



Telford & Wrekin
Co-operative Council

Protect, care and invest
to create a better borough



SKILLS
TELFORD

Telford and Wrekin skills strategy:

“A learning borough for all”

2025



FOREWORD

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Leader of Telford & Wrekin Council

Cllr Shirley Reynolds

Cabinet Member for Children,
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Telford & Wrekin Council

Telford and Wrekin is a vibrant, successful borough and in recent years it has grown rapidly – creating jobs and raising aspirations in the process.



Our challenge is to sustain this growth and address the challenges facing all towns and cities across the UK. That means attracting new investment and ensuring we have a workforce with the skills to meet current and future employer needs.

But if we are to use economic growth to tackle inequalities across our communities we must also ensure all residents have the opportunity to fulfil their potential.

This document sets out a strategy to drive improvement in the borough's skills levels. It has been developed in collaboration with key partners including skills providers, education settings and employers.

It supports **Telford's Vision 2032**, which sets out an ambition for a robust economy with growth in new sectors that delivers well-paid jobs, many of which are linked to our carbon neutral agenda. Delivering these ambitions will require clear pathways through education driven by new infrastructure that develops individuals so they have the right skills for a changing, dynamic economy – enabling them to meet their aspirations and fulfil their potential. This is essential if we are to create a more equitable borough.

We look forward to working with our Partners to achieve this vision.



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WHY DO SKILLS MATTER?

This strategy aligns with our Council Plan's vision "to protect, care and invest to create a better borough" and its commitment to ensure:

- Every child, young person and adult lives well in their community
- Everyone benefits from a thriving economy
- All neighbourhoods are great places to live
- Our natural environment is protected, and the council takes a leading role in tackling the climate emergency
- We are a community-focussed, innovative council providing efficient, effective and quality services.

Ensuring that all residents have the best possible skills is core to them accessing the best jobs and fulfilling their aspirations while also driving social mobility so that everyone prospers. It's also key to retaining our talent because currently too often young people leave the borough.







BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE ECONOMY

Telford and Wrekin has a diverse economy and with that comes a wide variety of opportunities. By ensuring all residents are able to access those opportunities, we can achieve inclusive growth.



Businesses are increasingly talent-led and inward investors will locate where they can hire the people they need. Increased mobility and post-Covid hybrid working patterns bring challenges and opportunities as companies rethink their location strategies.

Our Strategy for Fair and Inclusive Growth sets out seven pillars to drive our economy. Pillar three is to enhance 'Telford's Talent Pipeline' and describes the importance of having the right people with the right skills and talents to attract inward investors and deliver residents' ambitions and aspirations.

It's vital that Telford prioritises the skills our businesses need and that also create the best jobs for our residents. We recognise that places which take a holistic approach to growing, attracting and retaining talented people are also the most successful. That's why this pillar is central to Telford's attractiveness as a place where people want to live: creating a borough where there are outstanding economic opportunities; great schools; strong further and higher education offers; outstanding quality of life; and value for-money housing.

THIS STRATEGY

The development of this strategy will complement the Marches-wide Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) published in late-2023.



Skills Shortages in our Local Area

- Manufacture – unskilled and highly skilled operatives, engineers and IT specialities.
- Construction – wet and dry trades, planners, surveyors.
- Professional – all areas of digital and Information Technology (IT).
- Health Care – Medical, doctors to porters, GPs to specialist admin and maintenance trades all required.

It also recognises the formation of Skills England and the context of a developing and evolving policy and funding landscape. This includes the modified UKSPF funding and further changes introduced by the white paper 'Get Britain Working'.

The 'Get Britain Working' white paper sets out several key changes:

- Creation of a National Jobs and Careers Service
- Introduction of a Youth Guarantee for those aged 18-21, to ensure all are learning or earning
- Establish a 'Connect to Work' programme that will support people with disabilities and health conditions into work

This strategy is focussed on responding to the identified local skills needs of Telford and Wrekin, which also reflect the key themes as set out by Skills England in their publication, 'Driving Growth and Widening Opportunities'. In particular, it is responding to skills shortages, improving pathways through learning to higher skilled jobs, and maintaining a focus on the core skills needed to help residents gain and sustain employment.

It is acknowledged that as the skills and funding landscape evolves, all partners will adapt and shape their provision in response to any changes and maximise new opportunities to support the achievement of the aims set out below. This will include considering the extended UKSPF funding as well as the emerging support through the DWP initiative 'Connect to Work'.

