

The Marches Local Skills Report



A Final Report by Hatch
March 2021

Marches Skills Advisory Panel

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Linked Resources

- [CITB, Construction Skills Gap Analysis for the Marches LEP, 2019](#)
- [Department for Education, Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth, 2021](#)
- [Department for Health and Social Care, Integration and innovation: working together to improve health and social care for all, 2021](#)
- [HM Government, AI Sector Deal, 2019](#)
- [HM Government, Tourism Sector Deal, 2019](#)
- [HM Government, Industrial Strategy: Building a Britain fit for the future, 2017](#)
- [HM Treasury, Build Back Better: Our Plan for Growth, 2021](#)
- [Local Skills Report Annexes – Core Indicators and Additional Data, 2021](#)
- [NHS, A Health and Care Digital Capabilities Framework, 2018](#)
- [The Marches LEP, Skills Action Plan 2017-2020](#)
- [The Marches LEP, The Marches Local Industrial Strategy, 2019](#)
- [The Marches LEP, The Marches Strategic Economic Plan, 2019](#)
- [The Marches LEP, Visitor Economy Strategy, 2020](#)
- The Marches LEP, Sector Deep Dives, 2020:
 - [Executive Summary](#)
 - [Advanced Manufacturing](#)
 - [Agri-tech](#)
 - [Business and Professional Services](#)
 - [Cyber Security and Resilience](#)
 - [Environmental Technologies](#)
 - [Food and Drink](#)
 - [Health and Social Care](#)
- Further Marches LEP insights are available [here](#).

Foreword from the Marches SAP Chair

- i. As Chair of the Skills Advisory Panel (SAP), I am delighted to endorse this Local Skills Report for the Marches LEP. The report is the culmination of two years of work by the SAP, based on the sector deep dives and the expert data analysis by the team at Black Country Consortium and the subsequent work of the team at Hatch who have turned this data into information. As SAP Chair I am most grateful for their work, as I am for the active support of the team at the Marches LEP office. These collective efforts have delivered this Skills Report which provides a coherent assessment of the strengths and challenges we face in the Marches as we seek to address skills development as a key contributor to meeting the productivity and efficiency needs of the Marches LEP region and as we anticipate the challenges of the next five to ten years.
- ii. This report has been produced in an extraordinary context. The pandemic has challenged us all professionally and personally. It has certainly provided an impetus for the exponential development of digital learning. As a consequence, we now have opportunities for upskilling Marches residents to meet the needs of the economy in the 2020s which were inconceivable a year ago. We also have an opportunity to draw on one of the great strengths of the Marches LEP area, as an exceptional environment to live, grow a family and grow a business. In a world where we may have more choice over where we live to conduct our work, we need to ensure that talented people and innovative businesses are supported to locate in the Marches. The SAP can help create that environment through addressing skills needs of businesses and the personal needs of families for high quality educational opportunities.
- iii. The skills report is well timed, following the publication of the Government White Paper, Skills for Jobs. The report draws on the wealth of knowledge and insight from the representatives of the Business Boards, Federation of Small Businesses and the Chambers of Commerce, as well as further and higher education providers. It is an example of the type of collaborative planning envisaged in Skills for Jobs. It is rightly ambitious and in delivering our ambitions we will create a skills landscape in the Marches LEP which will meet the needs of our businesses and ensure a bright future for our talented young people and adults.



James Staniforth.

James Staniforth

Principal and CEO of Shrewsbury Colleges Group and Chair of the Marches LEP Skills Advisory Panel

Executive Summary

- iv. This Local Skills Report for the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) seeks to clearly set out the Marches' current skills priorities for the local economy. It is informed by the latest strategy commitments of the LEP and partners, analysis of data on local labour markets and engagement with local employers and skills providers. It also provides detail on the work of the SAP as it guides partners' commitment to address identified priorities. The structure of the report is outlined below.
- v. [Chapter 1](#) provides an introduction to the Marches Skills Advisory Panel. The SAP is a delegated sub-group of the Marches LEP Board and works across the LEP area of Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin. The SAP is responsible for providing well-evidenced, robust advice to influence investment and strategic decisions to address local skills challenges and drive change for the Marches region. SAP members include representatives of local businesses and organisations, education providers, public sector skills leads.
- vi. [Chapter 2](#) summarises The Marches' priority skills strengths, opportunities and needs based on the findings detailed in Annexes A and B. This report has been published in March 2021 during unprecedented uncertainty and volatility that has not yet been captured in much of the data available to the SAP. The economic context of the plan will need to be reviewed over time to better reflect EU Exit and the COVID-19 crisis which both generating increased need and new opportunities.
- vii. [Chapter 3](#) builds on Chapter 2 to provide a strategic framework for skills in response to the priority skills needs and opportunities identified. Cross-cutting and sector specific priorities and their rationale are explained. The cross-cutting priorities are:
 - **Delivering Responsive Demand-Led Provision:** Marches' business requirements need to be more central to skills provision.
 - **Strengthening Supply Capacity:** Marches providers need additional capacity to respond to evolving demands.
 - **Driving Digital Throughout:** The Marches needs to continue to embed digital skills in all subjects and at all levels.
 - **Inspiring Young People:** The Marches needs more young people ready and able to secure the area's growth ambitions.
 - **Harnessing Our Ageing Workforce:** The Marches needs to better harness the potential of its older workers.
 - **Reducing Barriers to Participation:** Marches businesses and providers need to address challenges created by its dispersed nature.
- viii. [Chapter 4](#) outlines ongoing and new skills actions in response to the strategic framework in Chapter 3 and how the SAP, LEP and local partners can support these actions. Under each cross-cutting priority, the actions are ordered by level of priority. The chapter also outlines how the actions align with local and national skills priorities and how they could be funded.

- ix. [Chapter 5](#) reflects on the considerable progress of the SAP to date in taking a leadership role in improving skills matching in the Marches by encouraging partnership working, enhancing local knowledge by commissioning, and disseminating skills information, and supporting Marches employers and skills providers to respond to the current skills action plan and COVID-19 challenges.
- x. [Chapter 6](#) provides examples of how local employers and skills providers are responding to skills mismatches to improve the Marches skills base, supported by SAP activities.
- xi. [Chapter 7](#) reflects on the key findings of Chapters 3 to 5 and calls for employers and education providers to continue to work together to progress the action plan to further improve skills matching in the Marches.

1. Skills Advisory Panels – Introduction

Skills Advisory Panels: The National Context

- 1.1 Skills Advisory Panels 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.
- 1.2 The Department for Education (DfE) supports SAPs with grant funding primarily to produce high quality analysis of local labour markets and Local Skills Reports. This report sets out the local strengths and skills needs and how the Marches SAP proposes to address its key priorities. The report aims to influence local partners and feed intelligence to central government, including the national-level Skills and Productivity Board (SPB).
- 1.3 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 “Local Skills Improvement Plans” created by business representative organisations in 2021/2 and committed to build on the work of SAPs.

The Marches LEP Skills Advisory Panel

- 1.4 The Marches SAP works across the LEP area which covers Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin, as shown by Figure 1.1. The SAP is a delegated sub-group of the Marches LEP Board and is responsible for providing well-evidenced, robust advice to influence investment and strategic decisions to address local skills challenges and drive change for the Marches region.

Figure 1.1 The Marches LEP area



Source: Marches LEP

- 1.5 The Chair of the Marches SAP is James Staniforth, Principal and CEO of Shrewsbury Colleges Group. James is a member of the Marches LEP Board and is responsible for ensuring SAP advice is reflected in strategic board discussions. Table 1.1 lists the Skills Advisory Panel members and organisations they represent.

Table 1.1 Marches Skills Advisory Panel Members

Name	Job Title and Organisation
James Staniforth (Marches LEP Board Skills Advisory Panel Chair)	Principal and CEO Shrewsbury Colleges Group
Clare Keegan	Harper Adams University
Prof. Paul Johnson	University Centre Shrewsbury
Prof. David Langley	New Model in Technology and Engineering (NMITE)
Prof. Nazira Karodia	University of Wolverhampton
David Williams	Herefordshire, Ludlow and North Shropshire College
Graham Guest	Telford College
Andrew Smith	Derwen College
Clair Schafer	Marches Skills Provider Network
Julie Webster	Department for Work and Pensions
Alexia Heath	Herefordshire Council
Janine Vernon	Shropshire Council
Sue Marston	Telford and Wrekin Council
Sonia Roberts	Charity Manager, Landau & Deputy Chair, Marches LEP
Debbie Gittoes	Herefordshire Business Board
Dave Courteen	Shropshire Business Board
Will Westley	Telford Business Board
Lindsay Barton	Federation of Small Businesses
Richard Sheehan	Shropshire Chamber of Commerce
Robert Elliot	Herefordshire and Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce
Trevor Oakley	Construction Industry Training Board (CITB)
Brian Frost	Shropshire Construction Training Group
Gill Hamer	Chief Executive, Marches LEP
Kathryn Jones	Partnership Manager, Marches LEP
Aggie Caesar-Homden	Skills Project Manager, Marches LEP

Source: Marches Skills Advisory Panel

- 1.6 The SAP meets quarterly at a central location, usually Ludlow. Currently, due to COVID-19, all meetings are being held virtually on Microsoft Teams. The Skills Project Manager coordinates dates and the meetings are scheduled at the annual meeting in advance. To find out more about the work of the Marches SAP, the Local Skills Report contents or to get involved in the local skills agenda, please contact:

Aggie Caesar-Homden, Marches LEP Skills Project Manager

Email: aggie.caesar.homden@marcheslep.org.uk

Address: Marches LEP, Cameron House, Knights Court, Archers Way, Battlefield Enterprise Park, Shrewsbury SY1 3GA

- 1.7 More information on the Marches LEP Skills Advisory Panel is available online at:

<https://www.marcheslep.org.uk/what-we-do/priorities/skills-advisory-panel/>

2. Skills Strengths and Needs

Key strengths:

- **Vocational and intermediate qualifications:** good supply of trade apprenticeships and intermediate NVQ qualifications, well aligned with the substantial presence of manufacturing and engineering in the Marches – sectors which make frequent use of apprentices and on-the-job learning.
- **Thriving priority sectors:** a base of specialised (food manufacturing and processing; cyber and defence) and fast growing (construction) sectors with evolving skills requirements.
- **Strong education assets:** includes well-performing schools and Further Education (FE) providers, as well as Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) of strategic national and international importance developed in line with the Marches' skills needs.

