskilling and creating further opportunities for local workers already here in the county. We’ve looked at how we can support underemployed demographics and tackle social issues including intergenerational social mobility, realising aspirations and how these can be achieved.

‘The CEP focuses on a number of key priorities for us – skills around sustainability, digital skills, STEM skills, professional skills – and wider challenges in areas including the importance of leadership and tackling negative perceptions surrounding the industries

involved within the development. For instance, we hope to create positive role models by engaging with local schools and training providers to highlight the incredible work of some of the young women working on Oxford North in highly-skilled jobs within the STEM and construction fields.’

#### CS4. Employer engagement with education - MINI Plant Oxford

MINI Plant Oxford has been at the heart of its community for over 108 years and employs over 3,700 highly skilled employees and Apprentices, who together build 1,000 MINIs a day - one every 67 seconds. The plant is one of the largest employers in Oxfordshire, with a core focus on nurturing and retaining local talent. It’s one of four locations rolling out the highly-commended BMW Group UK Apprenticeship scheme – ranked in the RateMyApprenticeship Top 100 Apprenticeship Employers table.

#### Engaging local schools

There’s a dedicated schools engagement team and Mark Massingham is Plant Oxford’s School Liaison Officer, connecting BMW Group with local education settings. It is Mark and the team’s role to build these relationships through various different engagements, including delivering presentations to students, taking part in mock interviews and bringing schools on site.

‘A key priority for us is reaching out to students early on’ explained Mark who himself is a former teacher, ‘By ensuring they are aware of the opportunities available to them here at the MINI and further around the county. The majority of our employees at the plant are from Oxfordshire and the surrounding areas, so to ensure that pipeline of talent is retained, it is important to work with our local education providers to engage students.’



### Promoting Apprenticeships

Engaging with schools and colleges is based around informing students of the extensive Apprenticeship programme, which offers opportunities across different levels and entry points, in a variety of different areas across the plant. These are popular programmes across all age demographics, with school and college leavers. One aim is to focus more on those at the end of year 11 and those coming up to the end of year 13 – as these are the times when students are likely to be looking at their ‘next steps’.

‘The local talent pipeline has always been hugely important to us, but it was our Head of Apprentice and Associate Training, Dr Simon Farrell, who really made working hand-in-hand and building these networks with the schools a priority – particularly over the last 3 years. And then from there OxLEP supported us in opening doors to contacts in education and connecting us with local schools.’

### Working with OxLEP

The local talent pipeline has always been hugely important and working hand-in-hand and building these networks with the schools has been a particular priority over the last three years. At this stage the OxLEP has supported in opening doors to contacts in education and connecting us with local schools. It’s also about supporting the local community in terms of employability and nurturing the soft skills within students

that are needed for the world of work. By helping schools with the Gatsby benchmarks - and focusing on students own personal development, not just academically, with Year 9, 10 and 12 students, helps to support their next steps decisions at the end of Year 11 and 13.

### Looking to the future

Going forward, facilitating this engagement with education providers in the area and ensuring that the pipeline of local talent remains a priority. Plant Oxford has added a facility called Junior Campus to add to its school engagement activities on site, to provide a broader insight into the manufacturing world and the need to look at sustainability too in a fun and engaging way and will hopefully be a really powerful recruitment tool.

‘BMW Group’s operations in the UK are critically dependent upon our ability to attract talented young people into our future talent programmes,’ commented Simon Farrall, Head of Apprentice and Associate Training, BMW Group UK. ‘Our work with the local schools helps us secure our talent pipeline whilst raising awareness of how attractive and exciting a career in advanced manufacturing can be. BMW Group needs to continually recruit enthusiastic young people to sustain our leadership of sustainable car manufacturing’

### Inspiring local students

Helen Richardson, Careers Coordinator from Icknield Community College, said: ‘Mark engages with our students in numerous ways – perhaps most importantly, coming into school every year over the past three years to run an Apprenticeship workshop with our Y11 hopefuls. This fantastic workshop offers our students encouragement, support, a thorough understanding of how the company operates, what the role entails, how the application process works and most importantly he

inspires them. He liaises at their level, he's honest and the students respond well to him.'

