

# West of England Annual Skills Report

March 2021



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## Linked Resources

[West of England Local Industrial Strategy](#)

[West of England Recovery Plan](#)

[West of England Employment and Skills Plan](#)

[West of England Climate Emergency Action Plan](#)

[West of England Regional Insights: the most recent economic and Labour Market Intelligence for the region.](#)

## Further Information

For further information about the West of England SAP please email:

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For further information about the underpinning analysis in this report please email:

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# 1. Foreword

We are delighted to introduce the first West of England Annual Skills Report, which sets out an evidence led analysis of the important work and progress being made by the region against the vision and objectives of its Employment and Skills Plan.

Led by the Skills Advisory Panel (SAP), a unique collaboration between public and private sector organisations, skills providers and the voluntary sector, the report has been underpinned by the latest labour market and business intelligence. This means that the employment and skills interventions developed in the region are directly responsive to employer demand, inclusion and local needs.

The Covid-19 pandemic has created huge challenges for the region and is having a profound impact on our labour market, accelerating some of the long-standing issues and further highlighting vulnerabilities of polarisation between our communities. The impacts have been particularly acute for parts of our economy, including for retail, hospitality and culture; and for some of our most strategically significant like advanced engineering and aerospace sectors, the recovery timeline appears elongated.

Despite these challenges, the region (through a Regional Recovery Taskforce supported by the SAP and other groups) has responded quickly and decisively. We have been able to work from a good platform with our existing measures, developed from our Employment and Skills Plan, flexing these through the last year to help the region to adapt and, really importantly, acting quickly by creating new ones where gaps have emerged.

Activity has included supporting the development of new digital skills and access – enabling people to continue to work and learn from home; creating an enhanced Adult Education offer to support the long term unemployed and those at risk of redundancy; expanding our one-to-one careers coaching service Future Bright; and launching the innovative Workforce for the Future programme to help SMEs retain and grow their skills capabilities. These interventions have helped to keep people in jobs and the region's unemployment rate in check.

The West of England will continue to build a robust and transparent evidence base, working with employers, sectors and networks through the SAP, to monitor the impact of Covid-19 and consider how employer demand and skills requirements may change over the coming months and years. We recognise these demands will evolve over the coming months and years, which is why it is imperative we continue our evidence-based work to allow the region to best position itself to take advantage of opportunities as they arise.

Our first Annual Skills Report provides a strong foundation to support regional and national ambitions for developing an inclusive, integrated employment, skills and education system which is aligned with demand and responsive to changing patterns of employment.



**Chris Grier**  
**Chair, West of England SAP; Local Enterprise Partnership**  
**Board Member**



**Joanne Rumley**  
**Deputy Chair, West of England SAP; Local Enterprise**  
**Partnership Board Member**



## 2. Skills Advisory Panels – Introduction

### Skills Advisory Panels: the national context

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

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

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

The White Paper committed to build on the work of SAPs to date. SAPs and their Local Skills Reports will feed into DfE trailblazes “Local Skill Improvement Plans”.

### The West of England SAP

The West of England SAP was established in March 2020 to oversee the strategic implementation of the people and skills components of the regions adopted [Local Industrial Strategy](#) (LIS). The West of England LIS sets out the regions ambition to drive clean and inclusive growth. Through the implementation of the LIS we want to ensure people can contribute to and benefit from the opportunities growth brings; focused on helping grow our economy in ways that protect the climate and environment upon which we and future generations depend.

The West of England Employment and Skills Plan, a key component of our LIS, recognises the distinctive strengths of our people and the places across the region and provides an over-arching framework to help shape the development of employment and skills activities. It sets a collective vision and shared priorities for delivery, reform and investment, helping to influence and catalyse action from both local, regional and national partners where priorities align.

The current pandemic and its impact on the economy has meant that the SAP had to adapt and respond quickly to provide evidence and advice around the immediate effects on the labour market and skills provision, as well as to consider the medium and longer term issues of recovery and how these may influence the priorities identified in the Employment and Skills Plan.

Sections 5, 6 and 7 of this report highlight how, drawing on this evidence, the region has significantly enhanced and adapted activity to respond to the challenges of Covid, whilst also keeping firmly focussed on its long term strategic goals. Our keystone programmes - Adult Education, Workforce for the Future, Careers Hub and Future Bright – have all flexed to extend their influence. In addition, a number of additional measures have been introduced through our Regional Recovery Fund, including the Digital Skills Investment Programme and Community Recovery Fund.

### **The SAP Board**

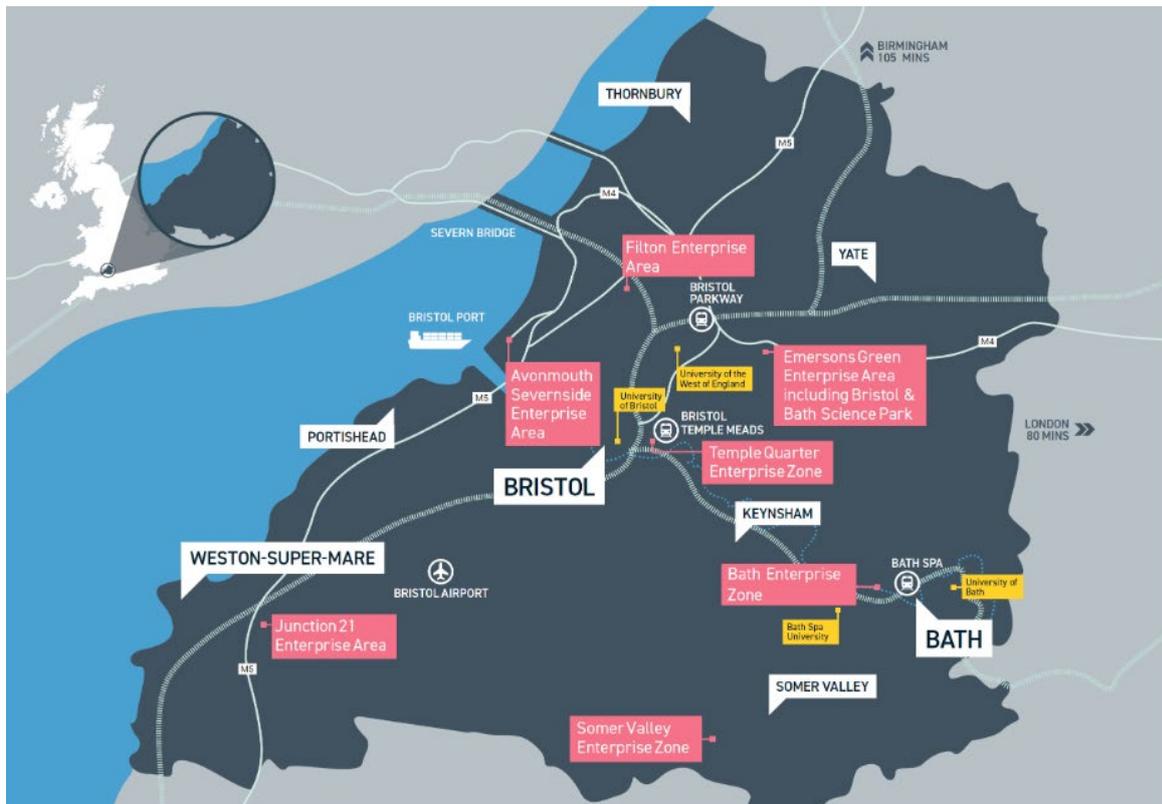
The West of England SAP is business led, currently chaired by a senior manager from one of the region's largest employers, Airbus, with a deputy chair from a local leading law firm (Foot Anstey). Membership includes a wider range of business, education and training provider representatives e.g. Business in the Community; Business West; SMEs; Social Enterprise; Higher Education; Further Education; Community Learning; a regional schools representative (from a Multi Academy Trust, Cabot Learning Federation); Western Training Provider Network; voluntary, community and health representatives (West of England Civil Society Partnership; UH Bristol); SWTUC; DWP and BEIS.

