



SKILLS AND EMPLOYMENT STRATEGY 2024 - 2029



FOREWORD

As Chair of the Skills Strategy Board, I am delighted to present the Buckinghamshire Skills and Employment Strategy 2024-2029.

The partnership forged between the Buckinghamshire Skills Strategy Board and collaborators across Buckinghamshire provides the platform from which to pursue our shared vision, highlighting how our employers and communities will benefit from investing in skills and employment to create growth with rich conditions for enterprise.

This Strategy recognises the numerous strengths Buckinghamshire already has, from our high educational achievement and employment rates, through to our globally-recognised assets such as Pinewood Studios producing global blockbusters. The renowned Stoke Mandeville Hospital, the birthplace of the paralympic movement, put Buckinghamshire on the map, while our thriving voluntary, community and social enterprise sector and wealth of small and medium-sized enterprises form our dynamic labour market.

We also recognise the challenges faced by employers trying to grow but unable to find the right skills, and the barriers faced by residents and communities in accessing employment, training and skills. These are complex issues, and the responses must

be as unique as the individuals and business that are at the heart of our communities. This Strategy commits to working in genuine partnership to attract the right investments for education, employment and skills and begin to prioritise interventions to catalyse change.

Dovetailing with the Buckinghamshire Local Skills Improvement Plan, this Strategy proposes five cross-cutting priorities which will secure future talent pipelines for the county's growth sectors, enable individuals to access support through employability and upskilling programmes, including influencing curriculum changes, and continue to support the strong collaborative approach between employers and education and training providers.

There remains much to do, but Buckinghamshire is ready to work with partners at all levels to create an inclusive, dynamic economy which works for everyone.



Professor Nick Braisby
Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive Officer,
Buckinghamshire New University
Chair of the Skills Strategy Board

This ambitious Skills and Employment Strategy has been the culmination of partnership working in practice. Steered by the Skills Strategy Board and created through collaboration across Buckinghamshire, each individual consultation and conversation has been driven by the commitment to make skills and employment better for everyone across the county: employers, educators, learners and communities alike.

Ensuring lifelong learning, accessible to everyone, is firmly at the heart of Buckinghamshire Council. In recent years skills and vocational learning has become an increasingly prominent priority for us and there is now a considerable amount of co-ordinated activity taking place. We are not complacent, we recognise the challenging times being experienced through the rises in the cost of living, the war in Ukraine and the generational effects that the Covid-19 pandemic brought to our communities. In recognition, the Skills Strategy Board will work to make sure that the paths available to our businesses, employers, residents and communities are full of opportunity.

I am delighted to endorse this Skills and Employment Strategy for Buckinghamshire.



Cllr Anita Cranmer

Cabinet Member for Education and
Children's Services

Member of the Skills Strategy Board

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PURPOSE OF THE SKILLS AND EMPLOYMENT STRATEGY

This Skills and Employment Strategy has been produced under the direction of the Skills Strategy Board. The Skills Strategy Board, reporting to the Place Based Growth Board, is a partnership group which brings together public and private sector partners to facilitate joined up discussions and design the county's approach to increasing productivity through skills and employment interventions.

The Skills and Employment Strategy:

- Sets out our vision for place-based skills and employment priorities that will underpin delivery of our ambitions for Buckinghamshire.
- Establishes our approach to economic growth through investment in skills and employment and focuses action.
- Enables effective local partnership working, encouraging collaborative approaches to addressing local challenges and sharing best practice.

The Skills and Employment Strategy has been created in collaboration with partners building on the work of the Skills Strategy 2017-22 and Local Skills Reports 2021 and 2022, as well as meeting the priorities of the Place Based Growth Boards Strategic Vision. The Strategy also dovetails with Buckinghamshire's Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP).



Buckinghamshire Skills and Employment Strategy

- Five-year plans that cover the period 2024 – 2029.
- Designed to cover the holistic skills and employment system including employability, technical, further and academic learning provision.
- Recommends a range of interventions which will be developed in a place-based approach. The logic chains detail where these dovetail with the LSIP.
- Developed by the partnership-based Skills Strategy Board including education providers, public and private sector partners.
- Sets the vision for place-based skills and employment priorities which provides a basis to develop strong cases for investment for local initiatives and supports the pursuit of external funding opportunities.

Buckinghamshire Local Skills Improvement Plan

- Three-year plans that cover the period 2023 – 2025.
- Key element of the Department for Education's (DfE) policy to place employers at the heart of the skills system.
- Developed by local designated Employer Representative Bodies (Buckinghamshire Business First for Buckinghamshire).
- Designed to ensure post-16 technical education and skills provision is more responsive and flexible in meeting local labour market skills needs.
- Recommends changes in provision and interventions such as apprenticeships and skills bootcamps in priority areas.
- Supported by Local Skills Improvement Fund and other mainstream funding.

More information on the Local Skills Improvement Plan is available in the glossary at appendix C.

VISION

Buckinghamshire: A place with a future-focused, agile and dynamic employment and skills system that assures the needs of employers, individuals and communities are met in order to contribute to the growth and productivity of the local economy.

MISSION

The county will collaborate to raise aspirations and encourage a culture of continuous, inclusive learning and development to enable our employers and residents to grow and adapt to change.



NATIONAL CONTEXT

The UK had one of the most robust G7 economies in the 1980s, 90s and early 2000s, but has experienced weak growth since the 2007/8 global financial crisis. Over the last decade businesses have been operating in an uncertain world, not least during the Covid-19 pandemic, and therefore have been more reluctant to invest than previously. Uncertainty regarding the implications of Brexit led to some businesses being reluctant to invest, whilst in more recent years, investment has been further hampered by rapidly rising costs.

Despite the UK's slow GDP and productivity growth, employment rates have remained relatively high and unemployment relatively low. The biggest impact to individuals therefore has been weak wage growth.