She added 'There are not that many companies that go the extra mile to deliver such amazing opportunities to our students – but it is definitely a two-way street – in return BMW Group and MINI have gained some fantastic Apprentices who will work with the group in their ongoing global successes'.

### CS5. Broadening horizons with new talent - Fisher Studios



The sudden economic impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic hit Fisher Studios immediately. Gone were many of the opportunities which required a photographer. Social distancing made many bookings impossible. Commercial clients squeezed their marketing budgets. Projects were put on indefinite hold was just the impetus I needed to move forward.'

Like so many business owners, David Fisher had a choice: to wait out the pandemic and hope business returned or be proactive by using the crisis to re-examine his business and make changes to help it to thrive in the long-term.

Fisher Studios came to OxLEP to speak with the Skills team about apprenticeships and the Kickstart scheme for young people. David saw it as a way of changing the business and gradually broaden its horizons with new talent.

A meeting with an OxLEP Advisor to look at the challenges faced by the studio helped David Fisher to create a 3-stage employment strategy, laying the foundations for the future.

As David explained: 'I found the meeting incredibly insightful and really appreciated the clear perspectives, ideas and suggestions. It provided me with some clarity and confidence especially in terms of my plans to recruit and was just the impetus I needed to move forward.' The sudden economic impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic hit Fisher Studios immediately.

### CS6. The Keys to Your Future - OxLEP Skills, Oxford Brookes University, University of Oxford

Oxfordshire is home to two world class universities – Oxford Brookes University and the University of Oxford, with the highest calibre of students attracted from all over the world to study here. However, once they have gained their degrees, the majority of graduates then leave the county - many to work in London.

The two universities were keen to come together to address the shared challenge of retaining the talent they have nurtured and with the support of OxLEP Skills, 'The Keys to Your Future' film (<https://youtu.be/X1MQlivIOa4>) was born.

The film was proposed as a new and creative way to showcase the wealth of job and career progression opportunities here in Oxfordshire for graduates, to encourage them to want to work in Oxfordshire and put down roots in the county. The aim was to show prospective students (and their parents and carers), undergraduates and postgraduates that Oxfordshire is not only a fantastic place to study but the degrees they gain – whatever subject they are in - will open doors to some of the UK's most exciting

and rewarding employers, who are right on their doorstep. It also aimed to highlight the diversity of employment available locally and help students appreciate more fully the areas where opportunities are increasing and what skills employers are seeking by giving them an insight into the local labour market.

Another aim shared by both universities is to widen admissions to a more diverse group of applicants. The Keys to Your Future film was also created with the ambition of illustrating that both the universities and the career opportunities here within the county are accessible to students of all backgrounds.



OxLEP Skills and the careers teams from the University of Oxford and Oxford Brookes University worked collaboratively to develop the narrative for the film and identify and engage organisations and alumni to feature in the film. This collaborative approach meant that, as a collective, a wider range of employers and individuals were engaged, and it was far easier to seek their agreement to be included in the film. In addition to new filming for the project, a wealth of pre-existing film and still images were gathered from the contributors so that as many employers and sectors as possible could be represented visually.

The WOW Show (an online channel creating real-life encounters with the world of work to inspire young people about their futures) was engaged to support with the narrative, undertake the filming and create the film.

Twenty-one businesses and organisations featured in the film, representing key

industries such as digital health, the creative industries, the visitor economy, publishing and retail, amongst others.

The film is now being shown at the universities' undergraduate open days and via their websites, to illustrate to prospective students where their degree could take them, helping to set longer term goals and aspirations. The film can be seen on the University of Oxford careers website: <https://www.careers.ox.ac.uk/article/staying-to-work-in-oxfordshire>

The film is also an invaluable resource for OxLEP Skills, who have shared it with secondary schools and colleges to use with older students who are considering their next steps.