SAP meetings moved to monthly during 2020 given the new issues and urgency created by the pandemic. In 2021, these are reverting back to quarterly two-hour meetings to allow the SAP to drill further into key strategic issues and ensure that solutions and proposals developed align with national and local activity. The frequency of these meeting will be kept under review.

### **SAP Geography**

The West of England SAP covers the same functional economic geography as the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) covering the four local authorities of Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire. Incorporating the cities of Bristol and the UNESCO World Heritage city of Bath, the region provides a unique blend of urban, rural and coastal areas.

Figure 1: The West of England Local Enterprise Partnership geography



### 3. Skills Strengths and Needs

#### Economic Context

The West of England has a strong and diverse economy and is one of the country's economic success stories. It is the most productive city region in England outside London, with vibrant innovative businesses and a highly-skilled workforce. With economic links to Wales, the Midlands, London and the South West, ensuring a strong economy recovery in the West of England will help to drive a wider national recovery.

The area benefits from above average levels of productivity, low rates of unemployment, a highly skilled workforce, good rates of pay and high-quality jobs. Whilst growth is expected to continue in the medium-term, productivity growth has plateaued in recent years and is likely to have been impacted by the recent economic crisis.

Prior to Covid, it was recognised that there were challenges to ensure that all residents can benefit from the West of England's economic growth, in particular people from disadvantaged groups. Equally, from an employer perspective, recruitment was starting to become a challenge, in particular at higher skills levels. Whilst the pandemic presents the region with a number of new challenges, the challenges and long term aspirations identified in the Employment and Skills Plan and the Local Industrial Strategy remain.

#### Figure 2: Regional Strengths and Challenges<sup>1</sup>

Skills Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Working age population growing, reflecting attractiveness of area</li><li>• Higher than average employment rate (79% vs 76%)</li><li>• Better than average wages and high value job opportunities</li><li>• Highly qualified workforce (45% qualified to L4+ vs 40% for England)</li><li>• Broad, diverse workforce</li><li>• High quality and diverse job opportunities from supportive business environment</li><li>• Four universities and HE provision within FE colleges</li><li>• Established innovation cluster with network of assets and cutting-edge businesses</li><li>• Partnership working and local relationships</li><li>• Strong voluntary and community sector</li></ul>

<sup>1</sup> Data Sources: Annual Population Survey, ONS. Data as at March 2021.

## Skills Challenges

- Some employers struggling to recruit and facing skills gaps
- 47,800 people not currently in work who want to be
- Low pay an issue, particularly for part-time workers
- Wage and occupational inequality and in work mobility
- 141,800 people aged 16-64 without a L2 qualification
- Educational attainment in schools, particularly for disadvantaged children
- NEET levels in parts of the area and for SEND and Children in Care/Care Leavers
- Lower than average progression to Higher level learning
- Low awareness of apprenticeships
- Geographical inequalities and deprivation
- Variable quality careers advice
- Health inequalities and barriers to work
- Growing polarisation of work between higher and lower skilled occupations
- Under-utilisation of staff

Source: [Employment and Skills Plan, Evidence Base](#)

## Supporting local economic priorities and sectoral interventions

There is a concentration of high value, economically productive sectors in the regional economy, as outlined in the LIS. The LIS aims to promote these high value regional specialisms, particularly cross-sectoral innovation between 3 distinctive and overlapping sector strengths and their supply chains:

- advanced engineering including aerospace
- creative, cultural and digital industries; and
- financial, business and legal ‘tech’ services

These sectors are globally significant and help provide high value employment, allowing for a higher skilled workforce, compared to the national average, to thrive in the area.

The combination of a diverse economic base, incorporating several significant sector strengths and four universities with world-class teaching, research or community engagement, together with the geographical size of the region, supports interaction between sectors. Local intelligence suggests that this diverse economic base, with representation from a range of key industries and a balance of sectors within the economy, has helped to contribute to its lower than national average unemployment rate and higher than national average employment rate.

The LIS and our Employment and Skills Plan, also recognise that there are a number of ‘pervasive technologies’, like digital, which are increasingly shaping the activity of a range of sectors and changing the nature of skills demand. Likewise, our shift to a Net Zero economy will create demand for existing and new so-called ‘green skills’ as

economic activity restructures – skills policy needs to ensure that supply matches this demand; with a recent report by the LGA suggesting that by 2050 there will be an estimated 29,000 direct jobs within the low carbon and the renewable energy sector in the region<sup>2</sup>.

The pandemic has led to unprecedented pressures on some of our high value globally leading sectors and assets, putting them at risk. With the pandemic still ongoing, the impact on the economy remains to be fully understood and it is likely to get worse before it gets better, with further job losses and redundancies expected once government support schemes conclude. Whilst the long term impact of the pandemic on sectors, their supply chains and individuals remains to be seen, there are a number of areas where there is a clear existing and growing demand for skills; which align to our strategic aspirations.

### ***Digital Skills***

A fundamental aspect of building a sustainable regional recovery from Covid-19 and to encourage enterprise and innovation, is the development of digital skills – from basic IT skills to more specific analytics and software design. Key initiatives and programmes supporting the development of digital skills include:

- The **West of England Institute of Technology**, led by Weston College with Bath College, Gloucestershire College, Yeovil College and University of the West of England (UWE), provides a number of courses supporting digital, health and advanced engineering.
- **Digital Engineering Technology and Innovation (DETI)**: a two-year R&D programme being delivered by a partnership of WECA, National Composites Centre, Centre for Modelling and Simulation, Digital Catapult, University of the West of England, University of Bristol and University of Bath. It brings together advanced engineering companies, digital technology pioneers and universities, to push boundaries (and skills) of digital engineering for the future. Industry partners include Airbus, GKN Aerospace, Rolls-Royce, Siemens and CFMS.
- A new £2m **Digital Skills Investment Programme**, forming a key part of the West of England’s Recovery Plan. The programme will support basic digital skills (to build capacity to increase access and take-up) and medium-high level digital skills (through a multi-partner approach to delivering short, innovative, bespoke training courses addressing digital skills gaps).
- **Adult Education Budget (AEB)** – developing basic ‘entry’ level digital skills provision to support residents to gain lower level digital skills. A key focus of this work is creating pathways from entry level up to level 2/3 and then feeder routes into further higher levels of training to support industry needs.

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<sup>2</sup> Source: [Local Green Jobs Stimulating a Green Economy, LGA](#)

## ***Green Skills***

The West of England has set an ambitious goal to be net zero carbon by 2030. To achieve this target, a step change is required across a number of deliverables including ensuring that the labour market is equipped with the right skills to support this transition - be it in ensuring the construction sector has the skills required to retrofit existing buildings and implementing low carbon standards in new developments; or supporting traditional businesses to benefit from growth in the green economy e.g. within advanced engineering and aerospace.

In order to support the net zero carbon goal and aid green recovery, WECA has commissioned a study to analyse the current scale of the retrofit and wider 'green skills' market, how this can be stimulated to support our net zero ambitions, the current skills pipeline to support this growth and where further skills provision is required. It is critical that WECA seek to mitigate, rather than contribute towards a 'boom and bust' scenario, so must consider short, medium and long-term actions to help develop both the regional retrofit and green skills markets. Therefore, the commission (once complete) will help to support the objectives of, the '[Climate Emergency Action Plan](#)' and Covid-19 '[Recovery Plan](#)'.

It will do this by:

- Identifying and quantifying the existing retrofit/green skills market, highlighting existing regional specialisms and high growth areas.
- Providing a summary of existing skills provision, short falls and factors that may restrict job creation.
- Providing insight into regional growth scenarios for the retrofit market and green jobs/skills market, including barriers, risks and opportunities.
- Discussing the possible retrofit and green skills workforce requirements necessary to achieve the commitment of becoming carbon neutral by 2030 as part of the Climate Emergency declaration.
- Setting out the levers for market interventions and stimulus available to WECA, its Unitary Authorities and partners at community, regional and policy level.