Key needs:

- **Ensuring responsive skills provision:** despite strengths, there is a need to respond to considerable change in both supply and demand of skills as a result of political, demographic, technological and economic shifts to support priority sectors outlined from Paragraph 2.15.
- **Enabling digital across generations:** needs pervade sectors and skills levels, continued, increasing and responsive support could unlock the potential of the Marches' workforce.
- **Building applicable skillsets for work:** relative low provision of workplace experiences and training of workers translates to a lack of work-readiness. This issue may be worsened as some people experience long periods out of work due to COVID-19.

Skill Strengths and Opportunities

Cross-Cutting Themes

- 2.1 **Demand-led provision:** Employers and skills providers in the Marches are keen to engage in more communication to improve skills matching and work readiness (Annex B – anecdotal). The SAP provides an opportunity for this, although skills providers and employers note availability of time and funding as a significant challenge. This is particularly an issue for SMEs especially since COVID-19 has increased demands on their resources.
- 2.2 **Skills supply:** Skills providers in the Marches recognise their role in anticipating skills need and respond to requirements where possible. They can be limited by funding and course design in their ability to adapt provision (Annex B - anecdotal), plus the dispersed geography restricts access and increases the need for courses to suit the catchment.

Priority Sectors

- 2.3 **Agri-tech:** the agriculture sector is the Marches' most specialised sector and generates 7% of all employment (Annex A - Figure A.1). The Agri-tech sector presents an opportunity for innovation-led higher skilled job creation in response to the need to retain more skilled people locally.
- 2.4 **Advanced manufacturing:** broadly, manufacturing is the Marches' second most specialised sector. It accounts for 13% of employment (Annex A - Figure A.1) and has strong prospects for

further specialisation driven by skills and knowledge. While there are relatively low skills shortages currently, additional core and cross-sector tech skills would help the sector to stay competitive (Annex B – Advanced Manufacturing Deep Dive).

- 2.5 **Enviro-tech:** The Marches has important enviro-tech strengths including a nationally significant anaerobic digestion cluster (Annex B - SEP). The sector is small but growing and could create 1,000 new jobs by 2030 (Annex B – Enviro Sector Needs Assessment). It will also generate demand for soft and general skills such as computer literacy and understanding company products.
- 2.6 **Cyber:** The Marches has key cyber assets including HE provision, security focused Enterprise Zone Skylon Park, a cyber cluster around Malvern and upcoming Midlands Centre of Cyber Security. These assets are expected to encourage the supply and demand of cyber skills.
- 2.7 **Health and Social Care:** accounts for 8.3% of GVA and 14.1% of jobs and is a local specialism. The dispersed geography and ageing population present pressure for change alongside the increasing demand for health and social care skills. The Marches is responding by promoting the role of technology in care, working with Skills for Care to identify and respond to future needs and growing skills provision (Annex B – Innovation Healthcare Analysis).
- 2.8 **Construction:** between 2011 and 2016 this was the fastest growing Marches sector and demand for qualified construction labour is expected to continue growing (Annex B – SEP Evidence Base). The Marches has a base of relevant FE and training providers to build upon and offer more, demand-responsive degree apprenticeship programmes (Annex B - CITB Skills Gap Analysis).

Skill Needs

Cross-Cutting Themes

- 2.9 **Demand-led provision:** 34% of employers have no skills budget or training plan, compared to 31% nationally (Annex B – Deep Dive Summary). Better understanding and communication of employers’ skills requirements is needed.
- 2.10 **Skills supply:** There is an ongoing need for skills providers to assess and react to skills needs of the local business base and support businesses in responding to skills gaps.
- 2.11 **Driving digital:** 30% of Marches employers believe that computer literacy and basic IT skills need to develop in the workforce and 29% suggest that advanced IT skills need developing (Annex A – Figure A.23). Digital capability gaps pose a significant threat to socio-economic inclusion and there is an ever-present, evolving need to encourage and facilitate take-up of digital skills.
- 2.12 **Inspiring young people:** Employers and providers recognise a need for greater communication of local career opportunities to support young people to make informed decisions about their career pathways (Annex B - anecdotal). This will improve the matching of supply and demand and provide young people with a realistic understanding of the Marches employment offer.
- 2.13 **Ageing workforce:** The Marches has a greater proportion of people aged 50+ than England (Annex A – Figure A.8) and its population is ageing at a faster rate. This will create skills replacement demands as older workers move into retirement and increase the demand for labour in the health and social care sector.
- 2.14 **Barriers to participation:** Across the wide geography of the Marches there are issues such as consistent coverage of skills courses and digital connectivity. 9% of the LEP’s neighbourhoods (LSOAs) in the 10% most deprived in England in terms of education, training, and skills

deprivation (Annex A - Figure A.10), suggesting skills as an acute area of need within the Marches LEP. This measure is based on a set of indicators including England language proficiency, continuing education post-16, FE and adult skills, and school absenteeism.

Priority Sectors

- 2.15 **Agri-tech:** despite the size of the wider agriculture sector, the agri-tech sector is not yet a major contributor to Marches' GVA or jobs. Growth has been stagnant in recent years and pre-COVID research projects jobs to shrink by 2022. The sector also generates a relatively low number of apprenticeships (Annex B – Agri-tech Deep Dive) despite the presence of a major agricultural higher education asset in the area. Intervention is needed for automation and innovation to generate higher value jobs.
- 2.16 **Advanced Manufacturing:** prior to COVID, the recent growth in advanced manufacturing employment was forecast to halt in the coming years (Annex B - SEP Evidence Base & Manufacturing Deep Dive). Developments in the low-carbon agenda and digitisation present real need for new skills and a focus on upskilling the existing workforce to adapt to new technologies.
- 2.17 **Business and Professional Services (BPS):** currently, professional and business services account for approximately 12% of employment in the Marches, compared to 19% at England. There is a high proportion of vacancies in accounting, sales, administration, and management. Aspirations to grow the sector will require more highly qualified people with skills that match the future needs of the LEP's business base.
- 2.18 **Food Manufacturing and Processing:** an important and growing sector in the Marches, with an employment specialisation 2.5 times the national average. The sector is currently at risk of hard-to-fill vacancy issues, particularly in poorly perceived roles and as an effect of changes to migration policy (Annex B - Food and Drink Deep Dive). There is a need to improve communication of roles and progression routes available.
- 2.19 **Cyber:** recruitment is a particular challenge for SMEs which struggle to source cyber skillsets and compete with higher paying roles elsewhere (Annex B – Cyber Security SIA).
- 2.20 **Health and Social Care:** the ability for training provision to keep up with demand for digital roles and vocations allied to medicine, nursing, dentistry, care, and optical services (Annex B – Health Deep Dive) needs attention.
- 2.21 **Construction:** there are issues around training provision such as viable options for upskilling and recruitment of trainers (Annex B – CITB analysis).
- 2.22 **Visitor economy:** despite a significant drop in employment since 2017 (Annex B – Visitor Economy Deep Dive), the sector has a crucial role in creating demand for local businesses, attracting skilled workers, and supporting wider jobs. Better accreditation and understanding of skills and careers in the sector are needed.
- 2.23 **Education:** as the Marches seeks to promote itself as a place to live, work and invest, more research may be needed into the requirements of the educational sector.
- 2.24 **COVID-19 impact reflections:** The COVID-19 crisis has disrupted the Marches economy and created a new landscape of opportunity and need that partners are just beginning to grapple with and understand. This remains an evolving situation and the longer-term impacts will depend on the area's ability to leverage new opportunities and respond emerging new needs. COVID-19 related needs and opportunities include:

- Students at all levels will have extra support needs after an extended period of remote learning and home schooling.
- Heightened demand for blended adult learning which Marches' post-school skills providers will need to respond to remain competitive.
- Despite historically low levels of unemployment, COVID-19 and EU Exit effects will lead to higher unemployment and a realignment in the balance between supply and demand.
- Working from home will likely be more common after the pandemic, allowing people to live further from their office and creating more opportunity for the Marches to attract higher numbers of skilled or higher paid workers to live in the area.
- The pandemic has highlighted the importance of the health and social care sector which may create new training demands and investment needs for the Marches the strong base of Health & Social Care operators in the area.
- Throughout the pandemic, people have increasingly relied on digital technology. There is an opportunity for the Marches to harness and strengthen the core digital skills developed throughout this time and embed specialist digital skills in core sectors.