The three local authorities that comprise the Marches area (Telford & Wrekin, Shropshire, Herefordshire) share key areas of concern, such as retaining our young people and students after they leave school or university, ensuring everyone of employment age can keep learning and developing key skills, and making our economies work for all residents. Core to this is minimising duplication across education and training providers while making it as easy as possible for employers and providers to work together to develop modules for upskilling and reskilling.

To address these issues requires local knowledge, local endeavour and buy-in from businesses, education providers and residents in the area so that we develop tailored placed-based solutions which support market engagement and enable local skills providers to meet the needs for both residents and employers.

That's why the borough requires a local strategy in addition to the Marches plan which recognises and complements national skills policy. It will enable the development of a programme of provision that creates pathways from school to employment that has Government funding aligned to it. Through greater coordination and collaboration we can avoid duplication and reduce the negative impacts of competition within the market which sees providers competing with each other for the same pots of Government funding.

A local offer of quality lifelong education, underpinned by a joined-up approach that brings together providers and business, is key to Telford's future success being built upon inclusive growth.



THE BOROUGH

POPULATION

It is important that we invest in skills and the opportunity for our employers to draw upon a young workforce.



Ranked one of the top 10 fastest growing areas in the UK*.

*Centre for Cities report 2024.

Median age of the borough 39.

Young people key to accelerating growth in the borough.

4.7% increase in those aged 0-19 in the borough*.

*Between 2011 – 2021.

75 years+ represent 7.76% of the boroughs population. UK average 8.6%.

10.5% increase to 17% in residents from a minority background.

CHALLENGES

This strategy is central to tackling areas of economic challenge by ensuring residents living in those neighbourhoods can access the necessary training to develop the skills required to secure employment and better jobs.

18 neighbourhoods ranked as UK's most economically challenged.

A key focus of this strategy is to ensure residents can access the best skills provision to help them into work or to progress to better-paid roles, through training and education that's delivered with the right flexibility and accessibility to childcare provision and transport. More widely, the way we work is changing, with more people working from home, and we can expect changes in technology to drive different work patterns as well as the jobs and skills needed.

Weekly wages for women in full-time employment are 20.3% lower* than men.

*Compared to the national average.

It is vital that we enable the local education and training system to produce a local labour force with the requisite generic, leadership and management, and technical skills, to fill new roles.

Professional occupations make up a 16.4% of employment compared to 23.3% nationally.

We aspire to create further growth within the sector, specifically within advanced manufacturing and engineering linked to green growth. It is crucial that the borough continues to produce a supply of local labour with high-level technical skills and associated leadership and management training.

Manufacturing makes up 15.7% of the workforce, 3x national average.

The same aspiration applies to the health and care sector, which continues to face significant challenges around recruitment and retention and has wider implications, for example in relation to the borough's growing older population.



A DIVERSE SKILLS OFFER

Telford has experienced strong economic growth in recent years and has the potential to continue doing so. We have a well-placed, well-connected town with the capacity for further growth and it is important the borough has a skills strategy that allows us to continue to attract businesses and people.

Our town offers a rich diversity of skills provision – both academic and vocational – delivered by major institutions and specialist providers that supports employability skills through to technical specialisms. Our anchor FE institution, Telford College, is the largest further education centre in Telford & Wrekin and Shropshire. It is recognised as a major skills hub delivering provision spanning A levels, T-Levels, apprenticeships, degree-level higher education programmes, blended and virtual learning and sector-specific specialist training hubs to help plug skills gaps. Its twin campus provides academic and technical centres with specialisms in engineering, construction, retrofit and health. The college engages with around 2,000 young people, plus more than 500 apprentices and over 4,000 adult learners and has links with 700 employers.

The pathway to further and higher education in Telford is strong, anchored by the college and Harper Adams University – whose specialisms in agriculture and agri-tech cross over into the wider engineering, manufacturing and tech sectors. Telford employers can also draw on a large pool of graduates from the region's nine universities, many of which have specialisms relevant to our borough's strong manufacturing and engineering base along with digital and tech skills linked to business and professional services sectors.

Although we have a wealth of provision, this strategy is about how we shape the landscape so it delivers for all, regardless of age, background or stage of life – and for all employers who need tailored solutions. To achieve our aspiration of a truly inclusive borough it must include those furthest from the workforce, for example those not in education, employment or training (NEET). It's clear this will require a range of different providers.