## ***Health and Social Care***

An aging population and the Covid-19 pandemic have highlighted a growing demand for skills within health and social care. The demand within this sector spans a wide range of roles and covers a breadth of skills and training levels from entry level to high skilled, technical roles.

Further evidence exploring the specific skills and qualifications needs, and progression pathways of this sector will be undertaken in the coming months.

### ***Sectors disproportionately impacted during the pandemic***

In the West of England, as elsewhere, a number of sectors have been disproportionately impacted (retail, hospitality & leisure, etc), albeit the full extent of impact has yet to be felt (because of furlough, etc). These sectors are being closely monitored as part of the regional recovery.

### **Skills for particular groups and those furthest from the labour market disproportionately affected by the pandemic**

Alongside skills for specific sectors, the Employment and Skills Plan calls for a focus on supporting those furthest away from the labour market through the development of entry level skills, as well as supporting individuals progress within their careers through lifelong learning and support. The region has pockets of long-standing deprivation, with 16% of Local Super Output Areas in Bristol falling into the most deprived 10% in England, 6% in North Somerset and 2% in B&NES<sup>3</sup>.

A number of challenges have been identified where particular cohorts need more targeted support this includes but not limited to:

- **Unemployed and inactive looking for work** – supporting individuals into employment who often have complex barriers to work such as housing, mental health, drug and alcohol problems, debt, health, childcare, transport, etc. and therefore support programmes must take this into account.
- **Progression of the resident population** - whilst the West of England is successful in attracting highly skilled individuals into the area, it is less successful at producing its own highly skilled people, resulting in inequalities.
- **Educational attainment and preventing NEETs** - Educational attainment in schools (as measured at KS2, KS4 and KS5) is slightly below the national average for all young people (except in B&NES), but significantly below the national average for disadvantaged children (at all three stages).
- **Other ‘at risk’ groups** - including BAME, disabled, lone parents, women and domestic abuse victims. Evidence suggests that minority groups often struggle to access skills and employability programmes.

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<sup>3</sup> Source: [English Indices of Multiple Deprivation, 2019](#)

## 4. Skills Strategy

### Employment and Skills Plan Vision

*'By 2036, the West of England will be internationally recognised for its sustainable, inclusive and diverse economy, providing a high quality of life, prosperity and opportunities for all its residents. Our people will be skilled, healthy and able to access 'pathways of opportunity' to achieve their potential and our businesses will be able to find the skills and talent they need to innovate, add greater value and thrive.'*

To achieve this vision the West of England will work towards 5 strategic objectives:

**Objective 1:** Integrating our employment, skills and education system to ensure it is aligned with demand and responsive to changing patterns of employment.

*Why is this important?*

- Misalignment of supply and demand of current skills and employment landscape
- Technological and digital advances are expected to disrupt the world of work, our system must be responsive
- Funding and delivery models are fragmented, leading to duplication, gaps and confusion for learners and employers

*Priority areas/groups:*

- Identification of duplication, gaps and conflicts in the system
- Identify opportunities for freedoms and flexibilities to encourage greater impact
- Intelligence to align funding, strategic priorities and investment decisions
- Ensuring provision aligns with employer and employee needs
- Ensuring provision is intelligence led, informing national and regional decision making
- Ensuring provision is accessible and flexible to ensure optimum take-up and impact

**Objective 2:** Encouraging all young people to achieve their potential.

*Why is this important?*

- Educational attainment at school age, especially for disadvantaged groups, is below average
- NEET levels are higher than average, especially amongst disadvantaged groups
- There is strong evidence that good school outcomes and careers information deliver lifelong impacts
- With expected growth in high skilled jobs in the area, our young people need the skills to be able to access these opportunities
- Progression to Higher Education is below average

*Priority areas/groups:*

- Improving educational attainment (age 5-18), particularly for disadvantaged groups
- Development of skills with a strong employability and enterprise link, with a focus on skills requirements of the future
- Preventing young people from becoming NEET
- Ensuring disadvantaged young people are supported to achieve their potential, including outcomes for young people with Special Educational Needs & Disabilities
- Raising aspirations of all young people and their parents through effective careers education advice and guidance
- Ensuring young people within the region have the opportunity to progress to Further and Higher Education as well as apprenticeship and technical routes to higher skilled jobs

**Objective 3:** Supporting everyone who is able to work by helping to address their barriers to employment.

*Why is this important?*

- 47,800<sup>4</sup> not working in the region would like to do so. Addressing their barriers to employment would improve quality of life and reduce costs of existing benefit payments
- Access to employment can be affected by race, gender, disability, age, where you live and other factors. Supporting certain groups or locations could help address this
- Barriers to work can be complex and solutions often need to be tailored, but common barriers include low skills (including basic skills), health issues (including mental health), transport, language and childcare as well as social issues such as housing, drug and alcohol misuse and other complex needs

*Priority areas/groups:*

- Supporting people with low level or no formal skills
- Supporting older workers who may need to reskill or upskill  
Focusing action in areas with higher levels of deprivation
- Supporting people with complex barriers to education, employment and training
- Supporting people from diverse backgrounds
- Ensuring employers recognise the value of a diverse, skilled and active workforce and can create opportunities for all

**Objective 4:** Empowering people to progress within employment, including to better higher paid opportunities, if they wish to do so.

*Why is this important?*

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<sup>4</sup> Source: West of England workings based on data from the Annual Population Survey, ONS

- 17% of people are paid below the real living wage with implications for child poverty<sup>5</sup>
- Low pay and insecure jobs can leave people stuck in poverty and reliant on benefits
- Pay and occupational profiles are not equal, with women, disabled people, people from BME groups less likely to benefit from higher pay and higher level occupations
- There is evidence of under employment and failure of employers to take-up modern management practices, which can limit progression opportunities for employees

*Priority areas/groups:*

- People in low paid/insecure employment
- People without a level 2 qualification, as well as level 3 and level 4 skills required for progression
- People working part-time and self-employed
- People working in low skilled jobs who are under-employed
- People with other barriers to progression, including Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, mental health, childcare and transport
- Supporting people from diverse backgrounds and ensuring employers recognise the value of a diverse workforce
- Supporting employers to address skills gaps and fully utilise their workforce through modern management practices

**Objective 5:** Ensuring employers are able to recruit and retain the diverse skills and talent they need to thrive from within and beyond the region.

*Why is this important*

- Some employers are finding it hard to recruit staff to help them grow and others have workforces that lack the skills they need for the future
- Employers play a key role in workforce development, but there is scope to increase training and development, which evidence shows is ‘good for business’
- There are gaps in the skills pipeline to support our growing innovation sector (e.g. STEAM skills)
- Our clean growth and infrastructure ambitions will require growth in certain skills
- Skills pipelines, such as apprenticeships are under-utilised
- Some groups are under-represented in the workforce, providing an opportunity to address the shortages
- Improving the health of our workforce can improve productivity and reduce staff turnover
- A culture of lifelong learning and continuous professional development will enable to the workforce to adapt to future skills requirements

*Priority areas/groups:*

- Development of skills to support a diverse, clean and innovative economy with opportunities for progression and growth

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<sup>5</sup> Source: West of England Working based on the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, ONS

- Increasing awareness among employers and individuals of the range of skills development pathways (e.g. apprenticeships and T-levels) to increase engagement in these routes from both employers and individuals
- Increasing Continuous Professional Development activity amongst employers and the self-employed
- Increasing employer engagement with schools, colleges and communities
- Increasing workforce diversity and helping businesses recognise positive impact on driving business growth
- Improving workforce health

The Employment and Skills plan has identified a number of strategic actions many of which work towards more than one objective:

	<b>Strategic Activities</b>	<b>SO1</b>	<b>SO2</b>	<b>SO3</b>	<b>SO4</b>	<b>SO5</b>
1	Work towards a more integrated regional skills function. To include intelligence, evidence based commissioning, co-ordination of provision and informed decision-making	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Co-design activities which challenge and support our schools to improve outcomes and raise aspiration among young people		✓			
3	Enhance careers education, advice and guidance through expansion of the Careers Hub model. By co-designing a world class careers advice service that adds value to and complements the current CEC offer	✓	✓			✓
4	Secure investment for a community grant scheme for projects targeting local need or specific hard to reach groups	✓		✓	✓	
5	Infrastructure to connect people to employment and skills opportunities. Align plans to ensure employment and skills opportunities are supported by infrastructure that links people to opportunities	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	Support effective retraining opportunities across the region, ensuring residents and businesses are well prepared for a changing labour market			✓	✓	✓
7	Develop Future Bright Plus Build on successful parts of programme and expand remit based on mid-term evaluation	✓		✓	✓	✓
8	Further development/re-boot of the Apprenticeship Hub Focusing on brokerage (people and businesses) to	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓



The overarching ambition for the recovery plan is to:

*“Build back better by capitalising on our ingenuity, creativity and diversity to create good jobs and a high quality of life for all our residents whilst achieving sustained emission reductions. As we build back our places, we will strive to create greener, healthier, more vibrant communities to live and work, to ensure the region continues to attract visitors, talent and investment from around the world.”*

The recovery plan is structured around the following principles for recovery, which form the five pillars of the plan.

				
<p><b>Rebuilding business</b> to help new and existing businesses survive and thrive in order to safeguard existing and create new jobs</p>	<p><b>Getting residents back into jobs</b> which pay above the Real Living Wage and offer security of employment through targeted training and brokerage to available opportunities</p>	<p><b>Strengthening inclusion</b> to prevent further widening of inequalities and build an inclusive economy where everyone has the opportunity to achieve their potential, reducing inequality gaps</p>	<p><b>Supporting a green recovery</b> using changes in behaviour brought about by the pandemic to accelerate our transition to net zero carbon</p>	<p><b>Renewing places</b> to re-think our approach to 'place', creating greener, healthier, more vibrant places to live and work and so continuing to attract people from across the world</p>
<b>CLEAN AND INCLUSIVE</b>				

Across these five pillars a number of strategic programmes have been identified which will ultimately support the principle for getting residents back into jobs. The programmes focused specifically around getting residents back into jobs are outlined here. Further details of all the proposed programmes in the recovery plan are available to view [here](#).

By 2025, the Recovery Plan will have achieved the following:

- ✓ Over **11,200 businesses supported** to adapt their operations, boost staff skills, and innovate
- ✓ **1,800+ jobs** created, plus **750 construction jobs** a year across our investments
- ✓ **22,000+ training and skills** placements each year
- ✓ Support residents to access good, secure jobs
- ✓ Deliver careers advice to **95 schools and colleges** with **10,000 people taking online mental health at work courses**
- ✓ Widen community access to business and skills support

## 5. Skills Action Plan

Against the strategic backdrop of the [Employment and Skills Plan](#) and the [Recovery Plan](#), a range of delivery is planned or underway at a local, regional and national levels. Drawing these together for maximum regional impact is a key role for the SAP and partners.

The following provides an overview of four integrated regional interventions which form the keystones of our Action Plan contributing to a range of Strategic Objectives and Activities – Adult Education, Workforce for the Future, Careers Hub and Future Bright – alongside a series of new interventions designed to help the region Build Back Better from Covid.

### Adult Education

#### ***What is the Adult Education Budget?***

Adult Education is used to help adults over the age of 19 to develop the skills and qualifications needed for life, work, apprenticeships and further learning. For the academic year 2020-21 the WECA Adult Education Budget (AEB) stood at approximately £14.7 million.

AEB supports all five of the strategic objectives set out in the Employment and Skills Plan by funding providers to deliver courses tailored to meet specific needs within the region, providing all residents with the opportunity to develop. These provisions help learners build confidence, develop the skills required for work and life and enhance their wellbeing.

Through regular strategic dialogue with AEB providers and as a result of Covid, provision has flexed to include more online provision, specific courses aimed at addressing needs arising as a result of Covid and flexibilities in type of provision delivered by AEB funded providers.

AEB has and continues to provide the skills and learning needed to equip adults for work, an apprenticeship and/or other learning. It enables localised, more flexible and tailored programmes of learning to be made available for learners to engage with.

#### ***How?***

AEB has been devolved to the Combined Authority which delivers in partnership with learners, businesses, and education providers to ensure funding yields positive results. New flexibilities adopted by AEB as a result of Covid-19 will continue to be monitored and reviewed, not least as redundancy announcements are being made in certain sectors which may require a targeted and tailored approach. By drawing on a detailed evidence base managed by the SAP, AEB is shifting to a more 'commissioned based' model where provision is targeted at greatest need. This has

been demonstrated through the approach to allocating new national recovery funding (see next section).

### ***Fit with Employment and Skills Plan***

Strategic Objectives: S01, SO2, SO3, SO4 & SO5

Strategic Activities: 1 & 10

For further information about AEB visit: [www.westofengland-ca.gov.uk/adult-education-budget](http://www.westofengland-ca.gov.uk/adult-education-budget)

## **Workforce for the Future**

### ***What is Workforce for the Future?***

Workforce for the Future is an £8m programme aimed at supporting small, micro and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) with identifying and meeting their skills requirements. Operating across all local authority areas in the region (Bath and North East Somerset Council, Bristol City Council, North Somerset Council and South Gloucestershire Council), delivering against all five of its strategic objectives, this programme is a key component of the Employment & Skills Plan.

A core regional 'brokerage service' was established at the end of September 2020, to provide a comprehensive and joined up one-front-door service for SMEs. The service will be further enhanced by Phase 2 funding, which will create a number of new sector based and geographically focussed interventions to extend its reach and effectiveness.

### ***How?***

Workforce for the Future is a skills analysis and development programme for SMEs. Designed to help identify current and future skills needs, businesses are paired with one or more of our key partners to review and build the current skillsets of existing employees. The programme helps businesses to gain technical skills, recruitment and training strategies, and action plans so that they can deliver strategic ambitions with a strong, resilient and adaptable workforce.

### ***Fit with Employment and Skills Plan***

Strategic Objectives: S01, SO2, SO3, SO4 & SO5

Strategic Activities: 1, 8 & 11

Further details of the programme can be viewed at: [www.westofengland-ca.gov.uk/workforce-for-the-future/](http://www.westofengland-ca.gov.uk/workforce-for-the-future/)

## **Careers Hub**

### ***What is the Careers Hub?***

The region is home to over 40,000 businesses and has one of the highest skilled work forces in the country. The economy generates many high-quality jobs and we want to give locally grown talent every opportunity to secure employment here in our region, starting with schools. The Careers Hub works with all 95 schools from across Bristol, Bath & North East Somerset, South Gloucestershire and North Somerset, and supports delivery against strategic objectives 1, 2 and 5 as set out in the Employment and Skills Plan

### ***How?***

The schools and colleges are supported to improve careers opportunities and work experiences for young people, allowing them to make more informed choices about their careers. The Careers Hub works to ensure that young people have more opportunities to connect with the world of work and potential future employers. Success is measured by progress against government's Gatsby Benchmarks.

The Careers Hub builds on the success of the Enterprise Adviser Network, working in partnership with schools, colleges, and businesses to ensure young people get timely and relevant careers advice and meaningful work experience.

### ***Fit with Employment and Skills Plan***

Strategic Objectives: SO1, SO2 & SO5

Strategic Activities: 1, 2 & 3

Further details about the Careers Hub can be viewed at: [Careers Hub - West of England Combined Authority \(westofengland-ca.gov.uk\)](https://www.westofengland-ca.gov.uk/careers-hub)

## **Future Bright**

### ***What is Future Bright?***

Future Bright is a strategic skills programme endorsed by the SAP, which supports strategic objectives 1,3, 4 and 5 of the Employment and Skills Plan. Available across the West of England combined authority area, the service offers free career coaching, training and support to help individuals to develop the skills and confidence they need to take their next career step and improve their earnings potential.