The Government's Skills for Jobs White Paper¹ refocused national policy to increase productivity, support growth industries, and give individuals opportunities to progress into work or further their careers through professional development. Employers were placed at the heart of Government strategy, bringing businesses together with education and learning providers to ensure that training is high-quality and delivers the skills that employers need, while ensuring that learning is future focused to any change that may result from the fourth industrial revolution.

Buckinghamshire has a vital role to play in delivering the growth in productivity and individuals through the Government's Skills for Jobs and Levelling Up agenda. We can build upon our history of being a productive, creative and entrepreneurial economy, and continue to be a net contributor to the UK exchequer, delivering £18.4 billion per year to national output.²

¹ Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth (publishing.service.gov.uk)

² [Buckinghamshire Regeneration Framework](#)



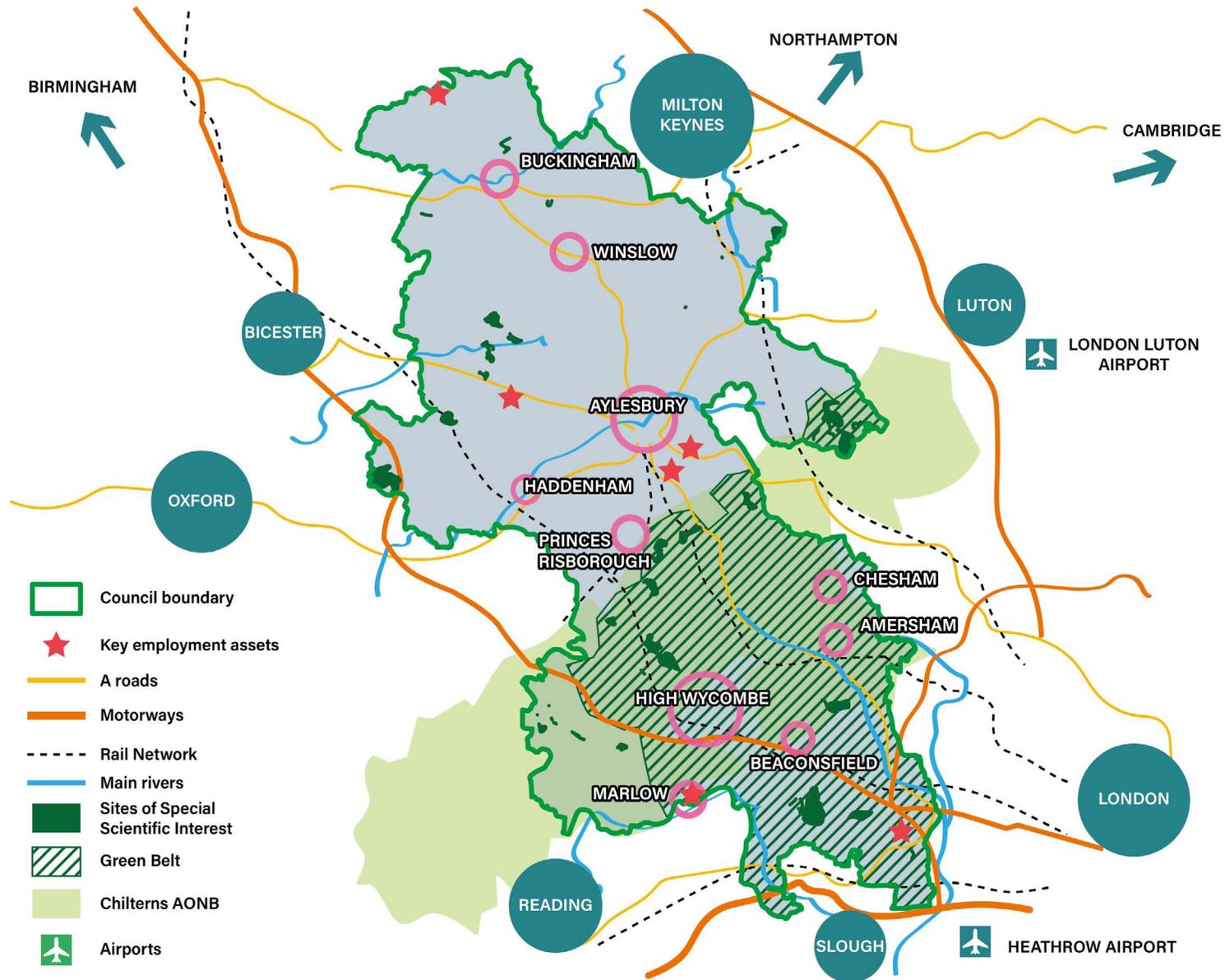
THE BUCKINGHAMSHIRE CONTEXT

Buckinghamshire is a richly diverse, enterprising, and attractive county located in the heart of a growing and innovative region. With a population of over half a million people, the county is one of the traditional Home Counties, bringing with it great connections into central London and ready access to international gateways at Heathrow and London Luton Airports. From quintessential rural villages and a backdrop of beautiful countryside to urban based living in our network of attractive and diverse towns, Buckinghamshire is a sought-after location for businesses and individuals alike.

Even though we are a thriving county and many of our communities enjoy some of the best outcomes in the UK, Buckinghamshire must respond to a range of issues which shape our places and key centres of growth. As we see our population continue to grow, we will also see challenges around job opportunities, skills and qualifications, and supporting business growth to meet the needs of our diverse demographics and communities.



