

# Marches Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP)

## Progress Report

June 2024





This progress report has been prepared in accordance with Local Skills Improvement Plans: Stage 2 Guidance (dated November 2023) and is intended to review progress against the local skills improvement plan published in August 2023. This report was produced in June 2024 but publication was delayed due to the pre-election period.

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### TERMINOLOGY KEY

2021 Census	National Population Census for England & Wales	LA	Local Authority
BID	Business Improvement District	LSIF	Local Skills Improvement Fund
C&Eco	Careers & Enterprise Company	LSIP	Local Skills Improvement Plan
DfE	Department for Education (UK Government)	Marches	Herefordshire, Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin
DWP	Department for Works & Pensions	MEP	Marches Education Partnership
ERB	Employer Representative Body (Shropshire Chamber)	MLSIP	Marches Local Skills Improvement Plan
FE	Further Education	MSPN	Marches Skills Provider Network
HCA	Hereford College of Arts	NMITE	New Model Institute for Technology and Engineering
HE	Higher Education	NOMIS	Part of the Office for National Statistics
HLNSC	Hereford, Ludlow and North Shropshire College	SAP	Skills Advisory Panel
HTQ	Higher Technical Qualifications	SCG	Shrewsbury Colleges Group
HWGTA	Hereford & Worcester Group Training Association	SLT	Senior Leadership Team
ITP	Independent Training Provider	T level	Technical Levels
ICS	Integrated Care System	UKSPF	UK Shared Prosperity Fund



## Who is this publication for?



The purpose of this progress report is to set out the progress achieved against the LSIP priorities and what still needs to be achieved. In addition to provide updated facts and to encourage the continued positive collaboration between all those involved to ensure Marches LSIP priorities are met. The ERB for the Marches is Shropshire Chamber of Commerce.

The Marches LSIP is first and foremost to put **employers at the heart of the skills agenda**, meeting the objectives set out by the White Paper of 2021 - Skills for jobs: lifelong learning for opportunity and growth.

This report is aimed at all those involved in the skills arena:

- Employers to support their need for a future skills pipeline, upskilling and current training. To encourage continued and further engagement with training providers and other stakeholders to enhance understanding, collaboration and mutual long-term benefits.
- Post 16 Training providers (public and private) so that they can, where feasible, work to address skills shortages, and evolve training to suit the styles and content required.
- Stakeholders such as Local Authorities, Careers Services and Job Centres (DWP) to understand skills demand, progress made against the LSIP priorities and future actions planned, to support their economic development, project, and programme agendas.
- Business facing organisations and specialist sector bodies to enhance their local understanding of needs and actions so they can articulate this to their sector or members and plan activities accordingly.

**Written in plain English to support the widest audience.** Terminology used by different parties is shown to cause cross party communication issues, as clearly highlighted in the Marches LSIP 2023 Report.

The report will have different uses for each audience and in addition it will help support the understanding of the benefits of collaboration. This can take many forms, for example industry specialists from local businesses working with training providers to enhance the curriculum content. Employers supporting career advice activity to enhance the local employee pipelines for their sector. Training providers working to create additional or modified courses to meet need based on the Employer's Voice research. Working together to ensure a healthy Marches economy.

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Stage 1 Report August 2023: <https://www.shropshire-chamber.co.uk/policy-business-support/marches-local-skills-improvement-plan/marches-lsip-stage-1-report>

Skills for Jobs White Paper: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/skills-for-jobs-lifelong-learning-for-opportunity-and-growth>



## Summary of the LSIP

The objectives and aims of the Marches LSIP:



- To help to ensure employer's views and needs are continuing to be understood by decision makers such as training providers and local authorities, thus providing those decision makers with relevant facts to base further activities and curriculums on. Great progress has already been made through the LSIF funded courses and course styles being introduced during 2024 to meet local need, as well as courses provided through UKSPF funding. Success will continue to be measured by the number of course applicants and in time, the number of successful completions, followed by post course employer feedback on the course content, style of delivery and level of retained knowledge gained.
- To help support employers to navigate and appreciate the breadth of training, training styles and training providers available across the Marches. To also help employers to understand other tools or funding and innovative ways to find solutions to skills shortages. To help manage employer's expectations as to what training providers are funded for or able to provide. To breakdown communication and cultural barriers, real or not, to ensure all parties have clear understanding of each other's situation. Through the work of the ERB, the formation of the MEP and additional SAP's a wider employer audience has already been reached. Success will continue to be measured by increased employer understanding and increased training levels.
- To encourage careers provision to ensure local training and employment opportunities are fully and equally advertised to learners. To ensure career opportunities locally are promoted to all, including those going to university to strengthen the chances of return. To help more employers understand the benefit of early pipeline intervention within schools and post 16 training providers. The further success of these actions will be shown through increased employer engagement with the Careers Service, colleges and ITP's.
- Encouraging providers to further harness available technology and current equipment to help support employers, employees and hard to reach groups especially across the rurality of the Marches, further evidence will be shown by increased provider interaction with hard-to-reach groups and provider collaborations with other providers or charities to ensure the widest reach.
- To help employers see the benefits older workers can bring with experience, reliability, and availability. Results, though longer term, will be shown by a reduction in the over 50's economically inactive cohort within the Marches.