3. Skills Strategy

3.1 Building on the skills needs and opportunities identified in Chapter 2 and the wider research underlying this outlined in Annex A and B, this chapter sets out the Marches' skills strategy by cross cutting and sector specific priority. The cross-cutting priorities are as follows:

Priority	Sub-priorities	Rationale
1: Delivering Responsive Demand-Led Provision: Marches' business requirements need to be more central to skills provision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A: Marches providers need more structured engagement with smaller SMEs and priority growth sectors to understand their skills needs. B: More Marches businesses need to develop training plans and increase their in-work training investment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marches employers do not invest as highly in training as other UK employers and SMEs (which make up a large proportion of employers) are harder to engage especially given current COVID-19 challenges.
2: Strengthening Supply Capacity: Marches' providers need additional capacity to respond to evolving demands.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A: Marches providers need to collaboratively plan future provision around evidence of employer demand and forecast needs among priority growth sectors and smaller businesses. B: Marches providers need new investment in physical and digital infrastructure to respond to evolving needs of the economy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Skills providers and partner agencies need to forecast skills demand for the economy. Skills providers need capacity and up to date facilities to meet evolving skills needs.
3: Driving Digital Throughout: The Marches needs to continue to embed digital skills in all subjects and at all levels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A: Marches' core digital skills offer needs to be continually refreshed at all levels of learning. B: Providers need to continually adapt intermediate and specialist digital content in programmes to meet the rapidly evolving demands and opportunities created by digital technology. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The need for core digital skills is a recurring key priority for all sectors of The Marches economy. Core & specialist digital skills provision needs to continually adapt to stay relevant.
4: Inspiring Young People: The Marches needs more young people ready and able to secure the area's growth ambitions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A: The Marches needs to strengthen careers advice to ensure more school age learners are better prepared for work and more informed about their options locally and to enter higher skilled jobs. Demand side interventions to encourage creation of higher skilled jobs could also support this. B: More Marches employers need to offer more meaningful work experience and apprenticeships, including for the existing and potential SEND workforce. C: The Marches needs to aim for better integration between initiatives supporting young people though school, college and early 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a perception amongst employers and skills providers that young people are as fully aware of the broad range of employment options in the Marches' key sectors than they could be. Employers continually want young people to arrive better prepared for work.

	work years to create clearer pathways.	
5: Harnessing Our Ageing Workforce: The Marches needs to better harness the potential of its older workers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A: Marches employers and providers need to provide a better offer to re-skill older learners at later stages of their working life. • B: The Marches needs to find better ways to transfer the skills of older workers to younger generations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Marches has a rapidly ageing population and needs to ensure smooth replacement of vital skills and knowhow. • Harnessing the skills of older workers to upskills new workers could help with this.
6: Reducing Barriers to Participation: Marches businesses and providers need to address challenges created by its dispersed nature.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A: Marches providers and employers need to make more learning opportunities, more widely available for the whole potential workforce including those with SEND through flexible, virtual, blended learning programmes. • B: Stronger co-ordination among providers is needed to ensure a good choice of accessible course provision in all parts of the Marches. • C: The Marches needs to ensure connectivity and equipment are available to remote learners to undertake blended learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COVID-19 is expected to increase demand for reskilling and virtual or blended learning programmes for adults. • The wide geography of the Marches means that it can be difficult to provide a full range of courses across the area suitable for the needs of all residents.

3.2 The Marches priority sectors have specific additional skills priorities that needs to be addressed:

Sector Priority	Rationale
7: The Marches' Agri-tech businesses need support to better understand future skills requirements and the value of formal learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Marches agri-sector has growth potential if it can position itself to capture evolving opportunities and access the skills to drive change, but the sector generates very low apprenticeship numbers and shows signs of favouring up-skilling existing staff to meet its evolving needs.
8: The Marches could build its tech-focussed agri-learning capacity and aim to be a net exporter of qualified Agri-tech employees to the UK.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harper Adams University is an internationally recognised HE anchor asset and Holme Lacey Campus in Herefordshire is the UK's premier organic farming college facility. • Although the current number of agri-apprenticeships isn't large, there is some clustering of delivery capacity around the Marches to build on. • The Marches engineering and digital capacity could be better supported and harnessed to strengthen agri-learning.
9: The Marches has a growing base of specialist engineering provision which it needs to use to better understand and meet the skills needs of many Advanced Manufacturing sectors across the Marches.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although the Marches is training more engineers than the economy is expected to absorb, NMITE provides the Marches with the capacity to better engage with, and support, manufacturing business to help the Marches ensure supply and demand for training are aligned with the sector's growth needs. • Training and career opportunities in advanced manufacturing need to be more attractive to learners and more relevant modules need to be offered that more closely match the needs of employers. • Each sub-sector and business can have quite specific training needs which may require specialist provision and The Marches Advanced Manufacturing sector has been broadly defined across the spectrum of higher and lower skills and includes businesses that are only

	partly adopting advanced processes including the area's significant base in defence manufacturing.
10: The Marches needs to use business support channels to help businesses adapt to growing competitive pressures in the Advanced Manufacturing sectors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recent growth in advanced manufacturing employment is expected to come to a halt, and there needs to be a real focus on securing competitiveness by upskilling the existing workforce to respond to technological change and drivers emerging from smart tech, Industry 4.0 and the low carbon agenda. Many manufactures recognise they need to deliver an up-lift in their higher and technical skills, as well as strengthening the focus on creativity for innovation and communication skills if they are to compete but need help to articulate their training needs so providers can respond.
11: The Marches' Advanced Manufacturers may need extra help to address the high cost of training across the range of roles and across such a large area.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There appears to be a reasonably high level of job vacancies and staff turnover in the Marches Advanced Manufacturing sector, and at higher skills levels. Current levels of staff training in the Marches' Advanced Manufacturing sector are low and this may be driven by cost and the time required to train staff. Capital equipment costs can be a barrier to skills provision in Advanced Manufacturing and specialist learning is difficult to deliver across a dispersed area like the Marches. The Marches appears to do well on higher level manufacturing apprenticeships, but the range of apprenticeships offered locally appears to be narrow.
12: The Marches should explore re-orienting training provision and creative new apprenticeships to better meet local needs in the Business & Professional Services (BPS) sector (inc. Digital & Creative).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BPS is a large and rapidly evolving sector which will increasingly rely on skilled knowhow to compete and succeed. Although the Marches does not have any major BPS sector strengths, it generates jobs across a range of key sub-sectors and staff turnover (partly driven by low retention rates among higher qualified young people) will lead to large numbers of openings which will require suitably trained people in order to maintain business operations. Training provision for BPS in the Marches is misaligned with expected openings and could be re-balanced by a shift for example from Media and Communication training to Marketing and Sales courses. The Marches' BPS sector appears to have a high proportion of vacancies and could make better use of apprenticeships at all levels. This is currently limited by a lack of flexibility in apprenticeship standards to respond to employer need.
13: The Marches needs to work with its nascent Enviro-tech sector to develop clearer evidence of the sectors skills requirements for providers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Marches has ambitions to grow its enviro-tech sector as the global interest in low carbon and sustainability evolves, but the sector is currently small locally and success will require a shift to higher value and innovation sub-sectors, as well as wider access to softer general skills. The sector is hard to define but it appears that a lot of people are in lower skill roles however, there appears to be huge scope to increase the number of enviro-tech apprenticeships and amount of FE and HE provision locally. This needs further investigation to be confirmed.
14: Effort is needed to make the Marches Food Sector a more attractive place to work offering great opportunities for learning and progression.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food Manufacturing & Processing (FMP) is an important and growing sector for the Marches and there are already local and national industry skills shortages which could be deepened by Brexit and rapidly evolving changes driven technology. The Marches FMP sector generates more job openings than it does course completers in relevant subjects.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food and drink apprenticeship numbers are decreasing in the Marches and there is particular scope for training to improve proficiency with a focus on customer service and communication skills, as well as digital science and related engineering skills.
15: Further work is needed to better identify the specialist training needs of niche, quality Food sector producers and to identify how best they can be met across the rural Marches.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some food manufacturing industries are highly specialised in the Marches, e.g. manufacture of cider and other fruit wines, processing and preserving of poultry meat, operation of dairies and cheese making.
16: The Marches needs to develop a clearer understanding of the complementary role its Cyber sector training providers can play in developing local skills for the sector.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The cyber sector is not yet large in employment terms but has strong prospects and is a strategic priority for growth. Skills and talent are a huge priority issue for SME cyber security firms and there are established national providers plus local broad provision that have a role to play. FE and private providers need to complement existing provision to help respond to need and drive growth.
17: Marches providers need additional delivery capacity to meet the Health & Social Care sector's evolving training needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The ageing population of the Marches is creating growing demand for qualified care staff. Local employment is expected to grow and generate yet more demand for extra training. The care sector and education providers in the Marches are already working together on tackling skills shortages (e.g. with the University of Wolverhampton's Centre of Excellence in Health, Allied Health and Social Care) and identified need for extra capacity and a greater focus on digital curriculum.
18: Marches providers need additional delivery capacity to meet the Construction sector's evolving training needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Marches has a growing construction sector and demand for qualified construction labour is expected to increase. Training has been in decline, but could be boosted by older workers in the sector. The Marches' construction sector already has skills gaps in skilled trades and professional and managerial roles and emerging technologies involving modern methods of construction will further increase demand for particular skills. The Marches has a base of HE provision relevant to the construction sector (including the new Marches Construction Ready Training Centre) which could be built upon to offer more specialist provision in growth areas and degree apprenticeship programmes to help meet higher level skills gaps with the right employer involvement.
COVID-19 Recovery Priorities	
19: The Marches Visitor Economy will need help to re-establish itself in new post-COVID markets, once partners are clear on the way ahead.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The visitor economy has a crucial role in creating employment opportunities and showcasing the Marches to the wider UK but will emerge from COVID under financial duress. In the long run, highlighting the visitor and quality of life offer could support creation of higher skilled jobs and retention of talent. The visitor economy sector will need to continue to train its staff and adjust to new requirements around hygiene and distancing, while facing immediate survival pressures.
20: The Educational sector should be encouraged to attract higher skilled workers and employers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The strong education sector helps to attract workers into the area in addition to other quality of life factors. This is supported by local home building plans. The sector is at risk of facing skills shortages given the impact of COVID-19 on educators.