BUCKINGHAMSHIRE TOWNS



THE LOCAL ECONOMY



31,210
businesses



553,100
residents³



£18,485M
in Gross Domestic Product



248,000
employee jobs



85%
work in the service
sector



Health and social work provides the most jobs (followed by administration and support, education, professional, scientific and technical, and retail)



51%
of residents hold a level
4 or higher qualification



8.3%
of individuals hold no
qualifications (age 18-64)



41%
work for a small to
medium-sized enterprise



2.6%
claimant count rate



13,100
economically inactive
residents want a job

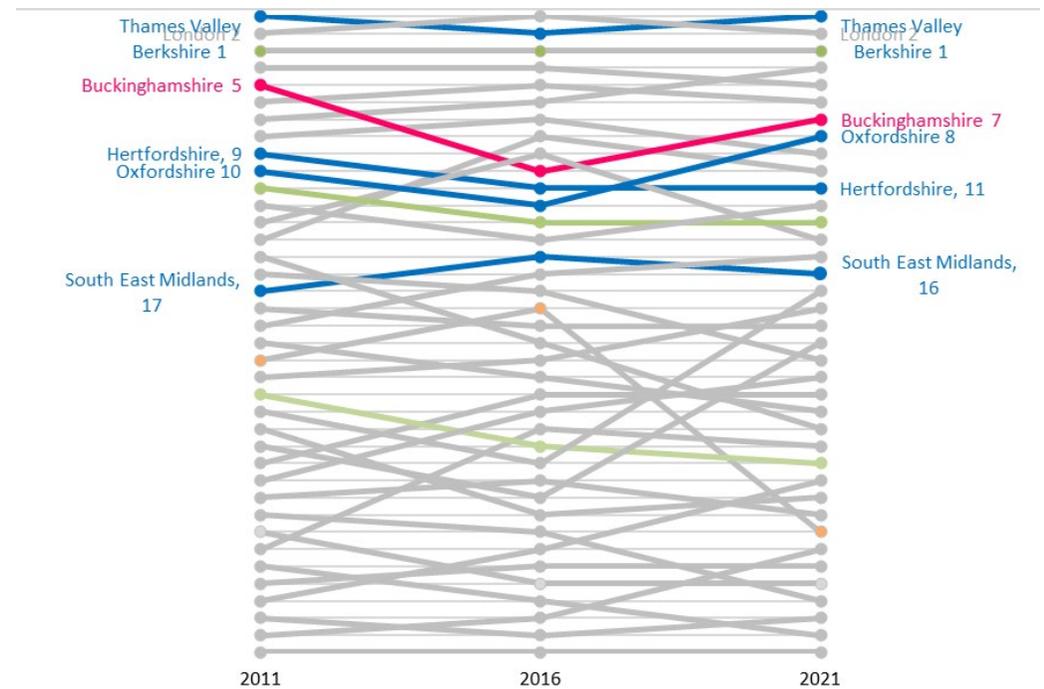
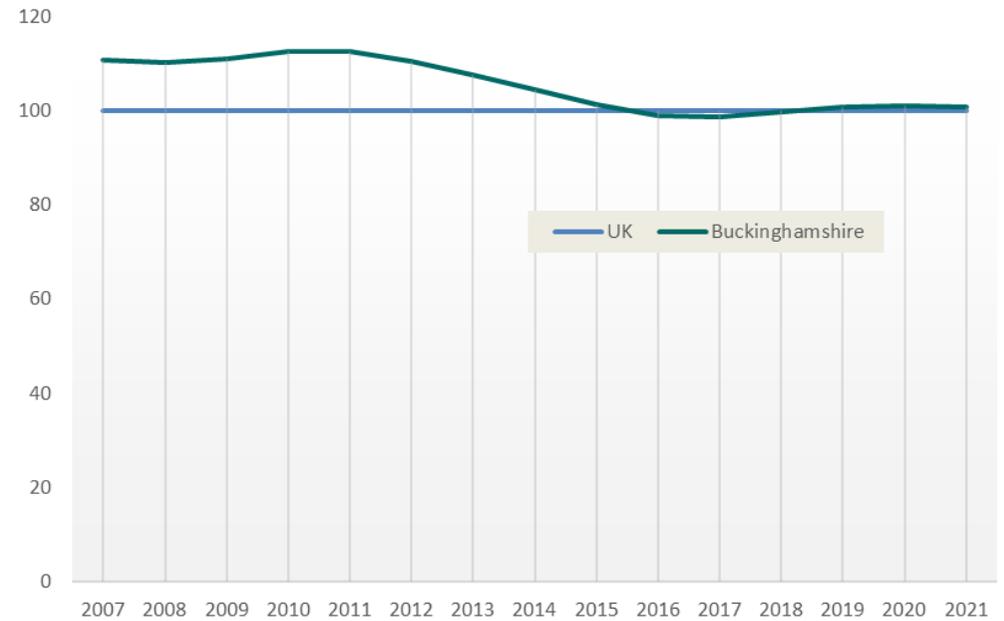
³ Census 2021

PRODUCTIVITY

From a relatively strong position between 2007 and 2011, Buckinghamshire's economy experienced slower than average productivity growth between 2011 and 2016, with productivity rates (GVA per hour worked) being more or less in line with the UK average ever since.

Underneath this headline there are two further factors to consider. In 2021, Buckinghamshire's productivity rates were deemed to be the 7th highest of all 38 Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) areas, suggesting that Buckinghamshire's economy is performing better than most. In fact, only eight LEP areas have above UK-average rates of productivity. However, the inclusion of estimates of the value of home ownership in economic output data artificially inflates Buckinghamshire's productivity figures more than in many other areas.

At the height of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, as was the case nationally, Buckinghamshire's GDP suffered a sharp drop followed by a fairly swift rebound between 2020 and 2021.



Top right - Chart 1: Buckinghamshire's productivity compared with the UK average (UK=100) (source: ONS, 2023).

Bottom right - Figure 2: Productivity of Buckinghamshire in comparison to neighbouring LEPs (source: Buckinghamshire Local Enterprise Partnership).