The Marches covers 5,957 sq.km, a wide geographical area, which includes Herefordshire, Shropshire, and Telford & Wrekin. Each sub area has its own challenges but also benefits. Though the LSIP looks at the entire Marches, the work has always considered the uniqueness and needs of each area. The population density of each area is very different, with the entirety of Herefordshire similar to that of the geographically small area that makes up Telford & Wrekin.



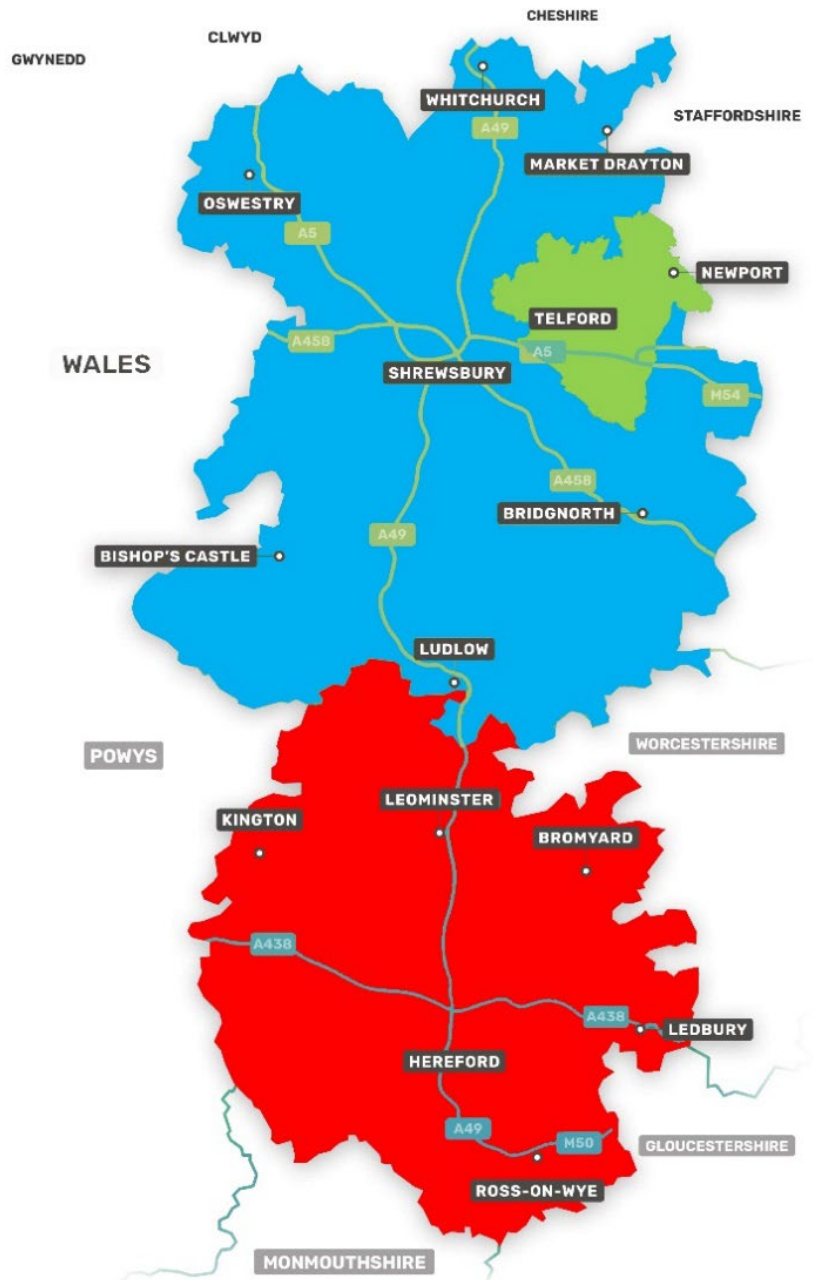


### Geography of the Marches

**Herefordshire's** population growth is slower than the national average and that of its neighbours at 2% (2021 Census) in the period 2011-2021. A deep agricultural and cultural history gives Herefordshire unique positives over other areas. There is a high rate of self-employment within the county at 14.3% (2023 Nomis). Important sectors are manufacturing, defence and security, food and drink production, agriculture, and tourism.

**Shropshire's** population growth is below the national average at 5.7% (2021 Census) in the period 2011-2021. Most employment is focused in or around the Market Towns. Agriculture and associated activities are still one of the largest sectors by number of businesses, however when you look at employment then health is the largest. There is a high rate of self-employment within the county like Hereford at 14.3% (2023 Nomis) against the UK which stands at 9.3%.

**Telford & Wrekin** Telford is a fast-growing modern town; in the period 2011-2021 it grew by 11.4% (2021 Census) and benefits from a wide variety of employment opportunities, is the most ethnically diverse and densely populated, but has marginally higher unemployment than the other two sub-regions. Local workers have more options for work in the area or in the eastern conurbations, but this can also lead to competition from workers coming in from outside the area. Self-employment is below the national average at 7.3% (2023 Nomis). Manufacturing density is still well above the UK towns average providing a wide range of employment at all levels.