4. Skills Action Plan

- 4.1 The following set of actions have been developed to respond to the skills strategy outlined in Chapter 3 and developed in line with local and national skills priorities. Within each cross-cutting priority section, the actions are ordered by level of priority based on the second and third columns of the table. For actions that are already underway the status column is highlighted in green, where the actions are in the pipeline the status column is highlighted amber. We have also included aspirational actions, which are not yet in the pipeline, but which are important and being developed by delivery organisations to address local and national skills priorities.

Action	Status - Underway, Pipeline, Aspirational	Timeframe	Wider Local Skills Priority Alignment	National Skills Priority Alignment	Group Targeted	Delivery Organisation	Responsibility of the SAP, LEP	Funding & Resources
1: Delivering Responsive Demand-Led Provision								
Raise awareness of employment support initiatives with employers and learners.	Underway	Short term	Will further existing initiatives e.g. The Work and Training Tool, Sector Based Work Academy programmes, ESF projects and the Kickstart Scheme	Skills for Jobs White Paper	Broad	LEP/All SAP members	Delivery	ESFA CITB
Establish business-led networks of SMEs and skills providers in key sectors to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure links with learning providers for planning training provision promote education, training and business links highlight business support services explore opportunities to jointly fund learning between 	Underway	Short – medium term	SEP 2019; Agri-Tech Deep Dive; CITB Skills Gap; Food and Drink Deep Dive; Innovative Healthcare Analysis; Visitor Economy Strategy Priority 1	Skills for Jobs White Paper	All sectors (Highlighted for construction, advanced manufacturing; agri-tech and health and social care, tourism)	Existing business-led networks SAP with input from businesses and business representative organisations e.g. Chambers of Commerce /FSB	The SAP provides an opportunity for communication between business networks and skills providers, but it is important to ensure this is far reaching.	SAP funding from DfE

Action	Status - Underway, Pipeline, Aspirational	Timeframe	Wider Local Skills Priority Alignment	National Skills Priority Alignment	Group Targeted	Delivery Organisation	Responsibility of the SAP, LEP	Funding & Resources
the public sector and employers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> and where appropriate establish sector skill strategies including around digital and remote learning. 								
Deliver business support programme to assist SMEs and strategic employers to establish workforce development plans and upskilling programmes.	Underway	Long term subject to funding	SEP; Agri tech Deep Dive Priority 2	Skills for Jobs White Paper	All businesses	LEP/Marches Growth Hub via ESF Skills Support for the Workforce and other ESF projects	Delivery oversight	Marches Growth Hub Funding, ERDF, ESF and proposed UKSPF
Develop an impact measurement programme to assess outputs, outcomes, and desired impacts from Marches Skills investment.	Pipeline	Short-medium term	Cross-priority		Broad	LEP	Delivery	SAP funding from DfE
Encourage FE leaders to establish a professional development network and programme for FE tutors to enhance professional development, quality of teaching and best practice for remote/digital learning.	Aspirational	Medium term	Priority 2 & 20		All sectors in line with business need	FE	Influence	Dependent on funding being secured
Explore a smart procurement toolkit for large employers/investors and public bodies to promote local supply chains and mandate apprenticeships and training.	Aspirational	Medium term	CITB Skills Gap Analysis Priority 1	Skills for Jobs White Paper	All sectors, (esp. Construction Industry, Food & Drink)	LA partners	Influence	Dependent on Funding being secured
2: Strengthening Supply Capacity								
Establish a Cyber Security Education training centre.	Underway	Short term	Cyber Security SIA Priority 16	AI Sector Deal	Cyber security sector	Midlands Centre for Cyber Security	LEP oversight and influence	Herefordshire Council, University of

Action	Status - Underway, Pipeline, Aspirational	Timeframe	Wider Local Skills Priority Alignment	National Skills Priority Alignment	Group Targeted	Delivery Organisation	Responsibility of the SAP, LEP	Funding & Resources
								Wolverhampton, ERDF
Establish a SAP focus group to monitor intelligence on labour supply and demand to enable targeted investment in provision and promotion of learning opportunities.	Pipeline	Medium term	Cyber Security SIA; Agri tech Deep Dive; Health and Social Care Deep Dive; Enviro-Tech Deep Dive Priority 2	Skills for Jobs White Paper	Priority sectors (esp. agri-tech, enviro-tech, health & social care)	LEP Employers FE/HE providers	The SAP provides targeted intelligence research and is reviewing remaining areas of need.	SAP funding from DfE
Undertake collaborative fore-sighting research to better identify the future skills requirements in key sectors driven by digital technology and innovation.	Pipeline	Medium term	Agri tech Deep Dive; Health and Social Care Deep Dive; Enviro-Tech Deep Dive Priority 1	Industrial Strategy	Priority sectors (esp. agri-tech, enviro-tech, health & social care)	LEP Employers FE/HE providers	Delivery	SAP funding from DfE
Work with the UOW Centre of Excellence in Health, Allied Health and Social Care to establish a spoke model centre of excellence for health and social care at FE level to inspire young people and encourage reskilling in older age groups	Aspirational ¹	Medium term	Priority 4, 5 & 17	Skills for Jobs White Paper	Health and Social Care Young people entering market Older people reskilling	College or training provider	Influence	Dependent on funding being secured
Undertake joint skills assessment across sectors with shared priorities to address shared skills needs across priority sectors	Aspirational	Medium term	Priority 1		Priority Sectors (esp. Adv Mfg., Enviro-Tech, Defence, Digital)	LEP	Delivery	SAP funding from DfE
Undertake research in priority sectors to better map progression and movement of students and workers engaged in re/ up skilling.	Aspirational	Medium term	CITB Skills Gap Analysis, 2019	Industrial Strategy	Priority Sectors (esp. Construction, Health & Social Care)	LEP/CITB	Delivery	SAP funding from DfE

¹ Note: A Centre of Excellence in Health, Allied Health, and Social Care is to deliver academic courses, apprenticeships and CPD at the University of Wolverhampton's Telford Campus from Spring 2021.

Action	Status - Underway, Pipeline, Aspirational	Timeframe	Wider Local Skills Priority Alignment	National Skills Priority Alignment	Group Targeted	Delivery Organisation	Responsibility of the SAP, LEP	Funding & Resources
			Health and Social Care Deep Dive, 2020 Priority 4 & 5					
Establish a Telford Maths and Digital Education and Enterprise Hub (proposition in pipeline).	Aspirational	Short term	Priority 3	Industrial Strategy	SMEs Employers Young people	Telford College led with partners	Influence	Dependent on funding being secured
Establish greater construction sector training capacity.	Aspirational	Medium term	Priority 2	Industrial Strategy	Construction sector Workers upskilling	Providers	Influence	Dependent on funding being secured
Establish a tourism and culture training hub that better co-ordinates and promotes learning in the sector.	Aspirational	Long term	Visitor Economy Strategy, 2020 Priority 19	Tourism Sector Deal	Visitor economy	LEP/Marches Growth Hub Local Authorities, providers	Influence	Dependent on funding being secured
3: Driving Digital Throughout								
Develop progression programme for the NHS Health and Care Digital Capabilities framework .	Pipeline	Medium term	Innovative Healthcare Analysis, 2019 Priority 17	NHS Health and Care Capabilities Framework	Health and social care	Providers	Influence	Dependent on funding being secured
Develop a Digital Care Curriculum .	Aspirational	Medium-long term	SEP 2019 Digital Strategy Priority 3	Integration and Innovation proposals for a Health and Care Bill	16-18 year olds, health and social care	FE providers	Influence	Dependent on funding being secured
Establish a Bootcamp for Coding based on the West Midlands pilot.	Aspirational	Medium term	Priority 3	Industrial Strategy	Students, people looking to upskill, unemployed people	LEP & education providers	Influence	Dependent on funding being secured
Develop a Fab Lab to encourage students to participate in STEM and digital.	Aspirational ²	Medium term	Priority 3	Industrial Strategy	Students	Education providers	Influence	Dependent on funding

² Note: there are existing Fab Labs in the Marches which will be engaged to identify additional scope for extra provision