### ***How?***

When joining the programme, individuals are matched with a dedicated career coach who supports them to create a personalised action plan. Future Bright supports people who are:

- Aged 19 and over
- Living Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol and South Gloucestershire
- Currently in paid work and receiving benefits or tax credits (Universal Credit, Working Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit, Job Seeker's Allowance, Income Support, Employment Support Allowance, Housing Benefit, or Means-Tested Council tax Reduction)

### **Fit with Employment and Skills Plan**

Strategic Objectives: SO1, SO3, SO4 & SO5

Strategic Activities: 7 &10

Further details of the programme can be viewed at: [www.westofengland-ca.gov.uk/future-bright](http://www.westofengland-ca.gov.uk/future-bright) . This project was initiated as part of a DWP pilot on in work progression but has proven so successful that WECA will continue to fund this for a further 3 years from the end of the current pilot.

### **Other Recovery Fund Initiatives**

In order to respond quickly and effectively to the Covid-19 crisis, a Regional Taskforce was convened by WECA to develop and ensure effective support was put in place for businesses and residents. This resulted in an additional £9.4m being set aside to support a green and inclusive recovery. The SAP was a key part of this process and developed a strong evidence base to help inform recovery measures through a series of themed task and finish groups.

New initiatives developed through this process included:

- **Community Recovery Fund:** to support community and voluntary organisations to reach out to residents most affected by Covid-19, and those already furthest from the labour market. A key element will be signposting organisations and residents to employment and skills support that already exists, helping to build capacity, resilience and inclusion within communities. **(Aligns with Strategic Objective S01, SO3 & SO4; Strategic Activity 4)**
- **Digital inclusion:** the pandemic has placed sharp focus on the need to quickly upskill and equip businesses and residents with the digital skills and access they need in a fast-changing economy. This proposal will invest significantly to build a pathway of provision and access for residents, starting with basic digital skills (which can be funded by AEB) to build steps which link to existing specialist and higher-level provision already available in the region. Our LMI and business insight, provided by the SAP and the analysis expertise that this has afforded, shows that our region needs to bridge the gap between entry level and highly specialist provision.

In addition, DWP has now funded a digital exclusion package across the WECA authorities (a similar scheme has been set up in North Somerset) to provide individuals with digital 'kit' as well as basic training to access common services (e.g. banking). **(Aligns with Strategic Objective S03, SO4 & SO5; Strategic Activity 4)**

- **Employability & Skills Portal:** A new regional portal launched in December 2020, acts as an all age access hub to help residents access the support, advice and guidance they need to remain in or find new work. The portal was underpinned by a significant mapping exercise which sets out in clear and

simple terms what support is available and how it is accessed. **(Aligns with Strategic Objective SO1 & SO3 and Strategic Activity 1)**

- **Redundancy Response:** A multi-partner/agency redundancy task force has been created, alongside a new digital business to business ‘**talent retention platform**’ (matching skills/individuals with jobs), to work with employers and providers to help individuals made redundant find alternative employment opportunities. **(Aligns with Strategic Objective SO3, SO5 & SO5 and Strategic Activity 6 & 10)**

## 6. Assessment of Progress

The following section details the progress made against the Employment and Skills Plan objectives and agreed priorities in the Regional Recovery Plan. Where available (it should be noted that some of the programmes are in their infancy), details of progress and key achievements are also included.

### **Objective 1: Integrating our employment, skills and education system**

The establishment of the SAP and development of WECA's regional economic and labour market intelligence function have acted as key building blocks in achieving this overarching strategic objective.

The diverse membership of the SAP and ability to reach out to a range of sectors and networks means we have been able to tap into intelligence quickly and comprehensively – this was crucial in developing the region's response to Covid-19 and has meant that the Recovery Plan and activity funded via the region's Recovery Fund have been focussed on evidence based need.

Regular economic briefings have been produced with detailed and up to date intelligence to inform planning, as well as bespoke publications like the Digital Skills Pack and Green Skills Analysis. Monthly labour market briefings and sector specific deep dives have been made publicly available [here](#). Key insights are regularly reported to the SAP, who are encouraged to disseminate to their wider networks as well as feed relevant information/ intelligence back to the SAP for others to use.

Further research to understand future growth opportunities and skills demand will shortly be commissioned. The SAP welcomes the opportunity to work with DfE in the development of a Local Skills Improvement Plan to further strengthen the voice of business in shaping the delivery of our Employment and Skills Plan.

The development of a regional Employability and Skills Portal (see previous section) also represents the starting point in drawing together the plethora of employment and skills support into a single framework to maximise access and take-up.

### **Objective 2: Encouraging all young people to achieve their potential**

Progress continues to be made in building our West of England **Careers Hub and Enterprise Adviser Network**, to shape and inspire our future workforce.

The Careers Hub now includes all 95 regional schools (including SEND & PRU) and has helped facilitate a marked improvement in the West of England's

performance against the Gatsby Benchmarks. Around 98% of schools were using the Gatsby benchmarks at the end of December 2020, compared to 58% at the end of March 2019. Furthermore, the average number of Gatsby benchmarks achieved was 3.7/8 at the end of December 2020 compared to 2.46/8 at the end of March 2019. In addition, ten of the region's school Career Leaders were recognised as part of the national Careers and Enterprise company campaign to highlight Careers Champions during national careers week.

In November 2019, WECA commissioned the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) to research the current provision of Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) available to residents of all ages in the West of England region. The report set out key recommendations for how WECA could build upon current services available and create a regional CEIAG Strategy.

The SAP has been instrumental in helping to inform and shape the development of this work including through the creation of a 'roadmap' and Action Plan for delivery against the prioritised recommendations. The SAP's intelligence function has helped by collating and presenting LMI to providers of CEIAG to ensure provision is aligned to the needs of the region and by improving the knowledge and skills of CEIAG professionals and providers.

As part of the Combined Authority's investment in the ground-breaking **Digital Engineering Technology and Innovation (DETI) programme** (see above), a new Diversity Demonstrator has been created which aims to address the skills and employment gaps in engineering, by championing engineering with children in the West of England, using a network of diverse engineering role models to inspire them. In order to appeal to under-represented groups and increase diversity in the profession, the Diversity Demonstrator focusses on breaking stereotypes and challenging perceptions about science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) careers by showcasing a wide variety of engineering role models from under-represented groups within the industry, including women, people from low socio-economic backgrounds and people of Black, Asian and minority ethnicity. The DETI Skills team at UWE has also started working with My Future My Choice, a grass roots organisation which actively encourages young people to develop their career aspirations.

To maximise the regional impact of government's **Kickstart** programme, WECA has convened a West of England gateway 'forum' for regional Gateway organisations and is continuing to liaise closely with DWP and potential 'Gateway' (coordinating) organisations to maximise the number and quality of kickstart placements in the region. This approach also allows businesses and individuals to access complementary regional and local support to increase the chance of kickstart placements turning into sustainable employment outcomes.

### **Objective 3: Supporting everyone who is able to work by helping to address their barriers to employment**

Alongside, longer term measures to unlock barriers to employment – given the profound and far reaching impact of Covid, several existing services have been adapted to support getting residents back into work:

A range of new funding reforms and flexibilities have been introduced via the devolved **Adult Education Budget**, intended to encourage and support providers to increase and maintain levels of support for priority learners. Measures include broadening access to Community Learning funding, increased access to Learner Support Funding (including IT equipment loans and support for mental health – both reported as being particular issues for some residents) and broadening access to full funding for younger and older learners.