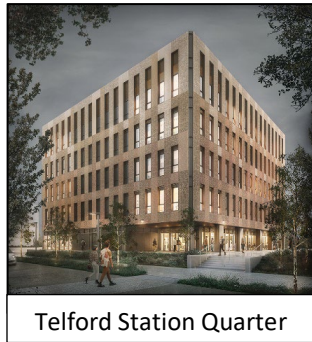
### Strategic and economic context update



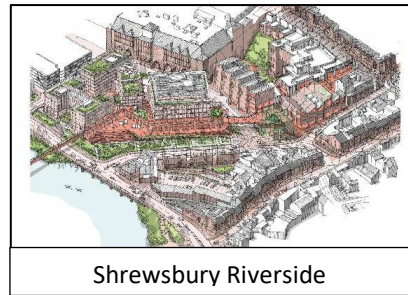
Though there have not been any dramatic changes to the Marches or its economy since the publication of the Marches LSIP report, there have been material changes which have removed assets from the local area. However, these are offset by reprofiling delivery and incoming financial investment, allowing for new projects to meet need and provide opportunities, as well as expanding training provision and facilities. Investments are many and complex. Here we highlight a small selection to give a flavour of the activity that is taking place. Activity that includes additional training types, courses, and new facilities to enhance skills and widen employment opportunities, as well as improving the local economy.



Hereford Enterprise Zone



Telford Station Quarter



Shrewsbury Riverside

#### What has gone or is going:



**Marches Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)** functions have now been transferred to the three local authorities across the Marches area. Marches LEP brought private and public sectors together to support economic growth. Funding came directly from Government and the LEP awarded those funds. Supporting a wide range and size of projects for varying audiences, including creating Growth Support Hubs in each sub area and managing the Careers Advice provision. As all services have transitioned there is no negative impact on the LSIP.



**University Centre Shrewsbury (University of Chester)** recently announced that the University will be withdrawing from the town. Courses covered Arts and Humanities, Business and Management, Education, Health and Social Care, Science, Social Sciences. The

University has taken a range of measures to ensure current students can complete their studies and future medical placements will still take place in the Marches. Local colleges are also working to provide additional degree level courses and enhance the range of university collaborations taking place. Therefore, there has been minimal impact on the LSIP priorities.



### Development, Improvements, and Investments:



Though investment comes through many channels, both public and private, several notable funds have enabled multiple projects to take place and continue to take place.

- UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) is a government-allocated fund managed by local authorities in partnership with local stakeholders, as part of the Government’s wider “levelling up” agenda.
- Rural England Prosperity Fund, which as the name suggests, supports projects in rural areas.
- Towns Fund – Telford providing funds for major infrastructure projects in the town.
- LSIF Local Skills Improvement Fund which is supporting the Marches Education Partnership to deliver a range of new courses to provide skills highlighted in the Marches LSIP report 2023.



Projects of note include many; below we share a few examples of investments that are working to ensure a healthy economy, more employment opportunities, and gives those training an opportunity to stay local.

- Herefordshire: Enterprise Zone Skylon Park ongoing project to grow the business community.
- Shropshire: The redevelopment and regeneration of the Riverside area of Shrewsbury.
- Telford & Wrekin: Station Quarter providing greater training offers and facilities for HE & FE.

A vital investment common to all council areas is co-working space creation, important with the high number of single person businesses, levels of self-employed and the rural nature of much of the area. Important for supporting new start-ups, cross pollination, and creativity, be they town or country based.

The visitor economy is particularly important to the economic wellbeing of the Marches and part of the role of the four BIDs (Business Improvement Districts) is to help support the visitor economy, which in turn requires skills, offers employment opportunities, and brings significant economic benefits. Training for those businesses involved, directly or indirectly in the sector, comes in many forms, from the BIDs, local FE colleges, private providers, peer mentoring and collaborations, offering businesses choice and an on-going staff pipeline. The businesses have spoken in these areas, as they have recently renewed their willingness to pay a levy to fund and therefore retain their local BIDs, as they see the value it brings.