The development of Telford's new Station Quarter sees a step change in the borough's education offer. It includes a highly accessible academic campus with A Level provision delivered by Telford College in a new Telford Sixth Form Centre alongside the Quad – a Digital Skills & Enterprise Hub with pathways from FE to HE delivered by the college and Harper Adams University. Learn Telford, the council's own adult education service, is also present,

OUR STRATEGY TO CREATE A LEARNING BOROUGH FOR ALL



ensuring pathways exist for lower-skilled adults to progress through to higher-level provision. The Quad – opened in 2024, brings world class education and training facilities targeting critical areas required by business that are vital to future resilience. It provides seamless pathways for young people and adults in an aspirational setting, playing an important role in attracting and retaining graduates. We know that adults are less able to move from the area to study due to family and caring commitments, so it's key to have a local offer that they can access.

The Quad also includes business incubation space, which raises the visibility of starting a business as a viable career pathway to our local talent and fosters entrepreneurial ambition. It enables direct connections between providers and business making it easier for them to collaborate to diversify, innovate and grow.

- Telford College offers dynamic and employer-driven packages including digital, IT and maths programmes focussed on hardware, software, data analysis, coding and cyber security skills with links to the Marches Institute of Technology.

- Harper Adams University boosts high-end skills through world class engineering, robotics and technology provision that crosses over from its agricultural training heritage into the wider manufacturing and engineering sectors. More widely, it benefits businesses across sectors through research and development and its data science expertise.

Challenges still remain, with Telford and Wrekin's working-age skills profile being behind that of many other places in the country. Cities Outlook 2024 includes a narrative on the competitiveness of 63 cities and large towns across the UK and it shows that half (50.8%) of the borough's adults possess a Level 3 qualification or higher, putting Telford in the fourth quartile nationally.

Children in the borough perform well at primary age, achieving results that are above the national average, however there are some challenges at secondary age including differences in qualification and skill outcomes.



This translates into very different levels of skills across our communities with Priorslee having 38% of residents aged over 16 having a level 4+ qualification. In Woodside the proportion falls to 16%. Areas with the lowest levels of qualification are typically found in our neighbourhoods with the greatest level of economic challenge including Sutton Hill 17%, Donnington 18% and Brookside 19%.



WHAT PARTNERS TOLD US

EMPLOYERS TOLD US

- they wanted to attract more local people to take up their job opportunities. Employers are keen to offer work experience opportunities to young people and view this as a pipeline of local talent.
- they recognise the value of work experience for young people, giving them the opportunity to understand the breadth of roles on offer locally.
- they are keen to encourage a culture of learning in the workplace, to upskill the workforce and ensure diversification across roles.

YOUNG PEOPLE TOLD US

- they felt confident about their next steps, with many having aspirations for Higher Education pathways. However, the majority told us they wanted to attend a University outside of Telford and move away to study.
- they were confident they could realise their ambitions and had the information, advice and guidance they needed to make well-informed choices.
- they are keen to find part-time work to fit around their studies, but many had struggled to achieve this.
- they would like more support with life-ready skills, to prepare them for adulthood.
- they felt they knew some of the skills and qualities that employers looked for but would have liked more work experience whilst at school to support with this.



OUR VISION

Our vision is for Telford and Wrekin to become “a learning borough for all”. So, whatever an individual’s aspiration, current skill base or age, they can access learning opportunities relevant to employers today and in the future. We also recognise the growth opportunities within our businesses and the need to continue to upskill to support them to compete, innovate and adapt to technological and digital change.

This strategy’s vision will be realised by delivering on the following objectives:

Objective 1 – Improve the overall skills levels of residents

Our aim: To raise working age skills at qualification levels 1, 2 and 3+ to higher than the national average.

We will achieve this by:

- **Ensuring all children and adults fulfil their potential.** We will continue to ensure that education is focusing on giving every child, young person and adult the skills they need to realise their potential. We will continue to invest in our collaborative approach, working in partnership with all schools and learning providers.
- **Ensuring success at level 2 as a foundation to further and higher education, work-based learning and employment.** Outcomes are currently too inconsistent. Our ambition is for all schools to be better than the national average for attainment of Grade 5 or above in English and maths at GCSE. This will be driven through our strategic partnership with schools.