Jonathan Black, Director of the Careers Service at the University of Oxford said: 'The project was a concrete, specific way for us to work with OxLEP Skills and Brookes, as we're all on the same side and facing the same challenges – it was a way of implementing collaboration output. It's easy to have good intentions about this sort of collaboration, but actually seeking the right opportunities to implement these are something else - this was a creative project and the right project for that.'

Iona Colvin, Senior Careers Consultant at Oxford Brookes University said: 'The film was initially mentioned by our outreach team as a good example of a collaborative project focused on what we have right here in Oxfordshire. Our Outreach Director then asked the Careers team to work on the project, which was then backed by senior leaders for funding and will form part of our communication and support for students nearing graduation.

'Given the calibre of students here in the county - the best talent in the world – we really want to retain and nurture students here and increase the momentum of these individuals across the labour market.'

## CHAPTER 8

# LOOKING FORWARD

The Oxfordshire economy is founded on a diverse mix of businesses, which for this report we have grouped into two main categories: cornerstone businesses and breakthrough businesses. Cornerstone businesses provide an essential platform for economic growth, through the delivery of critical services and supply chains (for breakthrough businesses), as well as most jobs for people across Oxfordshire. Breakthrough businesses are our innovation-focused businesses in science and transformative technologies, such as space, quantum computing, digital health and connected and autonomous vehicles.

Economic modelling suggests our economy will rebound quicker than many – and that many sectors will return to growth in the short term. Longer term impacts on unemployment may not be as bad as anticipated following the end of the furlough scheme. Employers need to understand that they are, unlike other areas of the country, recruiting in a competitive market. Jobseekers and young people need to be made aware of the exciting employment opportunities in the county and ensure that they have the right qualifications and digital skills which businesses require.

The workforce is highly trained, and we need to ensure that employers not only look at graduates to fulfil their talent pipeline but also consider people keen to learn through the higher-level technical provision such as Apprenticeships, which offers both progression and potential long-term loyalty to that business.

There are over 40,000 university graduates each year in Oxford. We need to ensure that rather than leaving the county for London and other areas they understand and experience the employment opportunities and quality of life which can be enjoyed if they put down roots here.

### Post Covid-19

Although we are well placed to recover economically fairly quickly from the COVID-19 pandemic; it has had a severe impact for many groups within the Oxfordshire labour market, which has seen unemployment rise from a historically low level in March 2020 and affected people in disproportionate ways in the economy, resulting in lost jobs and additional economic hardship. There is evidence of settlement challenges following the UK's exit from the EU which brings challenges for many businesses-including potential staffing and retention challenges.

Low-income families, vulnerable groups, and the most deprived areas have been the hardest hit by the COVID-19 Pandemic. Those who cannot work from home have been affected more and are often the most vulnerable. Both young and old workers have been disproportionately affected by redundancies and job losses, leading to heightened levels of inequality. Those in the Visitor Economy (covering Tourism, Hospitality, Retail, Arts and Culture) have borne the brunt of impact.

The spatial impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic have been uneven; Cherwell and the City of Oxford have been more impacted than other places in the County. 16 wards in Oxfordshire are in the most deprived 20% in England. The Northfield Brook ward has been identified as in the 10% most deprived in England. Most deprivation in these wards is classified under skills, employment and training rather than living environment. These places are frequently home to key workers and ethnic minority communities, both groups being disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>24</sup>.

In short these are unprecedented and challenging times for residents, communities and businesses with many residents joining

<sup>24</sup> OxLEP, Economic Recovery Plan (2020) <https://www.oxfordshirelep.com/publications>



the labour market – in some cases for the first time in many years, many communities facing uncertain futures and many businesses struggling to survive; whilst in parallel the County’s innovation ecosystem has continued to see areas of growth, particularly in Biomedical Sciences and the logistics sector.