## Priorities and actions (Roadmap)

Priority	Action / Activity / Milestone	Partners involved (detail the role and responsibilities of the ERB and relevant partners)	Timescales (start and likely end dates - original and any revisions)	Method of implementation and outcomes expected	Monitoring arrangements (how is progress monitored and at what intervals)	Progress Status
<p><b>Employers Voice</b>                      “Putting the Employers at the heart of the skills agenda.”</p> <p>(Relates to LSIP Report 2023 P18 – Emerging Skills Priorities &amp; Actions)</p> <p>Continuing to harness the voice of the employers</p> <p>Reporting findings to support the Colleges with their annual accountability statement preparation.</p> <p>Marches                      LSIP Stage 1 2022-2023                      LSIP Stage 2 2024-2025</p>	<p>ERB carried out extensive employer interviews across the area to gain intelligence and understanding of recruitment, skills, and training needs.</p> <p>Forming the basis for the LSIP 2023 Report, the ERB also used the opportunity to encourage businesses to engage to support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>providers and others decision making.</li> <li>enhance collaboration.</li> <li>ensure the correct future skills pipeline.</li> <li>understanding of the local training offer.</li> </ul>	<p>ERB team and external specialist.</p> <p>LSIP role / ERB Role</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Marketing</li> <li>Interviewing</li> <li>Analysing</li> <li>Reporting</li> <li>Reviewing</li> </ul>	<p>Employer Voice Interviews and Activities</p> <p>Stage 1 interviews target 450 by March 2023</p> <p>Stage 2 1<sup>st</sup> batch target 150 by March 2024</p> <p>2<sup>nd</sup> batch target 50 by June 2024</p> <p>Stage 2 3<sup>rd</sup> batch target 300 Sept 2024 to February 2025</p>	<p>To market the opportunity to participate to employers and raise awareness to all.</p> <p>To carry out the 1:1 interviews and activities with employers.</p> <p>To analyse the results.</p> <p>Along with other research report findings to support providers to make informed decisions for curriculum planning.</p> <p>To provide the reports and details to all stakeholders including employers to ensure widest understanding of need and detail.</p>	<p>Targets and coverage monitored weekly by the Project Manager and increased activity actioned if required to meet targets.</p> <p>Stage 1 target met - final number of interviews 463.</p> <p>Stage 2 1<sup>st</sup> batch target met – final number 154.</p> <p>Stage 2 2<sup>nd</sup> batch on target to reach 50 by 30/6/2024.</p> <p>Stage 2 3<sup>rd</sup> batch target set. Revised question set to be built during summer 2024. Interviews commence September 2024.</p>	<p>Complete</p> <p>Complete</p> <p>On track</p> <p>Not started</p>

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<p><b>Local Skills Improvement Fund</b></p> <p>(Relates to LSIP Report 2023 P19-22 Skills Priorities)</p> <p><b>Providing skills training for some areas of shortage highlighted in the Marches LSIP Stage 1 Report.</b></p> <p><b>LSIF Project 1 - Developing Manufacturing and Engineering Skills</b></p> <p><b>LSIF Project 2 - Construction Green Skills including Retrofit and Renewable Technologies</b></p> <p>Details at: <a href="https://marches-education.co.uk">https://marches-education.co.uk</a></p>	<p>The ERB’s employer findings and the LSIP 2023 Report provided the basis for the application for LSIF funding for new facilities and courses.</p> <p>MEP, made up of 6 partners, a successful £2.5 million LSIF funding application to provide additional training and resources.</p> <p>ERB has been involved through the inception and delivery of the project to ensure alignment with the LSIP priorities.</p> <p>Two projects being delivered jointly are.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Manufacturing &amp; Engineering</li> <li>2. Construction Green Skills &amp; Retrofit.</li> </ol>	<p>Marches Education Partnership</p> <p>Lead Telford College – Principal.</p> <p>For each project at each location, the sector, department or curriculum leads at HLNSC, SCG, Telford College, IN-Comm Training, HWGTA, SBC Training</p> <p>LSIP team monitoring LSIF progress throughout. With seats on the strategic board, both delivery groups and marketing group.</p>	<p>LSIF funding granted October 2023.</p> <p>Immediate planning commenced.</p> <p>Courses designed and equipment selected with the support of industry specialists and local employers.</p> <p>First courses go live in March 2024 and roll on to next academic year as premises and equipment become ready.</p>	<p>Project 1: Developing Manufacturing and Engineering Skills</p> <p>Project 2: Construction Green Skills including Retrofit and Renewable Technologies.</p> <p>To provide both full, part-time and short upskilling courses to meet industry need.</p> <p>Courses already being embraced by industry. Helping to upskill existing industry staff to ensure better retention in a tight labour market. Bring in new recruits and build a strong pipeline in sectors of great shortage.</p>	<p>The Marches Education Partnership has a dedicated team based at Telford College. Telford College is the lead for the LSIF projects. As well as lead for Project 1. HLNSC lead for Project 2.</p> <p>Bi-weekly meetings are held for the Operational Delivery Group to monitor performance against targets. (moving to monthly now courses starting).</p> <p>Bi-weekly meetings of the LSIF Marketing group to monitor progress and to ensure full and joint promotion of the project.</p> <p>Strategic Board meets monthly to monitor progress.</p>	<p>Project 1 6 providers On Time (all parties)</p> <p>Project 2 3 providers On Time (all parties)</p> <p>First course started March 2024.</p>