- **Providing holistic support for whole families.** Building on our family first approach, we will work in our communities and in collaboration with key partners to provide wrap-around support for families with wider issues which affect educational attainment by focussing on the prevention of NEET and unemployment at an early stage.
- **Supporting our further education and training providers to provide a high-quality offer.** Ensuring high levels of participation from all communities – particularly those with lower levels of attainment – and a high-quality offer at all levels for all ages.
- **Increasing participation in adult education and ensuring its quality.** We will do this by supporting skills providers to provide courses of the right quality that are well marketed and meet the needs of business and residents alike.
- **Ensuring access to high quality, impartial careers information, advice and guidance.** This will be delivered through Telford & Wrekin Council’s Job Box Service.

Measuring progress: The percentage of the working age population with each level of qualification; the change in percentage from a baseline year, and its comparison to the national average. Tracking building blocks to success including attendance and absence rates.

Objective 2 – Nurturing and supporting aspiration whatever an individual's background or existing skill level to fulfil their talent

Our aim: For aspiration to be built into our local skills system from a young age right from primary school all the way through to lifelong learning.

We will achieve this by:

- **Supporting parents to have high aspirations for their children.** This support, starting from early years, will include helping parents to improve their own skills levels and move into or progress within employment. This can improve parental well-being, including self-esteem, and positively impact the aspirations they have for their children. For some, this will mean removing barriers including:
 - Nurturing those without aspiration
 - Providing wraparound support to prevent drop-out
 - Removing barriers to learning, e.g. transport
 - Access to suitable childcare provision
 - Recognising that aspiration to learn starts at home and families need to be supported to nurture ambition in the home.

For others it will mean ensuring there is access to the learning and development opportunities they require to fulfil their ambition with a focus on professional qualifications and essential skills (maths, English, digital and computing etc.).

- **Supporting our schools to increase employer interactions.** We will build on the existing school engagement activities and offer from large employers and develop a suite of age-appropriate activities which can be supported by employers of all sizes.

- **Using council-led networks and partnerships to provide inspiring employer interactions – developing even higher ambitions for Telford's children and their families.** Using Government funding to increase SME interactions in our secondary schools and colleges, we will seek to effectively link small and medium sized employers to local schools to help schools diversify their careers offer.
- **Increasing higher education engagements in our schools.** We will partner with universities and FE to encourage more children and their parents to see higher education as an option. Importantly, this will demonstrate alternative pathways to higher level qualifications such as work-based learning and apprenticeships.
- **Continuing to build on the success of the Marches Careers Hub.** Currently, 19 out of 20 of Telford's schools/college are signed up to the Hub. This supports schools/college careers leaders to embed the 8 Gatsby benchmarks, including increasing employer engagement, embedding careers into the curriculum, encounters with further and higher education and informing students and their parents of their options.
- **Continuing to host our successful annual Telford Skills Show.** This facilitates connections and meaningful encounters between employers, training and education providers, schools, parents/carers, young people and adults. It highlights and promotes local opportunities and pathways to support aspiration and talent retention.
- **Increasing the uptake of in-work adult skills provision to drive upward mobility.** This will involve working with employers to increase skills training within working hours and effectively using any available in-work skills funding. It will ensure skills providers have a flexible offer that can meet the differing needs of residents and employers.

Measuring progress: The percentage of the population progressing through levels of education and take up of adult training and retraining courses.



Objective 3 – Developing progression pathways to provide a clear route for people to progress through the skills system to employment

Our aim: For residents to easily re-engage with the skills system whatever their circumstances and for them to recognise the benefit, whether accessing employment, increased earning potential or facilitating career development.

We will achieve this by:

- **Ensuring learners have a clear line of sight of where courses can lead.** It's important to enable learners to see the value of continuing in education and achieving higher skills levels which can lead to higher-paid work. We will work in partnership with employers, employer representative bodies and our education and skills providers to develop pathways across different sectors and providers and the appropriate means to share and promote this to target audiences.
- **Raising the profile of businesses, the types of jobs within business/sectors and skills requirements on a very practical, accessible basis.** This will include making more use of the Career Guide we already have produced with businesses.
- **Continuing to encourage progression through 'lifelong learning' including adults who are 'In Work'.**

Measuring progress: Take up of training and education courses.



Objective 4 – A skills system which is fully inclusive and representative of our borough

Our aim: Ensure all residents and communities, including the business community, are well-served by the skills system, and that engagement practices reflect our communities' needs. There should be appropriate provision and support available for everyone, to enable full participation and progression at all educational levels.