WECA has increased the low wage pilot income threshold to align with the real living wage and has also enabled learning in the workplace. Additional AEB funding has also been released to support the following areas:

- **Sector Based Work Academy Programme:** An existing well-established programme, led by the Department of Work and Pensions, that seeks to support unemployed residents to secure work through a package of pre-employment training, a work experience placement and a guaranteed interview for a real employment opportunity. The programme forms part of the HM Treasury ‘A Plan for Jobs’ strategy and is supported by a ring-fenced budget.
- **WECA recruitment pipeline:** A new programme that adopts identical design principles to the Sector Based Work Academy programme but responds directly to the particular needs of the West of England Economy through offering a more substantial and higher-level package of pre-employment training.
- **Re-establishing support for priority residents:** Growth funding offered in support of a significant and highly concerning issue within WECA adult education provision e.g. Residents who have been either unemployed or economically inactive for 6 months or more; Residents who are either unemployed or economically inactive, with prior attainment below full level 2; Residents who are employed in jobs which are either low pay or at risk of redundancy, with prior attainment below full level 2.
- **Digital: stimulating demand, improving access and building confidence:** **seeking** to stimulate demand for digital learning amongst disadvantaged residents, offering loans of equipment and bespoke training to support beneficiaries to confidently utilise the equipment in support of ongoing participation.

This additional support will ensure over 2,000 new learners.

The region’s **Future Bright** service has been expanded to more effectively reach people affected by the pandemic, offering career coaching, training and support to

help people develop the skills and confidence they need to take their next step. Future Bright criteria was flexed to ensure that this vital programme could work with individuals impacted by Covid. This includes:

- At risk of redundancy.
- Have been made redundant.
- Whose hours have been significantly reduced (e.g. zero hours, cut from full to part time).
- Who have been laid off (not furloughed).
- Working as self-employed, where their ability to earn has been severely impacted due to the nature of their business.

As part of its Regional Recovery Fund, WECA has agreed a **£1.5m Community Recovery Fund** aimed at reaching those furthest from the labour market and helping build their confidence and access to move closer to the labour market. This was also a key recommendation of the Employment and Skills Plan. A full business case is being developed with the aim of this new fund being launched by Spring 2021.

It is anticipated that the service will include outreach, capacity building, identifying specific need and addressing this, as well as cross referral of VCSE organisations into Workforce for the Future (see below) where SMEs can benefit from the workforce development menu of support to build their own capacity and growth. A call for a VCS Managing Partner has been launched.

The **WE Work for Everyone** programme has been set up to specifically target people with a learning disability to support them to achieve and maintain paid employment (see Case Study).

**Restart** – a £3bn investment programme announced in the Comprehensive Spending Review in Nov 2020) – is being led by DWP and will provide intensive one-to-one support for individuals who have been out of work for more than 12 months. WECA is one of two organisations to be selected to assess the proposals which have been submitted for the CPA 4a 'lot' area (south west). It will be imperative that this support aligns and mutually reinforces the regional interventions set out in this report.

#### **Objective 4: Empowering people to progress within employment, including to better higher paid opportunities**

Following the success of Future Bright, a successor programme Future Bright Plus has been developed to provide additional mentoring and support service for adults in work, but in receipt of some form of benefit or earning below the Real Living Wage, to progress. This was a key recommendation of the Employment and Skills Plan.

As of February 2021, Future Bright had received a total of 3,896 referrals. Of these, 2,407 individuals have worked, or are working, with a coach (action planning), 1,131 have entered learning and training and 603 have increased their wages. A

total of 429 employers have been engaged in supporting in work progression for employees.

With a further £3.6m investment over three years, Future Bright Plus aims to support 4,000 people to receive information, advice and signposting with a predicted £7.2 million increase in income achieved across the programme. To make sure that Future Bright can support those who need it most, the scheme has been expanded to those aged 18 and over and to those who are earning below the real living wage.

The devolved **Adult Education Budget** is aimed at helping residents achieve the foundational skills required to reach their potential (more detail in section 5). In addition to the measures set out to deliver against Objective 3, additional funding has been allocated for Targeted Level 3 entitlement, part of the 'Lifetime Skills Guarantee', which provides fully funded access to a select range of level 3 provision deemed to contribute most towards national industrial strategy. Through this, an additional 218 residents aged 24 and above will be enrolled on level 3 provision.

Alongside funding targeted at basic digital skills and access, additional investment to support 'medium to higher level skills' has been made available through WECA's **Digital Skills Investment Programme**. The programme is seeking consortia who can work together to co-design and co-deliver creative approaches to address employer/sector 'in demand' digital skills. These can be existing or new collaborations and can consist of any combination of employers, training providers, Colleges, Universities, sector representative groups and/or other community or charity organisations.

The key objectives of the fund are to:

- Address locally identified digital skills gaps; supporting employers to recruit hard to fill vacancies requiring specialist digital skills and improve productivity.
- Building capacity amongst employers to co-design and co-deliver training in a way that is agile and aligns sharply with the specialist digital skill requirements of local employers.
- Supporting WECA residents to undertake training which will result in better quality employment and progression routes in digital roles both within digital companies and across all sectors e.g. finance, health, manufacturing etc. Career progression is a key focus.
- Diversify the digital talent pipeline by targeting groups that are currently under-represented in digital roles and designing training programmes to meet their specific needs.

The project aims to train around 400 learners with expectation that 75% of participants will enter skilled digital employment or progress into better employment.

## **Objective 5: Ensuring employers are able to recruit and retain the diverse skills and talent they need to thrive from within and beyond the region**

Significant progress has been made against this objective, with additional support made available in the region's Regional Recovery Plan. Through the LEP and SAP, business perspectives continue to shape the design and delivery of key regional interventions.

The **Workforce for the Future programme** – an £8 investment, co-funded with the European Social Fund (ESF) – aims to work with SMEs to help them develop their future workforce, meeting current and future needs. A core 'skills brokerage' service aligned to the West of England Growth Hub commenced at the end of September 2020. The SAP has taken part in several 'deep-dive' themed sessions to identify the collective understanding of the immediate as well as longer term impacts of Covid-19 on sectors and residents across the West of England, helping to shape the core service.

The service is constructed as follows:

- Adviza Partnership: delivering a talent retention service to help SMEs retain talent in the region and prevent skills gaps widening.
- Business West: supporting SMEs to develop workforce development plans including identifying staff to upskill or reskill or opportunities for placements to be established.
- Careers Hub: developing and strengthening relationships between SMEs and schools to create a link to the future talent pipeline and forge links between education choices and careers.
- West of England FE colleges: working together to help SMEs understand skills provision, how to engage and influence curricula and provide SMEs with access to talent through apprenticeships for example.
- University of the West of England: targeting support at businesses with their digital skills planning, through an assessment of current skills levels, gaps and ambitions.
- Western Training Provider Network: a new regional apprenticeship service to help SMEs to source and prepare for placements, and identify funding options, including utilisation of unspent levy. The service will also link larger levy paying companies and SMEs in the supply chain to ensure more of the levy is spent/retained within the region.

A second call with a funding envelope of £1.9m seeking projects that focus on supporting SMEs with their skills needs in specific sectors or geographic areas, has now closed and successful applicants will be announced in due course. A pilot project **Creative Workforce for the Future** is underway and included as a case study in the next section.

Following an official launch in October 2020, the **West of England Institute of Technology (WEIoT)** – funded by DfE and WECA – continues to make strong

progress. The WEIoT involves industry, education and research collaborating to design and deliver flexible, higher-level technical learning to equip people with the skills to fully participate in, and contribute to, economic growth driven by digital innovation and emerging technologies. By 2024, the WEIoT will have delivered STEM-led education and training to 2,000 individuals with all learners studying to at least a Level 4 qualification – more than 96% of learners will be in technical disciplines and over 70% will be apprentices.

The WEIoT aligns with a number of strategic interventions linked to our LIS, including **DETI** (detailed above) and the emerging regional **iSTART** programme – the latter an innovative digital skills programme aiming to support people from diverse social and educational backgrounds to gain new skills leading to high quality jobs in the creative and digital sectors.

## 7. Case Studies

The following case studies help to illustrate how programmes, services and specific actions are leading to successful skills outcomes for residents and businesses across the West of England.

As highlighted in section 6, **Future Bright** is one of a number of initiatives designed to support individuals progress within employment. The following demonstrate how the tailored offer from the Future Bright coaches can help individuals unlock their potential.