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<p><b>Health and Social Care</b></p> <p>(Relates to LSIP 2023 Report P23-24 Skills Priorities)</p> <p><b>LSIP Stage 1 Report highlighted the difficulty in recruitment both for the public and private sector.</b></p> <p>Health &amp; Social care is a large sector and employer in the Marches. A sector that struggles to recruit and retain, especially at entry level and being a rural area in the main. Offering clearer career paths, new practical hands-on qualifications and state of the art learning facilities will help to ease this issue over time.</p>	<p>ERB worked with the NHS, the social care sector, social care advisory bodies and the ICS, to understand the needs of the sector, the difficulties faced. This data supported the work of the colleges and other providers.</p> <p>Example: New Health Care Support Worker Academy and Clinical Skills Centre at Telford College.</p> <p>2 week pre deployment training for Health Care Support Workers to prepare them for the workplace and their journey to certification.</p> <p>2 year T level course, using the new facilities and latest technology to prepare them for the ward environment.</p>	<p>Lead Telford College’s Director of Health &amp; Science. NHS (4 trusts) and ICS.</p> <p>Examples of some of the courses being offered to provide multiple and additional routes into health care.</p> <p>Telford College Health &amp; Social Care Level 1 T level in Health</p> <p>Shrewsbury Colleges Group offers 1 T level foundation and 3 T level courses in Health.</p> <p>HLNSC offers Health Care bootcamps (free), access to Higher Education Diploma and Foundation Degree courses.</p>	<p>Courses already underway.</p> <p>Future cohorts being recruited.</p> <p>T level will prepare students to move into a skilled job or lead to further technical qualifications, higher apprenticeships, or a degree course.</p>	<p>New centre, equipment and using virtual and augmented reality equipment.</p> <p>Health Care Support Workers to complete 2 weeks mandatory training.</p> <p>Technology being used to provide real life scenarios in controlled settings.</p> <p>2 bed maternity skills room and 4 bed hospital ward skills room created.</p> <p>Provide more trained staff into the sector. Provide new route in via T Levels and explore future expansion in collaboration with local Universities etc.</p>	<p>Progress monitored by the individual Colleges through their reporting mechanisms.</p> <p>Progress monitored by the Colleges, ICS, NHS.</p> <p>Also, by awarding bodies and funders.</p>	<p>On Time</p> <p>First cohort started courses as of September 2023.</p>

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<p><b>T Levels &amp; HTQs</b></p> <p>(Relates to the 2023 LSIP Report Priorities - P19-25 Coloured Sections)</p> <p><b>Though very new qualifications, they are being embraced by all main FE providers, giving students new training routes to employment, progression, or further study.</b></p> <p>Stage 1 LSIP clearly identified the employers wish for recruits to have a more practical education, in readiness for work, progression or promotion.</p> <p>Clear from the Employers Voice and LSIP 2023 Report that many employers are unaware of T levels or HTQs and those who do, have some misconceptions.</p>	<p>ERB will continue to use employer research to calculate the understanding by employers of the new qualifications to allow providers to increase, as necessary, their marketing activities and future course subjects.</p> <p>Increasing the number of subjects available in both T level and HTQs (known mainly to employers as HNC/HND)</p> <p>Example: HTQ Courses cover a wide selection, from Computing to Construction Management.</p>	<p>Telford College HLNSC SCG Curriculum leads. Reporting to Colleges SLT on enrolment and progress.</p> <p>Promote the value to employers, current and potential students, and stakeholders.</p> <p>Promotion to employers through LSIP Employer Voice interviews.</p> <p>Encouraging, through the LSIP process, other stakeholders to help to promote the value.</p>	<p>Colleges started to offer in this academic year and one in the previous year. Now adding further courses for the academic year 2024-2025 to broaden the offer.</p>	<p>Colleges have already put in place the following, and continue to do so, as they expand their course range.</p> <p>Suitable staff Facilities Equipment</p> <p>Able to raise greater awareness by employers and having the benefit of first cohorts to herald the value and success of T levels &amp; HTQs to other employers and stakeholders to raise engagement and enrolment.</p>	<p>Progress monitored by the individual Colleges through their reporting mechanisms.</p> <p>Also, by awarding bodies and funders.</p> <p>Evaluating employer feedback. Using Employer Skills Advisory Panels to bring on new courses and refine (where able) current courses.</p>	<p>Courses in place currently and new courses coming available 2024/2024 academic year.</p>