LABOUR MARKET

As of August 2023, Buckinghamshire is estimated to have the highest employment rate of all 38 LEP areas, with nearly 82% of working age residents in work. Conversely, economic inactivity rates are the lowest of all 38 LEP areas, whilst unemployment rates are comparatively low. The median wages of Buckinghamshire residents (£38,605) are also much higher than the national average (£33,197)⁴, though not the highest in the South East.

Though the health of the Buckinghamshire labour market looks positive, there are some underlying challenges within the economy. Over the last few years, Buckinghamshire's unemployment and claimant count rates have been closer to the national average than they have been previously. There are areas of the county where there are concentrations of residents who are less likely to be employed or are more likely to be in insecure or low paid work. Buckinghamshire also has an increasing proportion of economically inactive working-age residents who are inactive due to ill health (12,100) and around a quarter of economically inactive residents would like paid work (13,100⁵).

Whilst average wages are comparatively high, it is estimated that wage inequality is greater within Buckinghamshire than the national average (i.e. there is a greater gap between the top and bottom earners). Buckinghamshire's gender pay gap is also wider than the national average as the full-time median salaries of women working in the Bucks economy are 78% of the full-time median salaries of men while the national average is 83%.⁶ 50 of the 98 Bucks companies required to report their gender pay gap

(i.e. Buckinghamshire's largest employers) have a gender pay gap of over 10%.⁷

Nationally the population is ageing. By 2040, nearly one in seven people is projected to be aged over 75. These trends, partially mitigated by migration rates, will have a major effect on the country. As the population ages, so will the workforce. The productivity and economic success will be increasingly linked to older workers. Enabling people to work for longer will become increasingly important for society and individuals. Learning throughout our lifetimes will help us to participate for longer in the labour market, build personal and mental resilience and bring health and wellbeing benefits. Lifelong learning brings benefits to individuals, employers and wider society that will be increasingly valuable in an ageing population.⁸ The ageing population presents particular challenges for some of Buckinghamshire's key sectors. Within construction and healthcare for example, the ageing workforce means that large sections of the workforce will become eligible for retirement in coming years, thus heightening the need to adapt to retain staff for as long as possible, along with increasing the pipeline of new, younger, recruits.⁹

⁴ ONS Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings - workplace analysis

⁵ ONS Annual Population Survey, 12 months to December 2022

⁶ ASHE 2022, ONS

⁷ Government Equalities Office, 2022-23

⁸ [Future of an Ageing Population](#)

⁹ [Buckinghamshire Local Skills Report](#)

SKILLS ACQUISITION

In general, Buckinghamshire's residents are more highly qualified than the national average. Young residents tend to perform very well at Level 2 (GCSE and equivalent) and Level 3 (A-level and equivalent) and school leavers are subsequently more likely to go to university. Overall, Buckinghamshire has the highest proportion of young people entering 'sustained positive destinations' after both Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 of all 38 LEP areas.

However, there is a gap in attainment between the destinations of pupils who attend a selective or non-selective school in Buckinghamshire. Preparing all Buckinghamshire's learners to reach their potential as adults is a priority of the complementary Education Strategy.

Whilst lower than the national average, nearly a fifth of working age residents have no or only low (below level 2) level qualifications. According to the 2021 Census, 26,930 (8.3%) Buckinghamshire residents aged 18-64 have no qualifications.

The cohort of individuals of all ages undertaking apprenticeships is relatively small and has been stable for several years. As has been the trend nationally, reforms to apprenticeships have led to greater take-up at higher levels and by older residents in recent years. The number of apprenticeship opportunities at Level 2, a route into employment for some school leavers, has shrunk over the last five years.



Buckinghamshire's higher education provision is dominated by three subject areas: business and management, education and teaching, and subjects allied to medicine. Graduates from the county's Higher Education Institutions are slightly more likely to enter employment on completion of their studies than the national average, as 63% of Buckinghamshire's graduates entered full-time employment and 12% entered part-time employment, versus 61% and 10% for graduates in England respectively.¹⁰

In 2019, a smaller proportion of Buckinghamshire employers were providing training to their staff (57%) than the national average (61%), even though 3.9% of Buckinghamshire's employees were deemed not 'fully proficient' in their role by their employer.¹¹ More recent resident-based data shows that the proportion of working-age Buckinghamshire residents undertaking job related training within the last 13 weeks (22%) is slightly higher than the national average (19%), although is lower than in neighbouring LEP areas.¹²

In summary, the Buckinghamshire labour market features key strengths but also complex challenges. This Skills and Employment Strategy is intended to provide direction and commitment to resolving the challenges and making the most of our strengths through investment in skills.

¹⁰ HESA, 2020/21 graduates, reported in 2023

¹¹ 2019 Employer Skills Survey

¹² Annual Population Survey, 12 months to December 2022, ONS



Strengths

- High employment rates.
- High median wages (although whilst this is positive for individuals it can be challenging for businesses in terms of higher labour costs and impact on profit).
- High levels of qualifications amongst residents.
- Higher than average Level 2 and 3 attainment by young people.
- Further and Higher Education Institutions with a strong history of employer engagement, and a focus on applied learning and employability.
- World-class talent in industries such as high-performance engineering, film and TV, space and MedTech.
- Significant job growth expected in a variety of sectors over the next few years, in particular in the film and TV, and construction sectors.
- High-performing schools.
- A strong collaborative culture (between education institutions, and between employers and educators).
- High levels of employer involvement in the local skills agenda.
- Clear long-term economic growth aspirations set out in the Buckinghamshire Local Industrial Strategy.
- A top-performing Careers Hub.
- A top-performing business Growth Hub.