### **Case Study 1: Future Bright**

Brione left her job to become a self-employed driving instructor but sought support from Future Bright to get organised. Her Future Bright career coach Carol supported Brione to make sure that she understood the tax and regulations around being self-employed. Carol put Brione in touch with Cool Ventures business support, funded by Bath & North East Somerset Council and helped her to plan her time and income effectively. Brione is now saving up to buy her first home.

*She said: "Thank you very much for existing, as without your help, I would still feel like I am drowning in the deep end of the pool. And even though I wasn't and so would have been fine, being told by a third party professional that I was swimming perfectly, really helped me to feel like I would be okay and do well with my chosen career."*

### **Case Study 2: Future Bright**

Business owner Robert and his wife/business partner heard about Future Bright through St Paul's Learning Centre. They wanted to grow their business as graffiti artists, get more organised and increase their income to support their growing family.

Robert worked with career coach Karen to develop an action plan to improve their business processes and improve their marketing. He said: *"Future Bright has been a massive help to us. We knew some of the changes we wanted to make to the business but didn't have the funds or connections to make it happen. The changes we've put in place have given us extra time, improved our skills and our branding, and brought in new business."*

The business is going from strength to strength and Robert now plans to convert the business to a social enterprise so that they can invest in the community as they grow.

### **Case Study 3: Future Bright**

Laura was made redundant when the business she worked for closed as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. She spotted an advert for Future Bright on Facebook and reached out for support. She worked with her career coach Helen through a series of regular meetings by phone or online. Laura said: *“It felt personal and gave me something to own and control. I was made to feel reassured especially as the series of events that lead to me reaching out to Future Bright were firmly out of my control and unsettling.”*

Laura worked with Helen to develop her job application and interview skills and build her confidence in applying for new roles. She would recommend Future Bright to others saying: *“If you find yourself looking for guidance, reassurance or even need a confidence boost – you have nothing to lose with a personal career coach from Future Bright!”*

Individuals often face a range of barriers to employment and progression and Strategic Objective 3 of the regional Employment and Skills Plan is designed to identify and remove these. The **WE Work for everyone** programme is an example of how specific barriers are being addressed through targeted support.

### **Case Study: We Work for everyone**

The WE Work for Everyone Programme will specifically target people with a learning disability to support them to achieve and maintain paid employment, supported by a Navigator on a 1 to 1 basis (note on terminology – whilst UK Special Educational Needs (SEN) legislation refers to learning disabilities, in the West of England, the representative group of people from this community of interest have stated their strong preference for the term ‘learning disability’ to be used).

The programme will utilise local provision, driven by a single delivery model and underpinned by a single Menu of Opportunity. Led by Bristol City Council, (lead accountable body), the programme is a partnership between the UA areas of Bristol, South Glos, Bath and North East Somerset and North Somerset, with the West of England Combined Authority, all four local colleges and the DWP. Lasting for 3 ½ years, the total value of the programme is £4,454m. This will be funded through a collaborative bid to the European Social Fund, led by Bristol City Council on behalf of the four LEP wide LA’s for £2.227m, a request for WECA Investment funding of £1.3m and other secured matched funding from LA and FE sources of £927,000.

The WE Work for Everyone project will:

- Offer an individualised programme to support people with a learning disability to access the labour market and identify pathways to help them obtain employment.

- Provide intensive 1 to 1 support to identify suitable career pathways and signpost to specialist services, including bespoke models of provision aimed at people with learning disabilities.
- Strengthen the work with service users, schools, employers and parents / carers.
- Work with people with a learning disability to retain employment by ensuring ongoing support once in employment and working with their employer to meet both the employer's and the employee's specific needs.
- Identify and embed models of effective practice with internships and supported employment.
- Raise awareness of the contribution which people with learning disabilities can make to employers.
- Develop a Quality Standards and commissioning framework for specialist employment support, for the West of England area.
- Establish a sustainable model of support which can continue long-term across the West of England LEP area

The West of England Careers Hub and Enterprise Adviser Network is now active in every secondary school in the region and is an important vehicle for *encouraging all young people to achieve their potential*. The following case study demonstrates how employers are directly contributing to the service, helping to shape careers provision to ensure it aligns with economic need.

#### **Case Study: Careers Hub**

The CEO of a multi-academy trust (MAT) in the WECA region is also a member of the SAP and a strategic representative of schools. Having engaged via the SAP meetings, he suggested that schools could engage with the Kickstart scheme by offering placements. This idea was developed through the Workforce for the Future (WFTF) and Careers Hub teams, leading to the sharing of information and brokerage of cross-organisational links to help take this forward.

The SAP was also been consulted on how the Careers Hub can best support and engage with schools during the COVID 19 pandemic. This involved reviewing our offer to support virtual work experience. SAP members suggested that we should extend a pilot to all schools and this has now been actioned through a partnership with a virtual work experience provider.

WECA recently ran a West of England Careers Inspiration event to all schools. The purpose of this was to raise awareness of careers and to demonstrate the breadth of opportunities available. SAP members supported this strategic event by running sessions and giving presentations.

The Careers Hub has also established the 'Cornerstone Group' which comprises a group of employers who support and deliver careers outreach into schools. Several SAP members (who are themselves businesses), are members on this

group. Not only do they collaborate with schools, but they also use their own employer network(s) to encourage new employers to get involved. In addition, one of our Enterprise Advisers is a SAP member who works specifically with careers advisers within schools

Enterprise Adviser Quote:

*"I deliver presentations in my day job, so more than happy to do this as an EA. I adapted WECA supplied material to suit the audience. I was keen to explain about the EA role so parents understand new direction in schools with regards to careers (1-8, EAs etc). ..... [We] set up a stand for parents to talk about careers and got lots of contact and really positive response to the importance of careers and LMI"*

School Quote:

*"The report accurately acknowledges that we are only part way through a transformative journey ..... As a school community, we have worked hard to establish strong foundations across teaching and learning that are driving forward strategic improvements across the academy. Our pupils have higher aspirations than ever before, supported by dedicated teachers and a productive partnership between home and school. Because of this cohesive approach, our students are following exciting and rewarding career pathways that will positively impact on their futures."*

The Workforce for the Future programme is already actively engaging with small businesses to help them better understand their future skills needs and link more effectively with education and training providers. The programme can tailor support to meet the specific needs of sectors as demonstrated through Creative Workforce for the Future.

### **Case Study: Creative Workforce for the Future**

The Creative Workforce for the Future pilot has been led by UWE supported by several partners. It has the following targets:

	<b>Original Pilot Target</b>	<b>Extension Target</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
SMEs supported (includes 1-2-1 diagnostic sessions, networking events)	36	7	<b>43</b>
SMEs completing a meaningful project (includes taking on a placement / Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for employees)	24	5	<b>29</b>
Number of learners / interns provided with a placement in an SME	12	0	<b>12</b>

The aim of Creative Workforce for the Future (CWFTF) is to support SMEs in the creative and cultural sector to develop a more diversified workforce. This includes undertaking workforce development planning and diagnostic sessions with SMEs involved in the project, engaging them in networking groups to co-design processes and practices to develop and sustain a diverse workforce as well as taking part in more in-depth support such as continuing professional development for existing staff or taking on an intern/placement.

12 interns, all from BAME or socio-economic deprived backgrounds, were also offered placement opportunities comprising of a) 1 six-month placement in a partner organisation; and b) 2 three-month placements at an SME taking part in the project.

Project delivery commenced in advance of the pandemic but quickly had to pivot its delivery mechanisms including the delivery of planned event and the individualised support mechanisms to businesses and interns, to ensure the project as well as those taking part were able to achieve their goals. The project also flexed its offer to businesses to ensure that their needs and requirements were satisfied. Although still in its 'delivery phase' this project has already established several benefits, outcomes and areas of learning including the following:

It became evident during the intern's industry placements that there were gaps in the creative businesses processes around inclusion which brought opportunities as well as challenges for the businesses involved.