Funded by  
UK Government

**Marches LSIP**  
Local Skills Improvement Plan



Shropshire  
Chamber of  
Commerce



Herefordshire  
& Worcestershire  
Chamber of Commerce

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<p><b>Work Ready Recruits &amp; Upskilling of Soft Skills.</b></p> <p>(Relates to the LSIP 2023 Report – Quick Wins P27-29)</p> <p>This was something clearly highlighted through the Employer’s Voice. Though a national issue, the Marches trainers and funders are making inroads into local solutions to provide the new and current workforce, hard to reach and career changers with enhanced skills to increase productivity and deal with emerging technologies.</p>	<p>The ERB research, analysis and interactions which culminated in the LSIP 2023 Report provided a strong evidence base for the Local Authorities when reviewing UKSPF applications for training provision funding.</p> <p>Multiple programmes have been rolled out across the Marches in response to the employers voicing their frustration with soft skills and work ready skills during the LSIP interviews and highlighted in the LSIP Stage 1 report.</p> <p>Mainstream qualification and teaching already contain behaviour elements, so these additional courses will compliment those behaviours already being taught.</p>	<p>FE colleges and Private Training Providers and HE provision.</p> <p>Local Authorities</p> <p>ERB to support and help promote the relevance of these courses to employers.</p> <p>There is a close correlation between the LSIP report, and the courses being offered. For example, Leadership and Management was rated as a skill needing improvement as the ability of current staff was not meeting need. New courses have recently become available across the Marches to meet this requirement.</p>	<p>Ongoing as multiple offerings.</p> <p>Projects started. Funding runs until March 2025 for many of the projects.</p> <p>Courses being run by a wide variety of providers, from colleges to Local Authority skills hubs, Chambers to Universities.</p>	<p>These courses are varied in location, provider, size, skills level, duration and funding.</p> <p>Purpose is to raise the skill levels of the current workforce, help others to retrain for different sectors and to help bring more of the hard-to-reach back into the work force.</p>	<p>The future Marches LSIP portal will have links to the relevant course providers, and this will be monitored and updated accordingly.</p> <p>The local authorities have a role to oversee results where funding was allocated to run the courses. With colleges etc. funding and awarding bodies will monitor progress, completion rates and results. Colleges etc will gather feedback from both employers and students to determine next steps, value of the course and its relation to the local skills needs. These will be checked at a minimum annually.</p>	<p>Many courses funded or fee paying are already taking place.</p> <p>The Marches LSIP portal will pick up as the LEP Marches Growth Hub portal declines.</p> <p>Initial Marches LSIP portal build expected to be completed by end of 2024.</p>

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<p><b>Careers Advice Careers &amp; Enterprise Company</b></p> <p>(Relates to LSIP 2023 Report – Quick Wins P27)</p> <p>The LSIP 2023 Report research clearly showed that employers felt that certain sectors, especially careers with vocational training, were not being highlighted as much as non-vocational careers when advice was being given in schools.</p>	<p>The ERB has been working closely with the Local Authority leading on Careers for the Marches and with the C&amp;Eco’s team members to look for additional ways to enhance employer / student interactions to support the future pipeline. An area for improvement as shown in the LSIP 2023 Report.</p> <p>The Marches Careers Hub works to transform and support careers education across region by linking education with business, providing resources, and helping secondary schools and colleges achieve the Gatsby Benchmarks.</p>	<p>Careers &amp; Enterprise Company (contracted through Shropshire Council on behalf of all Marches Councils).</p> <p>ERB highlighting to employers how they can support this work, become Enterprise Advisors, offer taster sessions etc.</p> <p>ERB help to dispel myths and misunderstandings around careers advice.</p>	<p>Ongoing.</p> <p>The funding for the Marches Careers Hub and team has been renewed for 2024/2025.</p>	<p>To raise awareness of career choices, becoming more aligned to local needs and employer’s views. Noting the findings of the LSIP work to support their programme choices.</p> <p>State-funded schools and further education colleges in England are required to provide careers guidance to their pupils from ages 11-18. This duty has been steadily extended over recent years.</p> <p>Currently the Marches Careers teamwork with 65 different educational institutions across the area.</p>	<p>The Careers and Enterprise Company (C&amp;Eco) in the Marches is monitored against KPIs set by their national body.</p> <p>Marches Careers team are also overseen by The Marches Careers Hub Steering Group and the local authorities also monitor progress.</p>	<p>2024 national emphasis shift to create programmes that highlight vocational routes and technical qualifications such as T levels, as these are more highly valued by employers.</p> <p>Also new ways for employers to engage, which are less time consuming, being rolled out.</p> <p>Current delivery has started.</p>

## What has been achieved so far?

Despite the LSIP Report having only been published in August 2023, there has been much progress made already, even though some outcomes will of course take several years to bear final results. The Marches three general FE/HE colleges have all embraced the needs highlighted within the 2023 Marches LSIP report, as have the private providers, stakeholders, and local authorities. Below is a small snapshot of the achievements and growth. All have plans for further developments ahead to cover even more of the needs raised by employers. Independent training providers have also increased their course offer, upgraded facilities, and worked with the Marches LSIP report. Careers advice programmes are working with a greater emphasis on vocational and technical routes for school leavers, something again that was highlighted by employers. Digital and base IT skills are also being heavily focused on, vital to keep the workforce productive. You can read further details on various projects, growth and improvements in the Annexes accompanying this report.



### The Marches Local Skills Improvement Fund

One of the most powerful outcomes from the Marches LSIP to date are the LSIF projects. The Marches Education Partnership learnt that their application for LSIF funding was successful in October 2023. From this six partner training organisations have joined forces to deliver a suite of courses across the Marches, also providing new or upgraded facilities and equipment. These courses are directly in line with skills shortages and employer needs shown in the 2023 Employer's Voice report and the 2023 Marches LSIP Report.

The courses focus on two clear areas of need:

**Manufacturing and Engineering** employers needed staff to meet the multi skilled demands of modern technology including robotics. Courses allow current staff to upskill, courses designed with local employers in formats to suit. Many are short courses, to enable staff to become more multi skilled.