Challenges

- Buckinghamshire's unemployment and claimant count rates are closer to the national average than they have been historically (previously the Buckinghamshire rates were much lower).
- 13,100 economically inactive working-age residents wish to work but require additional support to do so.
- An increasing proportion of economically inactive working-age residents are inactive due to ill health (4.1% of working-age residents in 2022 compared with 1.9% in 2018).
- Ensuring strong local talent pipelines for growing sectors (including life sciences, health and social care, film and TV, construction, high performance engineering, and space).
- Ensuring a strong talent pipeline of green skills (including digital and engineering skills) to enable the shift towards a net zero economy.
- High levels of out-commuting.
- Retaining and attracting talent (school leavers, graduates and high skilled residents).
- Low take-up of apprenticeships, and fewer apprenticeships at Level 2.
- Higher than average rates of 16–17-year-olds whose activity is 'not known.'
- A lack of engineering training provision within the county.
- Low levels of interest in careers in sectors such as construction, health and social care, hospitality, tourism,

leisure, agriculture and horticulture, resulting in employers struggling to fill vacancies.

- Pockets of inequality and poor social mobility.
- Recruitment difficulties causing problems for employers in many sectors and are hampering business growth. In some cases, this is linked to wider issues such as a lack of affordable housing and poor transport links.
- Employer concern that new entrants are not 'work ready'!
- Lower than average levels of training by county employers, which may be linked to the higher proportions of small and micro firms in Buckinghamshire with relatively small budgets and/or time for staff development.
- Ever-growing and evolving demand for digital skills, including utilising Artificial Intelligence and robotics.
- Ensuring opportunities in growth sectors are accessible to all.
- Mismatch between the demand for skills and labour within the local economy, and the skills held and jobs sought by local residents.

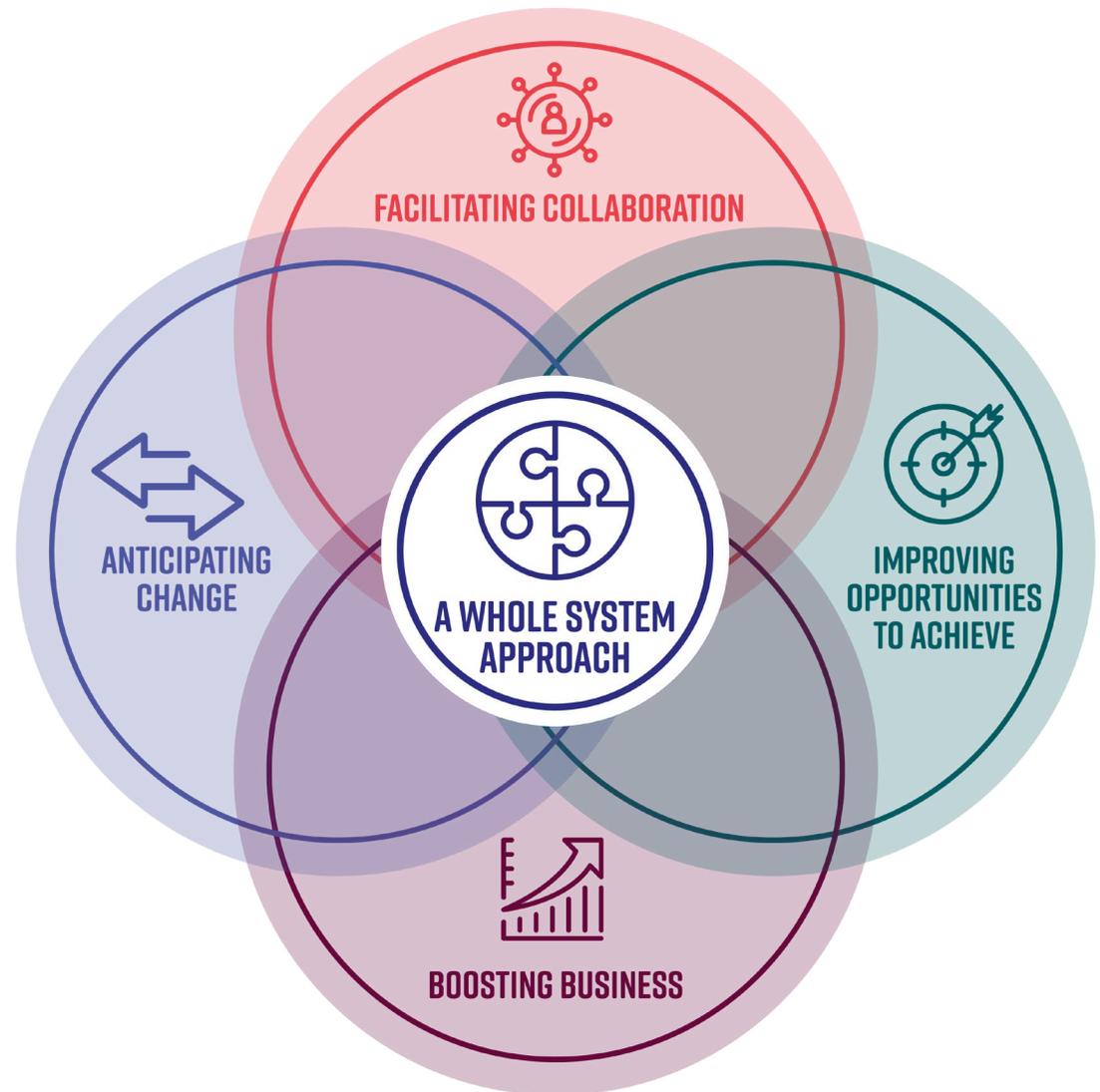


KEY PRIORITIES

The Skills and Employment Strategy 2024-29 has five cross-cutting key priorities. Each of these priorities is supported by metrics that will be used to measure how successful proposed interventions (described in the action plan) are in supporting Buckinghamshire to achieve the vision.

The five priorities are:

- A whole system approach
- Facilitating collaboration
- Improving opportunities to achieve
- Boosting business
- Anticipating change





A WHOLE SYSTEM APPROACH

A whole system approach. The macro level approach of how improving the skills and employment system will benefit everyone in Buckinghamshire, residents and business alike.