As a result, several companies involved in the project have raised awareness of inclusion or established initiatives to address barriers to inclusion, these have included:

- Establishment of a targeted Diversity Taskforce and Inclusion working group with a focus on screen representation and workforce; and
- Initiation of several initiatives to try and tackle the lack of diversity in their own organisations.

In addition, several companies have started looking at the language they use in their induction processes and what a meaningful 'exit' could look like when the intern placement finishes to cement the relationships and networks.

Several SMEs who have taken part in the project have already offered freelance commissions or employment to the interns who have taken part in the programme (9 of the 12 interns secured work to date).

### ***Creative Workforce for the Future: SME Feedback***

*"A thought-provoking and illuminating session, allowing space to focus on how we can build inclusion meaningfully into our planning and thinking as an organisation."  
"Insightful, and practically useful - a strong focus on what is immediately achievable, and credible ambitions to be moving towards."*

*"I'm using elements of the sessions with the team to help us think about how we collectively improve. We had a great discussion on how to talk to our clients about improving their approach to diversity and how we can incrementally improve ours. We're collating ideas for improvements and where we can justifiably celebrate success."*

Whilst still in its infancy, the main **Workforce for the Future** programme has received a number of positive testimonials on its effectiveness at supporting business engagement with skills providers:

Anthem Publishing is an SME supported by the Western Training Providers Network who are delivering the main apprenticeship service of the Workforce for the Future programme and also supporting with an apprenticeship levy sharing service. WTPN supported the company to find a suitable provider to deliver an apprenticeship, helping the company to navigate the complex apprenticeship sector and finances and supported with setting up of processes and readiness for taking an apprentice on.

*'An exceptionally professional service has been provided in an easy-to-understand way, especially as there are many facets and sometimes jargon associated with apprenticeships. The advice has been especially relevant to our business... We have been well supported with the selection of a training provider and we look forward to continuing with receiving support in remote induction/mentoring.'*  
*Anthem Publishing*

Business West are another delivery partner of the programme providing a range of support including supporting SMEs to identify their skill needs and produce workforce development plans:

*“Business West has been helping us with upskilling the team and developing a workforce development plan for the company and individuals. the whole process has been fantastic for the business so far.”*The Waiting Game

*“Working with Business West on developing our workforce is exciting as it gives us the opportunity to develop specific skills within our staff which we may not otherwise have been able to do.”*WECIL

## 8. Foreword Look

The SAP and partners have made significant early progress both against the ambitions, strategic objectives and activities of the Employment and Skills Plan, and in responding to the impact of Covid-19 through the development of the Regional Recovery Plan and associated activity. The region's labour market has shifted considerably from its long run position and policy and delivery needs to continue to be responsive to this, led by evidence.

Over the coming months, the SAP will continue to bring together the voices of business, skills providers, local government and other key organisations to understand the full extent of the impact of the pandemic on the labour market and to ensure that skills provision in the region responds to the needs of employers and those sectors most adversely affected.

It has been recognised by members of the SAP, with our evidence base also giving us early signals, that the pandemic has further accelerated economic disparities already present. Therefore, the work of the SAP will play a key role in shaping the future narrative for the region, highlighting the importance of the levelling up agenda in making sure all communities are engaged with the economic opportunities that emerge through recovery.

### **Future opportunities**

The FE White Paper 'Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth' was published in January 2021 and sets out how government will reform further education, so it supports people to get the skills our economy needs throughout their lives, wherever they live in the country.

Focusing post-16 skills on this core mission will increase productivity, support growth industries and give individuals opportunities to progress in their careers. It aims to place employers at the heart of the system so that education and training leads to jobs that can improve productivity and fill skills gaps.

The White paper talks about the need for Local Skills Improvement Plans. It is expected that these will be developed by partnerships between Chambers of Commerce and FE Colleges and aim to express the skills needs of local employers, determine what provision colleges deliver in support of such needs and determine the outcome related targets which will be used to hold colleges to account.

Through the SAP, the Combined Authority/LEP, Business West (Chamber), FE colleges and other key partners are already collaborating with a strong collective understanding of the West of England landscape to build on the recommendations set out in Skills for Jobs. Furthermore, programmes like Workforce for the Future provide a strong framework for connecting businesses and providers perspectives, to improve skills planning – this could be further enhanced as a Skills for Jobs "trailblazer".

The Skills for Jobs also provides the backdrop for progressing other aspects of our skills strategy e.g. by expanding on strategic opportunities like the West of England Institute of Technology and building on the outcome of our regional Green Skills analysis, to capture the opportunities of a shift to a Net Zero economy.

### **Recovery Planning**

The West of England Regional Recovery Plan was published in October 2020. The plan sets out immediate actions to support people and businesses directly impacted by the economic challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic. Actions sit alongside broader national and local activity to tackle the impact of the virus. To deliver the plan, existing programmes and plans across the region have been refocused, and a regional recovery fund was established – funding a range of activity, including supporting people to reskill, supporting small businesses, and high street renewal.

The conclusions of the recovery plan highlighted a range of medium-term challenges to our regional economy as a result of Covid. Issues such as changing models of work, increased reliance on digitally enabled business models, etc. On some issues, the pandemic has sped up pre-existing areas of change, on others, new challenges have emerged. The next phase of our recovery work will consider these medium-term challenges. The conclusions will serve as a bridge between our immediate action to stabilise the economy and getting the region back on track to deliver the LIS.

The SAP will play a key role taking forward aspects of this work including addressing the strategic questions ‘How can we support people to move swiftly back into work and young people to progress?’ Conclusions of this work will influence the region’s approach to broader engagement with Government on opportunities to strengthen our regional recovery.

### **UK Community Renewal Fund/Shared Prosperity Fund**

At the March Budget government announced a £220m UK Community Renewal Fund to pave the way for the £1.5bn per annum Shared Prosperity Fund. The Fund is intended to predominantly support investment in employment and skills, support for business, and investment in communities.

WECA has been identified as a ‘lead authority’ to coordinate and carry out initial assessment of bids, which are expected to come from a range of partners – local authorities, education institutions, and the voluntary and community sector. The evidence base managed by the SAP will provide important context for this work, helping us identify projects which will have the greatest impact and legacy.

### **Sector Specific Skills Forecasts & Deep Dives**

The SAP has expressed an interest in understanding which sectors are set to grow and contract following the pandemic. It is proposed that research is commissioned to consider a series of ‘policy on’ and ‘policy off’ forecasts to provide a local level view

on future skills demand. This analysis will be supplemented by business insights to help sense-check and inform the work.

Areas highlighted as having substantial growth in the coming years will be subject to sector 'deep dives' like the one undertaken for digital skills to identify areas of skills need and carer pathways within the sector. Again, the SAP and their networks will provide a pivotal role in corroborating the findings and ensuring that the content of these reports are reflective of what is happening locally.

Deep Dive areas already identified by the SAP include: Retrofit and Green Skills – report being produced by consultants Equity, including stakeholder and business engagement; and Health and Social Care – due to commence in April recognising that this sector has the largest volume of job advertisements both locally and nationally.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation of existing skills interventions**

As demonstrated in chapters 6 and 7, there are substantive interventions being progressed by WECA and partners across the region. As projects develop and lessons learnt emerge through monitoring and evaluation, the SAP will play an important role in learning from these and disseminating amongst networks; ensuring future policy and intervention design is informed and shaped by what works.

Over the next six months, we expect to see the following key milestones:

- **April 2021** – finalisation of Digital Skills Investment Programme and announcement of successful partnerships for delivery
- **March/April 2021** – closing of second phase applications for Workforce for the Future Phase 2 (delivery then expected to commence in Summer 2021)
- **April 2021 onwards** – implementation of government's Skills for Jobs White Paper including introduction of Trailblazers.
- **April 2021** – launch of Talent Retention Platform to help retain talent and skills in the region
- **May/June 2021** – launch of WECA Community Recovery Fund
- **June 2021** – decision on Careers Hub business case for future funding, which seeks to further build on and widen the impact of the Careers Hub to support young people
- **August 2021** start of next year of Adult Education Budget provision