Action	Status - Underway, Pipeline, Aspirational	Timeframe	Wider Local Skills Priority Alignment	National Skills Priority Alignment	Group Targeted	Delivery Organisation	Responsibility of the SAP, LEP	Funding & Resources
								being secured
4: Inspiring Young People								
Establish clearer career progression into defence/cyber industry.	Existing	Medium term	Cyber Security SIA Priority 16	Skills for Jobs White Paper	Young learners in schools, college, HE and people already working in digital sector	Midlands Centre for Cyber Security	Influence	Dependent on funding being secured
Strengthen careers promotion in priority sectors with skills shortages.	Existing	Medium term	CITB Skills Gap Analysis, 2019 Agri tech, Food and Drink & Health and Social Care Deep Dives, 2020 Priority 4	Skills for Jobs White Paper	Priority sectors (esp. agri-tech, construction, health & social care, food & drink) School age pupils	LEP	This will be supported by the new Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC) led Careers Hub.	CEC
Establish a Future Leaders Scheme offering engagement with businesses, mentoring, work experience, problem solving projects.	Existing	Short-medium team	SEP 2019 Priority 4	Skills for Jobs White Paper	Pre GCSE 13-14 year olds.	LAs and Young Enterprise and Careers and Enterprise Company	The MLEP Careers Hub is about to launch and could deliver this.	CEC
Establish SAP working group on work readiness , to raise awareness amongst employers, skills providers, learners and public and private partner organisations of the issues and opportunities.	Aspirational	Short term	Priority 4	Build Back Better Strategy	Young people entering the market	SAP	Delivery	Dependent on funding being secured
Create a Young Entrepreneurs support programme to inspire young learners to start up in business.	Aspirational	Medium term	Priority 4	Industrial Strategy	Young people entering the market People who are unemployed or re-entering the market	FE/HE Private sector providers	Influence	Dependent on funding being secured

Action	Status - Underway, Pipeline, Aspirational	Timeframe	Wider Local Skills Priority Alignment	National Skills Priority Alignment	Group Targeted	Delivery Organisation	Responsibility of the SAP, LEP	Funding & Resources
5: Harnessing Our Ageing Workforce								
Explore supporting micro-credentialling as a way to value core skills to increase accreditation of older workers and workers in sector with less formal qualification e.g. the visitor economy.	Aspirational Note: NMITE Skills Foundry aims to develop essential skills in a modular way.	Medium term	Priority 5, 6, 14, 18 & 19	Skills for Jobs White Paper	People who are unemployed or re-entering the market People whose skills are not formally recognised	SAP	Influence	Dependent on funding being secured
6: Tackling Barriers to Participation								
Continue to work with DWP and ESFA on initiatives to help people into training and employment.	Existing	Short term	Priority 4 and 6	Skills for Jobs White Paper	Young people facing barriers to learning and employment	Contract holders	Provide evidence base to support need and scrutiny and monitoring of projects, along with LA partners	ESFA and DWP
Encourage FE Institutions and training providers to set up a central mechanism for transferring unspent apprenticeship levies	Aspirational	Medium term	Priority 4 and 6	Skills for Jobs White Paper	Young people SMEs	FE institutions and training providers	Influence	Dependent on funding being secured
Appoint female ambassadors to promote uptake in traditionally male sectors.	Aspirational Although there is work being done in this area by providers and employers.	Medium term	Priority 4 and 6		Women entering/re-entering the market (agri-tech, construction, digital etc.)	LEP/all SAP partners	Influence	Dependent on funding being secured
Develop a UNESCO Learning City Approach to formalise an inclusive skills ecosystem.	Aspirational	Long term	Priority 1, 2 & 6		Broad	Local authorities, education providers, key employers.	Influence	Dependent on funding being secured

5. Assessment of Progress

Taking a Local Leadership Role

- 5.1 The SAP acts as a partnership of member organisations who nominate their panel representatives to feed into the skills planning and report back to their host organisation. As well as disseminating relevant policy reports and resources, the SAP commissions data analysis to provide up to date information on skills needs and opportunities to help identify local skills priorities. There is a good understanding among SAP members of the role of the SAP and its responsibilities for reporting to DfE and the SAP Programme Team.
- 5.2 The SAP engages with local authorities, European Social Fund (ESF) contract holders, the voluntary and community sector, and the Careers and Enterprise Company. Wider local authority teams and elected members are briefed on the work of the SAP through updates at the LEP's Operations Group meetings, scrutiny committees and the CEO report presented at LEP Board meetings. Data and research developed by the SAP is shared with partners and available on the LEP website to develop knowledge and understanding of the skills landscape across the Marches.
- 5.3 All local FE and HE providers are actively engaged with the SAP. They are all invited as members and asked to share skills information with their networks. The SAP HE Skills Group meets several times a year as a subgroup of the SAP with an independent Chair who acts as Director for HE on the LEP Board. The FE Colleges meet under a separate group, Shropshire, Wrekin Association of Colleges (SWAOC) which the LEP and local authority skills leads are invited to attend. The Marches Skills Provider Network (MSPN) shares data and analysis with its members, and the SAP data analyst and Skills Project Manager attends the MSPN Strategic meeting to communicate this first-hand.
- 5.4 Where there is a specific sector focus, the SAP Chair and LEP Skills Project Manager attend meetings to share data and analysis to sense check findings. The SAP also holds skills roundtable events to engage with employers, but this can be challenging as a high proportion of local employers are SMEs.
- 5.5 The broad geography of the Marches can present difficulties when engaging with busy employers across the area. To overcome this, the SAP connects with businesses via networks and engagement events such as roundtables, LEP Board events and communications and by working closely with the Marches Growth Hub teams. The SAP also sends businesspeople who are LEP Board members an annual report from the SAP Chair and other information as appropriate.
- 5.6 The local business environment is supportive of the SAP and includes strong, closely networked SMEs and active local Business Boards. Employers are represented on the SAP by three business board representatives, Shropshire Construction Training Group, Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), Chambers of Commerce, Construction Industry Training Board. SAP members from these organisations share insights with their members and build connections of the SAP across the West Midlands and into Powys and Ceredigion through communication with the Growing Mid Wales Partnership.
- 5.7 The impact of COVID-19 has made engagement with employers more challenging in large part because SMEs are focused on survival. They have limited resource to respond to skills issues and opportunities, and some have had to reduce their HR and support staff capacity. Those that

continue to engage have tended to welcome the shift to virtual meetings as it cuts down on travel time.

Enhancing Local Knowledge

- 5.8 The SAP has commissioned various data analyses and reports including baseline data analysis, sector deep dive reports and COVID-19 impact analysis. These reports alongside other LEP analysis have formed a baseline for the Local Skills Report Strategy and Action Plan, and are summarised in Annex B.
- 5.9 With considerable change in circumstances over the past year, the SAP is considering the need for further research in the following areas:
- Employer views on needs for CPD and their shifting post-COVID requirements
 - Collaborative fore-sighting research to better identify future skills requirements in key sectors post-COVID
 - The impact of Brexit and COVID on the Agriculture and Agri-Tech sectors
 - How to make advanced manufacturing (& other local sectors) more attractive to learners
 - Potential for and best approach to a smaller scale approach to learning (e.g. modular learning or micro-credentialling)
 - Sector deep dive updates post-COVID
 - Exploration of other sector deep dives given the shifting priorities, e.g. retail and hospitality, visitor economy and educational sector

Impact on Local Skills Provision

- 5.10 The SAP primarily influences skills providers via dissemination of information and analysis, including by undertaking bespoke research focused on local challenges such as the eight skills sector deep dive reports. This has been seen to support Marches skills providers and employers jointly to target and justify their funding requirements, and this has resulted in numerous successful bids for funding as outlined in Paragraph 5.18.
- 5.11 The SAP provides a means for skills providers to communicate with and hear from each other, local employers and public and third sector representatives. The SAP also feeds back information from skills providers to DfE in the form of quarterly reviews which feed into DfE policy development.
- 5.12 Skills providers report to the SAP that funding mechanisms can be a barrier to better aligning provision with longer term local economic needs. Current arrangements require the curriculum to be demand-led which in turn relies heavily on larger employers that have capacity to articulate their demands. This can obscure the needs of smaller businesses and not always reflect the longer term and less easy to enumerate future needs of the economy. Other application led funding streams are limited and are often capital focused. Plus, there is a disparity between funding opportunities for general FE institutions and Sixth Form colleges with proposed White Paper funding streams applying only to general FE institutions.
- 5.13 The SAP aims to support providers to understand the funding landscape. Recent funding announcements have tended to focus on short term COVID-19 response and have not addressed uncertainty around the availability of longer terms funding, for example the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, Levelling Up Fund, and any FE funding.

COVID-19 Recovery and Renewal Plans

- 5.14 The SAP has commissioned a COVID-19 impact analysis report which has highlights that some existing skills issues have worsened since March 2020. As set out in Chapter 2, this report seeks to respond to these immediate and longer-term recovery issues. The SAP has also reviewed skills providers engagement with employers over elements of the July 2020 Plan for Jobs and this has been fed into DfE policy development via the policy team.
- 5.15 The SAP has also continued to meet throughout the crisis to support communication on evolving skills needs and has continued to disseminate up to date research and policy information to panel members. Although all actions should help with the Marches' COVID-19 recovery by reducing the likelihood of unemployment, actions which align with the COVID-19 specific priorities (Priority 19 and 20) should in particular support the recovery.