**Green Construction** agenda has seen a speedy rise in the demand within construction for staff trained in retrofit and renewables. The technology has outpaced the understanding of the career path and availability of training, causing a severe shortage of entrants into the sector. Again, upskilling those with construction skills or a trade is proving to be an important route to speeding up the pipeline.



### Growth, progression, and success by our three main general FE/HE colleges

#### Hereford Ludlow North Shropshire College (HLNSC)



- Over £2m in capital and resources being invested in a state-of-the-art Low Carbon Technology Training Centre facility to support the national and regional sustainability agenda.
- Over £0.2m invested over the last 3 years and over £0.3m pending to increase the college's T Level offer for September 2024 entry in priority areas including Building Engineering, Early Years, Animal Management, Equine and Livestock, and Business.
- £506,000 invested to increase the college's HE offer with Higher Technical Qualifications in priority areas including Electrical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Modern Methods of Construction, Digital and Leadership & Management, to name but a few.
- Launching Higher-Level modular courses in LSIP priority areas including Engineering, Construction, Digital and Leadership & Management, to name but a few.
- Launched Skills Bootcamps in priority areas to upskill and/or reskill those in the workforce or wishing to enter employment, including: Health, Early Years and Leadership & Management.
- Over £200,000 invested in delivering numeracy skills programmes to local Shropshire residents as part of the UKSPF funded Multiply project.
- £151,000 invested in developing Level 3 and Higher-Level courses to support LSIP identified priority areas, including Retrofit, Principles of Alternative Energy and Fluid Mechanics to name but a few.



#### Shrewsbury Colleges Group (SCG)



- Invested 500k further enhancing our Renewables Energy provision.
- Built a Net Zero Skills Hub for Heating Engineers and Electricians to upskill in the latest environmental technologies.
- Invested 250k further enhancing our Electrical, Plumbing and Gas provision to further increase our technical skills training programmes.

- Introduced 7 new T Levels in September 2023, directly aligned to the LSIP priority areas of Engineering (Electrical Electronic / Mechanical), Construction (Design Surveying and Planning), Digital (Digital Production, Design and Development), Professional (Business Support), and Health (Nursing).
- Increased the college's Higher Skills portfolio with the introduction of Higher Technical Qualifications aligned to LSIP priority areas of Engineering (Electrical, Electronic and Mechanical), Construction (Modern Methods of Construction and Site Supervisory), Digital, Professional (Leadership & Management) and Health (Healthcare Professionals).
- Introduced Higher Level modular skills programmes in LSIP priority areas including Engineering, Construction, Digital, Health and Leadership & Management.
- Delivered Numeracy skills programmes to over 500 local Shropshire residents as part of the UKSPF funded Multiply project.

## Telford College



- Telford College is an award-winning provider, rated the number one performing college in the West Midlands combined authority area for upskilling professional programmes, leading to employment.
- £1.8 million investment in the Wellington campus to transform it into a technical and vocational training centre of excellence, with a university presence.
- Telford College opened a new £430,000 cutting-edge Clinical Skills Centre, to train students for a wide range of careers in health and social care. 30% increase in students enrolling in health and social care. 200+ students benefit from hands on clinical training in the clinical skills lab with industry experienced lecturers. Over 800 HCSW trained through the academy since 2022. Over 60 NHS staff to achieve a L3 teaching qualification. 60 adults have attended a step into NHS programme.
- First educational provider to create a virtual augmented reality suite (VR) providing students with real-life learning environments. New Digital & Maths Skills Hub in Telford's town centre opening in September 2024 giving a 21% growth in student applications for Business, Digital and Professional Studies for the 2024/25 intake.
- Launched new bootcamp-style short programmes to reskill and upskill workers in the manufacturing, engineering, and construction sectors, with over 450 heating engineers successfully completing in 2023/24.
- £600,000 upgrade of advanced Manufacturing and Electrification Centre. Creation of a new Retrofit Skills Lab for renewable energy to upskill electricians in electrical sustainability.
- Sustainability remains a key operational factor for the College. For example, projected reductions in electricity and gas in 2023-2024 are 10% and 5% respectively. Upgrade of 99% of light fittings to LED - some 4,500 fittings.