We will achieve this by:

- **Building on our record of consultation and community engagement.** We will ensure all communities can access adult skills provision at all levels, focusing particularly on evidence of good progression to higher education levels and jobs outcomes for all groups. We will have a specific focus on those who may need additional support to access skills provision due to disability, health and mental health conditions, and drug and alcohol misuse.
- **Strengthening partnership working.** Through partnerships, we will provide “holistic support to succeed” to families with barriers that can impact educational attainment, such as mental health issues, drug and alcohol misuse, homelessness and domestic abuse.
- **Using adult skills provision as a driver to reduce inequality.** It's vital we enable out-of-work residents to attain the right skills to meet the needs of the local labour market and move into sustainable and well-paid employment. In addition, targeting skills provision at those in low-paid and insecure work to address in-work poverty.
- **Ensuring adult skills provision is fully inclusive.** We need to support adult skills providers to be inclusive in their offers to residents who may be considered to have higher learning needs by ensuring appropriate classroom and wraparound support and flexible course delivery.
- **Supporting the learning of English.** Many businesses have migrant workers and support around the learning of English will enable these employees to progress. Provision of “ESOL” (English for Speakers of Other Languages) is currently limited.
- **Maximising opportunities for in-work learning.** This includes apprenticeships and supported internships.
- **Supporting employers to navigate the skills provider market.** It's important they can access timely, appropriate provision to support upskilling and reskilling. This provision must be flexible to meet the needs of the employer, for example enabling shift workers to access learning.
- **Building on our success in supporting SEND learners to progress into paid employment.** We will develop our supported internship programmes while exploring offer options to help SEND learners progress into meaningful paid employment.
- **Building a Sector Work Academy Programme (SWAP) for adults with learning disabilities.** This will support people into employment and embed a “supported employment” approach within adult skills provision.
- **Promoting volunteering opportunities.** We will ensure that people are more aware of the benefits volunteering can bring, which includes work skills and experience, health improvement, and community cohesion.

Measuring progress: Narrowing the attainment gap between students in our most and least deprived areas; skills system access rates by ward; skills system accessed by demographic and protected characteristics.



Objective 5 – A skills system which provides the skills required by businesses, both current and future, and contributes to economic growth and the prosperity of the town.

Our aim: To create a responsive skills eco-system, built on effective joint working between skills providers, education settings and employers. We will foster and promote better, more effective linkages between providers and employers, to share opportunities in sectors, and ensure provision is both meeting local employers' needs, and strengthening schools' relationships with post 16 providers.

We will achieve this by:

- **Getting the skills and opportunities right for investment.** We will do this by continuing to drive our existing “business supporting, business winning” approach where we include support on skills, recruitment etc as part of our investor “red carpet” offer and our account management approach working with existing employers to connect them into provision, funding and ‘hide the wires’.
- **Co-designing skills solutions with businesses and skills partners.** This will ensure the skills system is responsive, innovative and produces the right skills mix for now and the future, delivered in the way that businesses need. This includes engaging with employees and supporting employers to maximise social value commitments.

- **Working with local employers to promote in-work upskilling.** Collaborations which encourage access to skills and workplace development at all levels including apprenticeships, work experience and internships are critical to creating the workforce we need.
- **Lobbying for streamlined budgets tailored to need.** We will also work to “hide the wires” in how we support employers and further develop links to our Skills for Growth programme.
- **Supporting those at risk of redundancy.** This is about enhancing the work we already do around recognising transferable skills and matching employers downsizing with those recruiting as well as tailored programmes of support for employees facing redundancy. Again, there is an important role for our Skills for Growth programme to play.
- **Facilitating and enhancing the relationship between providers and employers.** The council will facilitate collaboration between employers and providers to create the solutions to skills and training needs in the borough.

Measuring progress: Achieve the Targets/outcomes from LSIP; number of businesses involved in school engagement; number of apprenticeships advertised in borough; Quad outputs including business skills activity; evidence of more flexible provision such as modular, evening etc.

**BUSINESS SUPPORTING
BUSINESS WINNING**

GOVERNANCE AND DELIVERY

Executive oversight of this strategy will sit with Telford & Wrekin Council's Cabinet

Telford Education Strategic Partnership will have ongoing responsibility for the implementation and monitoring of the strategy. It will have strong links with the Invest Telford Partnership, providing input from a business perspective, and further connections to business groups, eg Telford Business Board. This will ensure businesses understand the strategy and can support with shaping and delivery.



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