Skills Action Plan

- 5.16 The current [Skills Action Plan](#) was delivered in 2017, two years before the SAP's creation. Ongoing actions from this, the [Strategic Economic Plan](#) and [Local Industrial Strategy](#) are included in Chapter 4.
- 5.17 The SAP has performed a strong leadership role on skills in the Marches, engaged with local partners, and advised and supported providers to develop programmes which are evidence-based and that meet the needs of local employers. For example, the SAP has supported co-ordination of Local Growth Fund and other LEP investments to develop new apprenticeship opportunities.
- 5.18 The Marches LEP has made significant progress in supporting employers and skills providers to understand the need for and attract investment to deliver:
- Eight Priority Sector Skills Deep Dive reviews to provide insights on skills supply and demand mismatches in the Marches, in line with Action 3 of the Skills Action Plan
 - £200k of Local Growth Funding (LGF) for Shrewsbury Colleges Group to expand and enhance training capacity in automotive engineering and advanced manufacturing engineering subjects as set out in Figure 6.6. This aligns with Action 5 of the Skills Action Plan
 - £315k of Growth Deal funding to improve Derwen College's IT infrastructure to develop digital resources to assist young people into work, in line with Action 6 of the Skills Action Plan. An example of activities supported is provided in Figure 6.5
 - The Marches Centre of Excellence in Health, Allied Health and Social Care (described in Figure 6.2) is a £5m project, including £3.5m of LGF to create technologically advanced learning facilities at the University of Wolverhampton's Priorslee Campus, Telford, in line with Action 4 of the Skills Action Plan
 - LEP project development funding was also awarded to support Shropshire Chamber to develop a virtual careers advice service using 3D and video technology, in line with Action 6 of the Skills Action Plan
 - The development of Skylon Park Enterprise Zone by part-funding the soon to be opened Midlands Centre for Cyber Security through Local Growth Funding, in line with Action 1 and 4 of the Skills Action Plan

- LGF funding for NMITE, a new independent, not-for-profit, teaching institution which seeks to address the shortage of skilled graduate engineers in the Marches, and across British businesses, in line with Action 4 of the Skills Action Plan. A recent investment of £5.7m focuses on the development of the Centre for Advanced Timber Technology, the Centre for Automated Manufacture, and the Centre for Future Skills
- 5.19 The Marches LEP has also launched a Careers Hub to work with the Careers and Enterprise Company to raise awareness of local employment and training opportunities based on data and intelligence gathered by the SAP. This will further support Action 2 of the 2017 Skills Action Plan. Hub members include local schools and colleges working together with a Steering Group of cornerstone employers, local partners, and SAP members. It will be one of only 11 hubs in the UK to include all schools in its LEP region.
- 5.20 More information on the influence of the SAP is available on the [Marches LEP website](#).

6. Positive Impact Stories

- 6.1 SAP members have prepared the following case studies to give good practice examples for how local employers and skills providers can influence better matching of skills demand and supply in the Marches.

Figure 6.1 Case study – Demand-led apprenticeship courses

Impact on Local Skills Provision

Training provider: SBC Training
 Employer: AICO
 Location: Oswestry
 Cross-cutting skills priority: Delivering responsive demand-led provision
 Timescale of approach: Long term

“Through strong partnership working, we have provided bespoke and enhanced apprenticeship training for AICO which has delivered nine apprentices and boosted local employer support of apprenticeships.” Clair Schafer, SBC Training

Issue targeted:

- AICO is a market leader in domestic fire and carbon monoxide detection. It has an ambitious growth plan including workforce expansion of 10-15%.
- The organization has very high standards of quality and customer service and identified that expanding its workforce via apprenticeships would enable it to embed the values and skills needed.
- The organization has just completed the move to a new prestigious custom-built premises in Oswestry and is committed to growth in this area.

Activity:

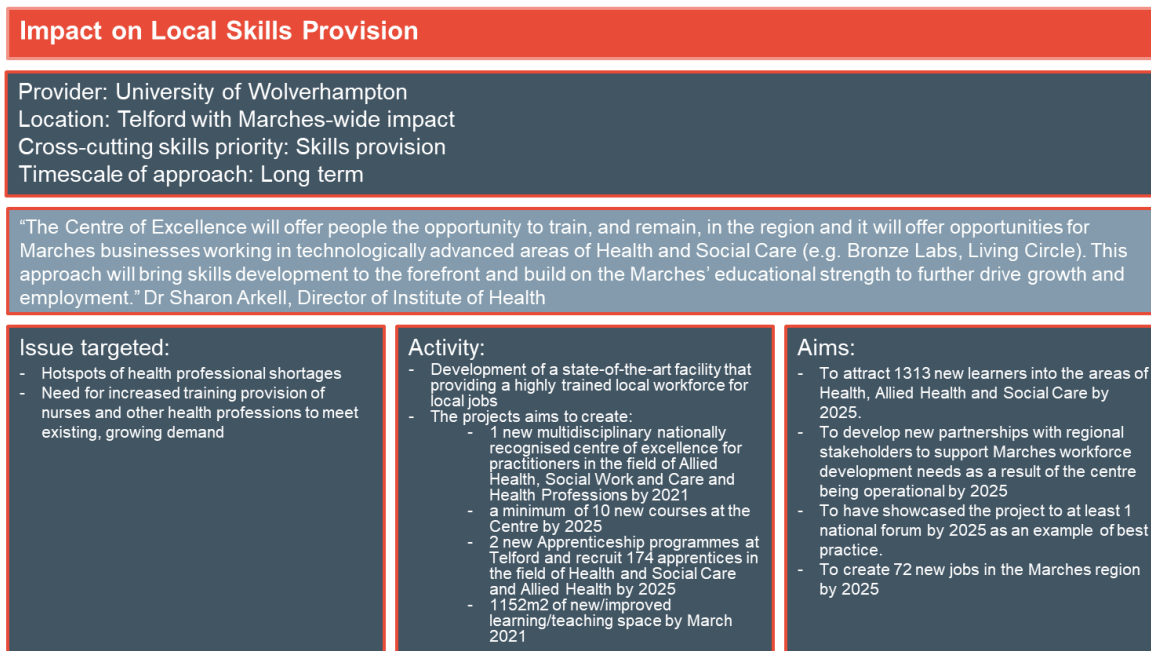
- AICO partnered with SBC Training to plan and design the apprenticeship programmes needed. The organization has also enhanced the mandatory apprenticeship standards by adding industry specific modules which the apprentices follow.

Impact:

- 9 apprentices trained in Customer Service, Infrastructure Technician, Warehousing or Digital marketing as part of an ongoing programme. This is in line with the LEP's aim to increase apprenticeships.
- The project has been successful because of the synergy and shared values between employer and provider resulting in strong partnership working.
- AICO is now a strong advocate of apprenticeships and promotes this whenever possible.
- This illustrates the importance of having the right mix of high-quality training provision which enables employers to identify the best solutions.

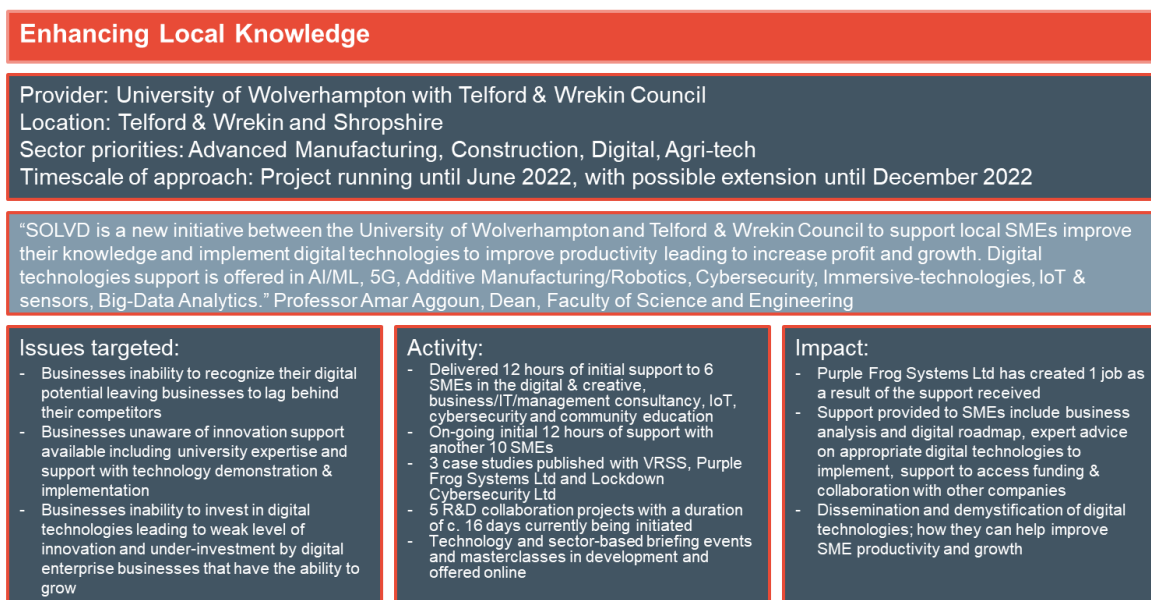
Source: SBC Training, 2021

Figure 6.2 Case study – Skills development in a priority sector: The Centre of Excellence in Health, Allied Health and Social Care