### Other Achievements



- Hereford Arts College (HCA) achieved OFSTED Outstanding for their FE provision. HCA Alumnus wins an Oscar, providing solid proof that neurodiversity is not a barrier to work or success.
- HCA in conjunction with the Hereford BID are hosting the 2024 International Festival of Artist Blacksmithing. Blacksmithing brings collaboration between HCA, HLNSC National School of Blacksmithing, NMITE and other educational institutions around the country and globe. Highlighting the career paths and opening additional learning opportunities to current students.
- NMITE's The new Future of Work Skills Hub is built around three core themes: innovation, entrepreneurship, and future skills development, helping to prepare local businesses and individuals for the future of work, whether that is upskilling, reskilling or developing entrepreneurial and innovative skills. NMITE's new centre will also play a leading role in the world of new technologies and converting the skills learnt to productive economic use.
- Working with employers to enhance training providers knowledge and understanding. All colleges and larger private training providers have created employer groups (skills advisory panels) to ensure that they have the best sector understanding and knowledge, helping ensure students get the best possible training for the sectors they will work in. These groups are growing and will continue to cover more sectors and sub sectors.
- A growing focus on encouraging older workers, who no longer feel able to work in their current role, to consider bringing their wealth of expertise and experience to teaching. Information events being held and publicised. Teaching, like all professions, has suffered from skills shortages.
- Local companies also offer a new way to train as some have opened training academies to ensure a good pipeline for the future. Various reasons behind these, Iconsys in Telford is training engineers for their own staffing needs. Aico of Oswestry is training electrical contractors from across the UK on fire safety equipment installation. Staff shortages have increased the ingenuity and investment being made by employers to manage the skills issue.
- The Station Quarter in Telford will bring FE and HE together in a centrally located venue. Telford College and Harper Adams University working together to help enhance much needed digital skills at all levels, to ensure a technically able modern workforce. Herefordshire Skills Board launched. Shropshire Council forming a Skills Delivery Group, chaired by Shropshire Chamber.



## What still needs to be achieved?

# Marches LSIP

## Local Skills Improvement Plan

Though much has been achieved since the Marches LSIP Report was published in August 2023, there is still room for further improvements, changes, and investments to continue to ensure that businesses across the Marches can recruit, retain, upskill, and become more productive. Collaboration and the breaking down of language and cultural barriers are of high importance to ensure resources are available, and also that best practice and innovative ideas are fully and clearly understood by differing audiences to ensure opportunities are not missed.



Marches LSIP Portal. This will be created to help give employers and their staff another route to finding the resources they need, helping to bridge gaps between employers and providers. The portal's aim is to include, but not limited to, simplifying terminology, manage expectations, shatter myths and publicise the wide variety of training, support and skills sets available across the Marches. This will work in conjunction with the three Local Authority Growth Hubs, to compliment not duplicate content and emphasis. The ERB is well placed to do this as employer facing and as a Chamber of Commerce, it is a natural first port of call for many in business when looking for support, advice, or training.



Another piece of work for the ERB Marches LSIP team, working closely with the other stakeholders, is to promote to employers the enhanced opportunities arising from the Marches LSIP report, new skills pipelines, reasons to engage with training providers, increase understanding of career changing and employing older staff. This work will be partly through the Marches LSIP Portal, but also through events offering promotional opportunities to the right audiences, working in conjunction with other stakeholders to avoid duplication and continued Employer Voice interviews will be another information and promotion vehicle.



To support stakeholders, where great change, such as devolution, takes place. Articulating career change possibilities, such as teaching, highlighting transferable skills examples or ensuring re skilling training is well publicised to help pre-empt difficulties such as local redundancies. Work to support stakeholders such as local authorities and DWP in those instances. Highlighting examples where an employer has found staff from an unexpected source or training provider.



The 2024 Employer’s Voice report contained a detailed section on job vacancies across the Marches, to highlight two things, those skills still in greatest need, and to help educators to understand the terminology employers use with regards to a skill or role. This information will help training providers better understand continuing skills shortages, areas of decline and new opportunities.

From the analysis of 2024 recruitment data, and despite a slowdown in recruitment, many of the skills needs followed the same pattern as they did in 2023. This proves that the training provider choices were not only correct, but have longevity, as the process of filling the skills pipeline takes time. The focus will be on the local need and employment opportunities to prepare a workforce able to ensure a healthy Marches economy for now and the future.

Below is just a selection of top skills vacancies across the Marches. Clear how many are roles requiring vocational skills. The new training offers are very much reflecting that need. Continued Employer’s Voice surveys, analysis of available government data and that provided by sectors specialists such as the CITB will continue to be needed to ensure the correct direction when training providers are planning curriculums, offering new courses or managing funding.

Selection of the key vacancies by volume across the Marches during the past 3 months. These are the most common terms used by employers and had the highest number of unique job vacancies.			
Multi-Skilled Maintenance Engineers	Gas Engineers	Production & Machine Operatives	Welders & Fabricators
Vehicle Technicians	Field Service Engineers	Warehouse Supervisors	Forklift Drivers
Electricians	Painters & Decorators	Carpenters	Bench Joiners
Labourers	Environmental Consultants	Surveyors	Site Managers
Health Care Assistants	Nurses	Social Workers	Residential Support Workers
Receptionists	Administrators	Accounts & Finance Assistants	Digital Marketing Assistants
Marketing Managers	Software Developers	Graphic Designers	Office Administrators

## Annexes



The purpose of the annexes attached is to give the reader greater detail to support the facts and information in this report. To provide examples and insights into the very varied world of careers, training, and skills.



### **Additional Information on:**

1. General FE/HE Colleges
2. Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF)
3. Specialist FE/HE Providers
4. Private Training Providers & Provider Groups
5. Innovative solutions to training – employers turned trainers
6. The Employer's Voice – putting employers at the heart of the skills agenda
7. Careers Advice and the Careers & Enterprise Company



### **Contact information:**

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