In parallel the ‘Levelling Up’ white paper identified the Human capital – the skills, health and experience of the workforce that will help drive levelling up, with the ambition that ‘By 2030, the number of people successfully completing high-quality skills training will have significantly increased in every area of the UK. In England, this will lead to 200,000 more people successfully completing high-quality skills training annually, driven by 80,000 more people completing courses in the lowest skilled areas.<sup>25</sup>’ The ‘Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth’ sets a new vision for skills and training and underlines the importance of skills in driving business growth, productivity, inward investment and inclusive growth and marks the heralding of a new era in the skills landscape.

This revised Local Skills Report and Plan – overseen by our Skills Advisory Panel provides the basis for a strategic, co-ordinated and collaborative response to both the short to mid-term impacts of the pandemic, whilst continuing to lay the ground for the innovation led ambitions articulated in our Local Industrial Strategy. As locally led public/private business partnerships LEPs and SAPs have a comprehensive understanding of the local skills demand and supply and are able to work strategically with our employers to leverage funding and join up the dots, driving investment and helping to demystify the skills system for many.

There are multiple opportunities for all to embrace this new era and to actively become part of the solution that supports long term economic growth, prosperity and opportunity for all.

**Employers, business groups and business representative organisations** will be key in shaping future skills priorities, helping shape the curriculum and creating new partnerships with providers. They can support the next generation of talent through closer and deeper engagement with education, including schools, whilst providing Apprenticeships, Traineeships and T-Level placements and supporting work experience placements for those furthest from the labour market. The SAP - through our OxLEP Skills Hub team will help employers navigate the often overly complex skills landscape to identify the right options for them and will continue to work with local leaders on locally identified priorities which match local labour market priorities highlighted in this report.

**Training providers** – from the smallest provider of niche specialist delivery to the largest Further Education provider will continue to play a key part in taking forward our skills ambitions. They will continue to deliver a range of training and skills opportunities to many; offering support for those most impacted but they should also be in listening mode as employers bring forward key intelligence, skills and shorter-term training requirements and they should be responsive to clearly articulated needs.

**Residents and communities** – the SAP are here to help you achieve your potential by accessing opportunities and to help create the infrastructure that supports you throughout your learning and employment journey.

**We look forward to continuing to work collaboratively to deliver our key priorities for the benefit of our residents, communities and businesses.**

<sup>25</sup> Levelling Up white paper, HMG, 2022 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1052046/Executive\\_Summary.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1052046/Executive_Summary.pdf)



More information about the Skills Advisory Panel and OxLEP can be found [here](#); please do get in touch.

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Case Studies supplied with thanks to (in order of case study):

- Activate Learning
- The Henley College and CISCO
- Oxford North
- MINI Plant Oxford
- Fischer Studios
- Oxford Brookes University and University of Oxford

## Annex A: Core Indicators About

This Annex provides data and intelligence on key aspects of Oxfordshire's labour market and skills landscape. It has been published as a separate document that can be accessed:

- <https://www.oxfordshirelep.com/skills/our-approach>
- <https://www.oxfordshirelep.com/publications>
- <https://www.oxfordshirelep.com/about/our-governance/skills-sub-group>

The indicators presented within Annex A have been defined by the Department for Education (DfE), to ensure consistency between the Local Skills Reports being produced by Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) across England. OxLEP has drawn on local intelligence to provide commentary around these indicators. This local intelligence has been gathered from: OxLEP board members, Oxfordshire Skills Board/ Skills Advisory Panel members, Other OxLEP Sub-Groups, local employers working within the Oxfordshire Skills Hub on careers initiatives, local employers surveyed as part of the Oxfordshire Employer Skills Survey, local SMEs that have engaged with the OxLEP ESF Skills for Business Programme, the Oxfordshire Provider Network. As per the Department for Education guidance for Local Skills Reports, additional data analysis and local intelligence is provided within (or sign-posted from) Annex B.

## Annex B: Additional Data About

This Annex provides additional tables and charts. It has been published as a separate document that can be accessed:

- <https://www.oxfordshirelep.com/skills/our-approach>
- <https://www.oxfordshirelep.com/publications>
- <https://www.oxfordshirelep.com/about/our-governance/skills-sub-group>

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