Buckinghamshire has a rich and diverse economy, enabled through collaboration between employers, educators, public services, communities and residents. The work of each party is intertwined, and collaboration can lead to a system which works for everyone – and is more than the sum of its parts. This means working across the partnership to provide a skilled workforce, while ensuring that skills and employment are adequately captured in the facilitative services, such as affordable housing and adequate public transport.

Buckinghamshire's approach to take a helicopter view of the whole system creates the opportunity to build on our strengths and work together to tackle our challenges.

¹³ UK Business Count, 2023, ONS (VAT/PAYE registered businesses)

¹⁴ Business Register and Employment Survey, 2022, ONS

¹⁵ Annual Population Survey, 12 months to December 2022, ONS

¹⁶ Ofsted, 2023



Strengths

- 31,200 businesses and employers, including world-class assets and recognised brands to a thriving community of small and medium-sized enterprises.¹³
- 248,000 employee jobs.¹⁴
- Lower-than-average unemployment rate of 3% (8,700) compared to the national average of 3.7%.¹⁵
- Economy worth £18.485m in Gross Domestic Product.
- Educators: two universities, one college group, one adult and community learning provider, several independent training providers and employer providers, and 47 selective and non-selective secondary, middle and upper schools.
- 87% of all schools and colleges rated good or above by Ofsted.¹⁶

Challenges

- Recovery in the form of productivity growth has been slow.
- Several central government skills reviews and changes in funding and delivery policies have created instability in the further education and skills sector.
- There is a mismatch of skills sought by local employers and the skills held and jobs sought by local residents, as 28% of job vacancies in 2019 were vacant as employers were unable to find candidates with the appropriate skills.¹⁷
- Attracting talent to Buckinghamshire is dampened by the comparatively high cost of living as Buckinghamshire's median house prices are 14.7 times higher¹⁸ than the median gross pay of Buckinghamshire residents.¹⁹
- Buckinghamshire is one of the least 'self-contained' economies in England, with high levels of commuting and skills drain when young people do not return following university.
- 13,100 of Buckinghamshire's economically inactive residents wish to work but require additional support to do so.²⁰
- 12,100 residents are economically inactive due to long-term ill health. This is a rise of 73% from 2020 to 2022.
- It is expected that a number of individuals who took early retirement during the Covid-19 pandemic may need to seek employment, as the rising cost of living continues to affect our residents and communities.
- The Chiltern area of Buckinghamshire has very poor social mobility prospects with low pay for disadvantaged individuals and a high pay gap.²¹

The Skills Strategy Board are determined to work in partnership to close these gaps; providing the in-demand skills employers require to boost business and enabling our residents and employees to access the continued professional development and learning to thrive in the changing labour market, and in life. To ensure we focus our resources on achieving the maximum impact, the immediate focus of the Skills and Employment Strategy is to streamline local delivery and accelerate re-skilling to meet local demand, especially through Skills Bootcamps, T Levels and apprenticeships. In the longer term, we will continue to explore how Buckinghamshire can act as a test-bed for new national initiatives and build the case for skills investment in the county to further our ability to roll out agile and tailored interventions at pace, when and where required.

¹⁷ 2019 Employer Skills Survey

¹⁸ ONS house price statistics for small areas in England and Wales: year ending Dec 2022 (published June 2023)

¹⁹ ONS earnings and employment from PAYE RTI, seasonally adjusted July 2023 (published August 2023)

²⁰ Annual Population Survey, 12 months to December 2022, ONS

²¹ The long shadow of deprivation (publishing.service.gov.uk)

This Skills and Employment Strategy commits to:

- Explore partnership working opportunities including seeking a devolution deal to deliver funding programmes aligned with local need.
- Partner with employers to develop a series of Buckinghamshire-specific career pathways and job matching across our key sectors and supported by training and qualification routes. These pathways will support individuals to understand the steps to take to further their career, and support a pipeline of talent for employers.
- Work in partnership to promote apprenticeship opportunities to maximise apprenticeship levy transfers from large employers to small and medium enterprises, with the aim of achieving a net-zero return of apprenticeship levy to HM Treasury.
- Explore introducing social value conditions on contracts and procurement processes to provide opportunities for local people, in line with forthcoming Government legislation.
- Seek to introduce specific skills and employment conditions in the Buckinghamshire Local Plan 2025 to work with developers to deliver apprenticeships and other work-based learning, work placements and provide measures to support local people into employment, such as transport.
- Promote cross-collaboration across Buckinghamshire Strategies including:
 - Education Strategy to ensure a joined-up skills and education system.
 - Housing Strategy to secure affordable housing to attract people to live and work in Bucks including keyworker housing.

- Regeneration Strategies providing new employment opportunities and education provision.
- Digital Strategies to maximise access for residents, communities and employers to high-speed, reliable internet capability to enable connectivity and access on-demand learning, upskilling and pathways to employment.
- Transport strategy to support growth by improving access to jobs and learning providers.

Success will be measured through:

- An increase in the employment rate.
- A decrease in the number of economically inactive people who would like a job.
- Increase in the median wage relative to the median house price.
- Increase in the number of businesses investing in Buckinghamshire, through companies moving into Buckinghamshire or investing in new facilities and skills.
- An increase in the county Gross Domestic Product.
- A marked improvement in social mobility using the criteria set by the social value commission.
- An increase in the number of existing businesses who are sustained and growing over the period of this strategy.
- An increase in the number of start-up businesses who are sustained and growing over the period of this strategy.

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE SKILLS HUB

The Buckinghamshire Skills Hub provides a one-stop facility to help employers and people in Buckinghamshire to thrive. Individuals of all ages can use this facility to develop the relevant qualifications and skills that are required to be successful in the workplace, while employers can promote the live vacancies and explore development opportunities to reach the next stage in their growth journey. Buckinghamshire Skills Hubs achieves this by promoting and utilising the links between business, the local community and education and training providers.