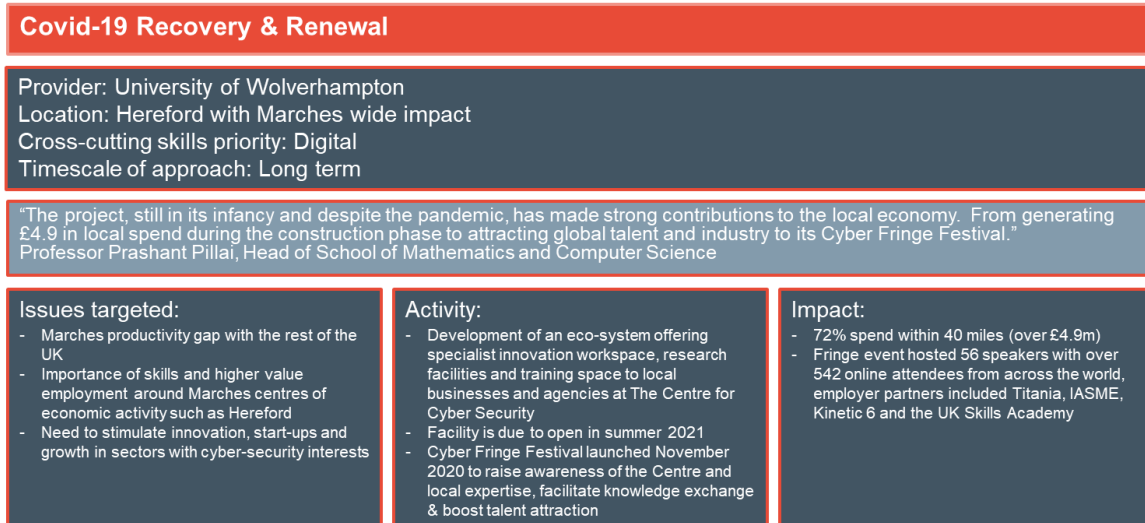
Source: University of Wolverhampton, 2021

Figure 6.3 Partnership working on digital skills provision: the SOLVD initiative



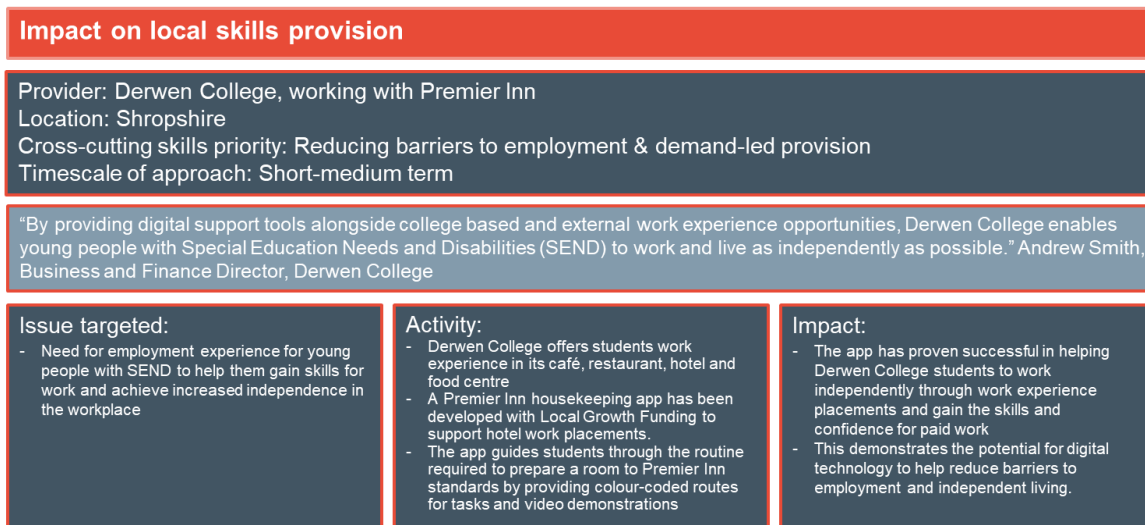
Source: University of Wolverhampton, 2021

Figure 6.4 Case study – Skills development in a priority sector: Centre for Cyber Security



Source: University of Wolverhampton, 2021

Figure 6.5 Case study – Use of digital and partnership working to reduce barriers to participation



Source: Derwen College, 2021

Figure 6.6 Case study – Skills development in a priority sector: Automotive Training Centre

Impact on Local Skills Provision

Skills Provider: Shrewsbury Colleges Group (SGC)
Location: London Road Campus, Shrewsbury, Shropshire
Sector priority: Automotive/Manufacturing Engineering
Timescale of approach: Immediate

"Growth Deal funding enabled Shrewsbury Colleges Group to respond to continued growth in demand for specialist skills in Automotive/Manufacturing Engineering by supporting a project to expand facilities and provide additional training for this key sector. The initial investment from the Marches LEP under the growth deal facilitated the further investment from the college and partners in the industry." Andy Lee, Director of Employer Engagement, Shrewsbury Colleges Group

Issue targeted:

- Requirement to further enhance training in the priority sectors of Automotive and Manufacturing Engineering
- Particularly critical is supporting the upskilling of those who are currently employed within the Automotive sector, in the specialist areas of MOT, Advanced Driver Assistance Systems (ADAS) and Hybrid Vehicle, where no regional training is currently available

Activity:

- In collaboration with partners from the sectors the project achieved:
- construction of a new Automotive Training Centre for full time and apprentice learners, with the latest equipment available
 - reconfiguration of the existing Automotive workshop, to form a specialist centre for upskilling those within the Automotive industry in emerging technologies and MOT courses.
 - enabling the expansion of the Engineering department into some of the vacated workspace

Impact:

- New Automotive Centre of 840m2, with value of c.£950k for c.£600k total investment
- Re-developmental of 390m2 of existing workshop
- Additional 80 learners by September 2022
- 2 jobs created at SGC
- Collaborative working partnerships/investment with four leading industry based companies
- Sustainable growth in training and responsiveness to regions employment needs (including specialist), with emerging technologies
- Increased MOT/Hybrid courses confirmed 2021, new Level 4 Technician and ADAS to follow

Source: Shrewsbury Colleges Group, 2021

Figure 6.7 Case study – Skills development in priority sectors: Centre for Research into Environmental Science and Technology

Covid-19 Recovery and Renewal Plans

Provider: The Centre for Research into Environmental Science and Technology (CREST) at University Centre Shrewsbury
Location: Marches LEP
Sector priorities: Enviro-tech, Construction, Advanced Manufacturing
Timescale of approach: Immediate

"CREST develops and increases the productivity of environmental science and technology businesses in the area." Prof. Julieanna Powell-Turner, Director of Crest

Issues targeted:

- Requirement for research and specialist advice for SMEs and start-ups
- Need to develop innovation and products and support new skills
- Need for increased productivity, skills and employment during post-COVID recovery

Activity:

- CREST was set up to develop and increase the productivity of environmental science and technology businesses in the region
- Research undertaken includes: Air soil and water analysis; alternative raw material reuse; carbon innovation including Net zero; sustainable supply chain support; waste and resource assessments
- Business networks held include: Shrewsbury Geospatial Group, Shrewsbury Water Forum, PLASTICS network
- Networking events e.g. Smart Rural series incl: energy, water, digital skills and transport and, NetZero skills workshops

Impact:

- Creation of opportunities for student placements (12 to date) and project work in industry
- 'Triple innovation helix' through engagement with the business community, HE and other public sector bodies where new ideas and opportunities are tested
- Enable SMEs increase their productivity and clean growth in line with the Marches Local Industry Strategy
- Catalyst for larger institutional and multi-HEI collaborations
- The work of CREST will be even more important as part of post-COVID economic recovery

Source: University of Chester, 2021

Figure 6.8 Case study – Use of digital and partnership working to reduce barriers to participation: Telford College’s Augmented and Virtual Reality Suite

Covid-19 Recovery and Renewal Plans

Provider: Telford College

Location: Marches wide

Cross-cutting skills priority: Driving digital throughout

Timescale of approach: 12 months, March 2021 – March 2022

"It is an exciting opportunity to work in partnership with Telford College to create and develop our AR compliance application"
David Wells, Executive Director of Wrekin Housing Trust, commenting on the development of Virtual Reality Care Home software

Issues targeted:

- Need for improved digital skills capabilities as outlined in the Marches Digital Skills Strategy
- During the recent pandemic it very quickly became apparent innovative and creative ways of engaging with employers and students were required to ensure that their skills would continue to be developed.
- Teaching remotely, the College was challenged to develop real world skills within a practical setting, such as a construction site or automotive workshop.

Activity:

- Utilising the technology within its AR/VR suite, the College has adapted learning provision to meet the needs of students and employers.
- For example, the College’s Health & Safety Training Environment Software (H.A.S.T.E) allowed students to immerse themselves in a virtual scenario from which to identify potential hazards and risks either independently or in a tutor lead session.

Impact:

- Students and employers have continued to develop skills, including core digital skills, to a high standards throughout the pandemic.
- Over 2000 students have benefited from this technology
- Moving forward the college is continuing to enhance resources which support the use of digital in skills development and further share good practice.