Photos courtesy of Buckinghamshire Skills Hub



FACILITATING COLLABORATION

Facilitating collaboration means celebrating existing collaboration between employers, educators and communities, while encouraging further partnerships across Buckinghamshire.

Buckinghamshire's labour market already benefits from strong collaboration between employers and education providers, promoting opportunities and providing the in-demand skills to grow our economy. Our high-performing schools deliver higher than average attainment by young people, and a strong focus on employability and hands-on learning is delivered through Buckinghamshire's Further and Higher Education institutions.



Photo courtesy of Buckinghamshire New University

Key strengths

- Top-scoring Careers Hub (6.8 on the Gatsby Benchmarks of Good Career Guidance, versus the national average of 5.5) which is an association Careers Leaders from our schools to share best practice, develop shared projects and resources to support students and build links with employers.
- Bucks Skills Hub provides career support, information and advice for individuals of all ages, as well as sector-specific career pathways and case studies. Live job vacancies and information on job and career fairs are published to provide routes into employment.
- Buckinghamshire's dynamic network of over 80 Enterprise Advisers, at least one per secondary school, from different industry sectors and professional backgrounds including Cisco, McAfee, IBM, Align, EKFB, Verizon, John Lewis and Metrobank, amongst others.
- Buckinghamshire's Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) was developed using data provided by over 800 businesses and feedback from 435 businesses and 22 education and training providers.
- Strong commitment to continuous collaboration and improvement through LSIP Employer Sector Groups including the Creative Industries, Construction, Engineering, Digital Sector Groups, Bucks Health and Social Care Academy Forum and Bucks Education and Training Provider Forum to facilitate the employer-provider collaboration.
- In the 2021-2022 academic year, 2,710 apprentices were Buckinghamshire residents, and 45% of these apprenticeships were started by people over the age of 25.
- Bucks Health and Social Care Academy optimises workforce's partnership-working across systems to provide education, training and skills development ensuring the best possible delivery of care.

Despite the excellent collaboration already taking place, there are pockets of challenge throughout the county.

Schools experience unequal access to work experience within employers, whilst employers note that capacity and insurance issues in hosting young people prevent further work experience opportunities and industry placements. For example, one employer noted that they were prevented from hosting T Level industrial placements of 315 hours because it was not possible to insure the young person on their policy. The lack of exposure to work experience opportunities contributes to the employer-cited concern that school, college and university leavers are not work-ready.

Work readiness of new entrants to the labour market was reported by several employers as a skills gap in need of remedy. Work readiness, as summarised in [Buckinghamshire's Local Skills Improvement Plan](#), covers practical skills, digital literacy (for example use of Microsoft Office programmes), attitudes to working, communication and collaboration and leadership skills. This Skills and Employment Strategy endorses the approach of the Local Skills Improvement Plan to deliver a pilot initiative volunteering skills record, for the Health and Social Care Sector to address work readiness skills, which may be rolled out to other sectors if successful.

Job and career fairs provide inspiration to young people to explore different career pathways and opportunities and essential support for adults seeking employment or career changes into new sectors or industries. In 2023, there were over 60 job and career fairs, plus the 80+ events that are offered within Buckinghamshire schools. This high number risks saturating the market and overwhelming the intended participants, while there is little understanding on the efficacy of job and career fairs.

The majority of our young people choose academic pathways into university education post-school. While this is an excellent route, it is not the only pathway to employment and may not be the most suitable, or direct, for everyone. There is limited awareness and understanding of alternative education and employment options such as T Levels and apprenticeships, which provide the opportunity to learn vocationally-specific skills whilst gaining industry experience and even a wage through an apprenticeship.

There is one sector-specific Skills Bootcamp currently delivered in Buckinghamshire by Flannery Plant Hire in Plant Operatives. Beyond this high-performing bootcamp, residents and employees (aged over 19) may access the national offer, though the journey to sign up to a bootcamp is complex, often sold out and the learning is not tailored to Buckinghamshire's employer needs.

There is sporadic engagement from employers in workforce development programmes, and Buckinghamshire's employers are more likely to use non-public training providers such as regulatory bodies or suppliers (66%) for off-the job training rather than public

provision (15%) through the college, university or government provision.²² This is potentially because employers are not aware of opportunities such as Skills Bootcamps, Sector Based Work Academy Programmes (SWAPs) and National Careers Service workforce development, or further work is required to bring employers and training providers together to deliver in-demand, high quality training.

To tackle this, Buckinghamshire will:

- Develop the work experience offer, including promoting opportunities on the Bucks Skills Hub website, with filtering capabilities by the age of the participant and introduce a virtual work experience platform, developed by Buckinghamshire Council.
- Produce a Jobs and Careers Fair Plan, developed through and monitored by the Skills Strategy Board, to ensure that the job and career fair offer facilitates collaboration without duplication or overwhelming the intended participants. The plan will use data collected from jobs and career fairs in the county delivered by the Skills Strategy Board partnership; the Bucks Skills Show, the Confident Futures Skills Show, and the Buckinghamshire Jobs and Apprenticeships Fair.
- Cross-collaborate with the Education Strategy to promote career options and experiential learning throughout key stages 2 and 3 (pupils aged 11 and over).
- Develop a place-based approach to apprenticeships, using partnerships to:
 - raise the profile and awareness of vocational education pathways such as T Levels and Apprenticeships, including with

²² 2019 Employer Skills Survey

employers, learners and parents. Map the existing apprenticeship provision offer to support learners to access the right, high-quality course for their career aspirations.

- Commit to working with the LSIP sector employer groups to target sector skills shortages which can be delivered through apprenticeships in programmed cohorts.