Source: Telford College, 2021

Figure 6.9 Case study – Skills development in priority sectors through investment in new manufacturing equipment

Impact on Local Skills Provision

Provider: Herefordshire, Ludlow & North Shropshire College

Location: Herefordshire and neighbouring counties

Sector skills priority: Advanced Manufacturing

Timescale of approach: Long term

"It was a really interesting course with plenty of hands-on experience and practical lessons. It gave me a good basis in all aspects of engineering from milling and turning to computer aided design and electrical, which I chose to specialise in. There is a good range of engineering equipment to use at the College, which helps in taking the theoretical lessons into practical." Robert Ralph, HNC Engineering Student (Maintenance Engineer, Henry Weston’s Cider)

Issues targeted:

- Need to develop the manufacturing sector skills base to maximise future opportunities
- Requirement for College investment in robotics, pneumatics and automation control training equipment to deliver skills provision

Activity:

- c£100k awarded to Herefordshire & Ludlow College by Marches LEP as part of a joint College/HGTA bid to secure capital investment to support manufacturing sector skills
- Purchase of equipment to introduce Advanced Manufacturing technologies into the existing Engineering curriculum
- Launch of new higher level provision - an Higher National Certificate (HNC) in Computer Aided Manufacture & Automation and in Electrical & Electronic Control Engineering
- A top-up HND in Engineering is now being developed for a Sept 2021 launch

Impact:

- Training benefitting 100+ Level 3 students and apprentices each year
- 30+ HNC starts each year from a wide range of engineering and manufacturing sector employers in the region.
- Support expansion and improved productivity in advanced manufacturing
- Increased employer investment in skills
- Helped to meet replacement demand
- Improved the pipeline from education to employment in the advanced manufacturing sector

Source: Herefordshire, Ludlow and North Shropshire College, 2021

Figure 6.10 Case study – Skills development in priority sectors through investment in new agricultural technology

Impact on Local Skills Provision		
<p>Provider: Herefordshire, Ludlow & North Shropshire College Location: Herefordshire and neighbouring counties Sector skills priority: Agriculture & Food Timescale of approach: Long Term</p>		
<p>"I chose Herefordshire & Ludlow College because it was close to home for me, I also know it is a good place to come from friends and neighbours. I would definitely recommend the course and the College to a friend as it's really easy to get to and the course is very flexible." Agricultural student at Herefordshire and Ludlow College</p>		
<p>Issue targeted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Need to support the food and agriculture sector in developing their skills base, equipping them to maximise future opportunities 	<p>Activity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Marches LEP awarded c£100k to Herefordshire & Ludlow College, as part of a joint College/HGTA bid to secure additional capital investment - Purchase of a GPS tractor that supports skills development in use of the tractor technology compared with traditional farming methods - The tractor is used in the delivery of agriculture courses utilising the organic farm owned by the college - Apprentices and full time students use the tractor to support the ploughing and estate skills required at the farm 	<p>Impact:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Helped to support students studying on full time, part time and apprenticeship Agriculture courses - Students of all ages engaged in basic starter training, retraining and upskilling - Helped to meet replacement demand and improve the progression from education to employment and progression within the food and agriculture industry - The tractor is used by students and farm workers to supply the baby food industry. - Increase in full time student numbers

Source: Herefordshire, Ludlow and North Shropshire College, 2021

Figure 6.11 Case study – Skills development in priority sectors through investment in new manufacturing technology

Impact on Local Skills Provision		
<p>Provider: Herefordshire, Ludlow & North Shropshire College Location: Herefordshire and neighbouring counties Sector skills priority: Manufacturing Timescale of approach: Long Term</p>		
<p>"I felt I was a well qualified welder and fabricator, the course at the college allowed me to explore welding techniques I had not tried before." Welding and fabrication student at Herefordshire and Ludlow College</p>		
<p>Issues targeted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Need to support the manufacturing sector in developing their skills base, equipping them to maximise future opportunities. - Skills requirements around energy and manufacturing. 	<p>Activity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Marches LEP awarded c£100k to Herefordshire & Ludlow College, as part of a joint College/HGTA bid to secure additional capital investment - The College invested in new equipment for welding techniques - This allowed for further development of apprentices and full time students in fabrication and welding skills. - Purchase of a plasma cutter and extraction system enhanced and upgraded tired facilities 	<p>Impact:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Helped to support expansion and improved delivery of welding courses and modules to varying age groups across the Marches and surrounding counties. - Students of all ages engaged in basic starter training, retraining and upskilling. - Helped to meet replacement demand and improve the progression from education to employment and progression within the industry. - Increase in part time students and apprentices.

Source: Herefordshire, Ludlow and North Shropshire College, 2021

7. Looking Forward

- 7.1 The Marches is now facing new and particularly pressing skills challenges from the COVID-19 crisis and also EU Exit. This Local Skills Report sets out a way forward for The Marches SAP to operate within the wider Marches LEP and national skills policy framework where it can support local employers and skills providers to continue to improve skills matching and boost productivity for the Marches economy.
- 7.2 The Marches already has much to offer with high quality skills provision, an attractive quality of life offer and significant sector-specific strengths and opportunities. We are currently facing a period of substantial change in terms of how and where people work underpinned by fast paced technological change. It is critical that the Marches is ready and able to make the most of new opportunities for employment and growth, while continuing to address existing challenges embedded in its traditional sectors, areas of disadvantage, rural make-up, and ageing population.
- 7.3 The success of the Marches in increasing its skills base to maintain good employment levels and boost productivity, depends in part on the ability for the SAP and its partners to continue to work together (as described in Chapter 6) to maintain a good balance between supply and demand, both now and into the future.
- 7.4 This report provides a blueprint for how the SAP can do this. Chapter 2 summarises the key areas of focus which are highlighted in data and by the SAP as areas of particular need or opportunity for skills matching in the Marches. Chapter 3 builds on this by outlining the strategic aims which will address the issues raised in Chapter 2. Chapter 4 provides more detail on how the SAP is currently addressing or can in future address these aims. The chapter also prioritises actions and describes the delivery organisation, the responsibility of the SAP or LEP and the funding source needed to take the actions forwards.
- 7.5 The remaining two chapters of the report reflect on how the SAP is currently operating and the progress it is making against the current action plan and provides examples of best practice in addressing skills issues in the Marches.
- 7.6 To make the most of this Local Skills Report over the next two years, the LEP, SAP and local partners are asked to reflect on the action plan in Chapter 4 in particular and work with others to progress the actions which are set out as relevant to their organisation. The LEP and SAP is also committed to delivering, supporting, and influencing these actions as set out in the action plan table.
- 7.7 To find out more about the work of the Marches SAP, the Local Skills Report contents or to get involved in the local skills agenda, please contact:

Aggie Caesar-Homden, Marches LEP Skills Project Manager

Email: aggie.caesar.homden@marcheslep.org.uk

Address: Marches LEP, Cameron House, Knights Court, Archers Way, Battlefield Enterprise Park, Shrewsbury SY1 3GA

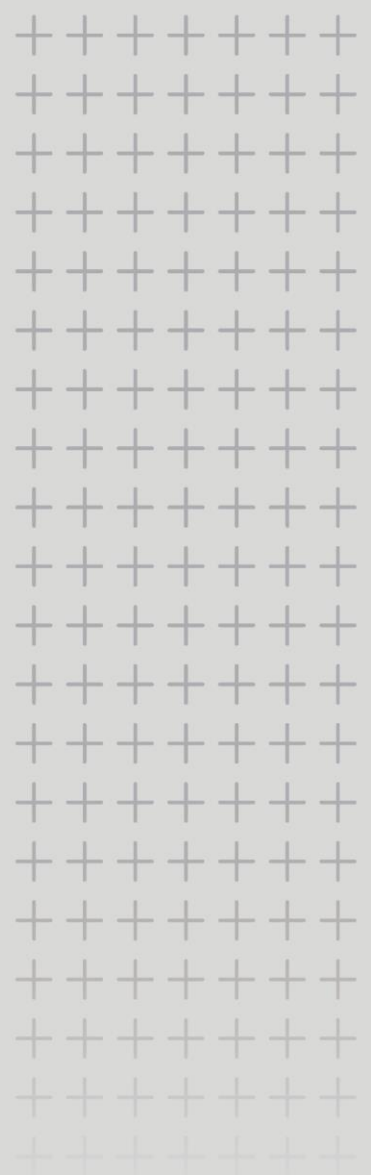
- 7.8 More information on the Marches LEP Skills Advisory Panel is available online at:
<https://www.marcheslep.org.uk/what-we-do/priorities/skills-advisory-panel/>

Appendix A - Consultee List

A.1 The following people were consulted on this report.

Table A.1 Consultee List	
Consultees (Name, Organisation)	
Aggie Caesar-Homden, Marches LEP	
Alexia Heath, Herefordshire County Council	
Andrew Smith, Derwen College	
Brian Frost, Shropshire Construction Training Group	
Catherine Baxter, Harper Adams University	
Christina Blakley, University of Wolverhampton	
Clair Schafer, SBC Training & MSPN	
Clare Keegan, Harper Adams University	
Dave Courteen, Mosaic Group & Shropshire Business Board	
Prof. David Langley, NMITE	
David Williams, Hereford, Ludlow and North Shropshire Colleges	
Deborah Gittoes, ACL Online & Herefordshire Business Board	
Gill Hamer, Marches LEP	
Graham Guest, Telford College	
James Staniforth, Shrewsbury Colleges Group	
Janine Vernon, Shropshire County Council	
Julie Webster, Department for Work and Pensions	
Kathryn Jones, Marches LEP	
Lindsay Barton, Golden Kite Solutions & Federation of Small Businesses	
Mark Thompson, AceOn & Telford Business Board	
Mike Goodall, Federation of Small Businesses	
Prof. Nazira Karodia, University of Wolverhampton	
Parmjit Chima, Harper Adams University	
Paul Hinkins, Business Watch & Telford Business Board	
Prof. Paul Johnson, University of Chester	
Richard Sheehan, Shropshire Chamber of Commerce	
Robert Elliot, Hereford & Worcester Chamber of Commerce	
Scott Grindey, Black Country Consortium	
Sonia Roberts, Landau	
Sue Marston, Telford Council	
Tim Yair, Midlands Energy Hub	
Toby Kinnaird, NMITE	
Trevor Oakley, Construction Industry Training Board	
Will Westley, Telford Business Board	

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