- Support the work to be undertaken through the Bucks Training Provider Forum plus the LSIP sector groups where employers will meet with providers to deliver high-quality, employer led training opportunities.
- Develop a pilot initiative volunteering skills record, through the LSIP, for the Health and Social Care Sector to address work readiness skills, which may be rolled out to other sectors if successful.
- Work with the Department for Work and Pensions and employers to increase the Sector Based Work Academy offer and access to workforce development through the National Careers Service.
- Introduce Skills Bootcamps tailored to the needs of Buckinghamshire's employers as detailed in the Buckinghamshire Local Skills Improvement Plan.

Successful delivery of the Facilitating Collaboration theme will be measured upon:

- An increase in the availability of work experience including implementing a repository of opportunities on the Bucks Skills

Hub and tracking the number of users accessing the virtual work experience platform.

- Delivery of a Jobs and Careers Fair Plan, owned and monitored by the Skills Strategy Board.
- An increase in the number of students taking T Levels and employers hosting work experience for T Level students.
- A zero return of apprenticeship levy funding to HM Treasury.
- An increase in the number of apprenticeships taken aligned to sector skills shortages in the Local Skills Improvement Plan.
- An increase in the number of apprenticeships at all ages.
- An increase in the number of Sector Based Work Academy Programmes (SWAPs) and increase the number of individuals reaching sustained employment as a result of a SWAP.
- Introducing further Skills Bootcamps, aligned to sector need as described in the Local Skills Improvement Plan. The Skills Bootcamps programme will also track the following outcomes:
 - Number of individuals starting and completing a Bootcamp.
 - Job interviews provided.
 - Individuals achieving sustained employment.
 - Individuals starting an accelerated apprenticeship.
 - Individuals who achieve new contracts because of the learning achieved on the Skills Bootcamp.
 - Individuals who are promoted or assume new responsibilities as a result of the learning achieved on the Skills Bootcamp.

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE CADETS

The Health and Social Care Cadets programme offers work placements for students currently undertaking their Health and Social Care Level 3 diploma to inspire learners to discover career opportunities in the Health and Social Care sector which the individual may not have previously considered. Delivered in partnership through Buckinghamshire Council, Buckinghamshire College Group and Buckinghamshire Health and Social Care Academy, the programme gives students an opportunity to gain valuable hands-on experience providing exposure to a range of different areas and roles within the field of social care, while employers can secure future talent pipelines and influence the training to deliver the skills demanded in the sector.

The partnership welcomed 4 cadets in 2023 for a 5-week programme and their experience included placement days at White Leaf Support in High Wycombe, The Epilepsy Society, as well as within the Adult Health and Social Care Team at Buckinghamshire Council.

This is what the cadets had to say about their respective experiences:

- *We've been able to see all types of people in all different settings, so it's good when you're not too sure what you want to do in your career.*
- *It's helped me develop a lot of skills like communication - that I can use in the future.*

Photo courtesy of Buckinghamshire College Group





IMPROVING OPPORTUNITIES TO ACHIEVE

Improving opportunities to achieve supports those with additional barriers into learning and employment opportunities.

As one of the home counties, Buckinghamshire often faces the perception as an affluent area without the same need as other parts of the country. The reality is that, like elsewhere, Buckinghamshire has areas of affluence and other areas where health, work and education outcomes are poorer. Buckinghamshire is committed to working in partnership to remove disadvantage and promote opportunities which bring everyone closer to the workplace.



OPPORTUNITY BUCKS

Opportunity Bucks is the Council's flagship programme to improve opportunities for people in Buckinghamshire. Responsive to the government's Levelling Up White Paper published in February 2022 which sets out 12 national missions designed to spread opportunity across the whole UK and improve everyday life and life chances for people in underperforming places.

The Opportunity Bucks programme focuses resource across three areas where people are experiencing the most hardship in Aylesbury, Chesham and High Wycombe. Specifically, the Jobs, Careers and Skills Theme within Opportunity Bucks will support individuals in the 10 identified wards to access support to help them into employment or a better job. This is being achieved through:

- Employability programmes which provide intensive 1-1 and group sessions to upskill individuals to access employment. These programmes include mental health support.
- Adult literacy and digital skills programmes.
- Multiply, government-funded, free to access numeracy skills programmes to help with budgeting, children's homework or to unlock job opportunities.
- Horizons, a Buckinghamshire Council employment programme to help individuals overcome multiple barriers to employment with job matching support and ongoing personal development and career progression advice for employees and managers.

The Skills Strategy Board will support Opportunity Bucks to achieve the ambition to improve opportunities for individuals in the ten designated wards by collaborating, steering and promoting opportunities for joint working and targeted marketing to deliver programmes.



Multiply bus



Buckinghamshire Jobs and Apprenticeships Fair

While Opportunity Bucks provides focused effort into the areas of most complex need, there are individuals across the county who also experience barriers to learning and employment.

- 26,930 Buckinghamshire residents aged between 18 to 64 years old had no qualifications in 2021.²³
- 13,100 economically inactive individuals in Buckinghamshire want to work but require support to overcome barriers, such as long-term ill-health or caring responsibilities.²⁴
- A further 12,100 economically inactive individuals in Buckinghamshire are not seeking employment due to long term ill-health. There has been a 73% increase in the number of economically inactive individuals due to being long term sick over 2020-22.
- In June 2023, 8,860 people were claiming unemployment related benefits (85% were estimated to be unemployed and 15% working some hours or receiving low earnings).²⁵
- 2,230 Buckinghamshire residents claiming unemployment related benefits were aged over 50 years old in June 2023.²⁶
- 9.2% of working age Buckinghamshire residents are providing unpaid care.²⁷ Though this figure represents care of individuals at any age, we recognise that some individuals are prevented from seeking employment due to unavailability of childcare and social care.

- Buckinghamshire has welcomed approximately 2,000 refugees, predominantly from Ukraine and Afghanistan, who face multifaceted challenges when developing their skills to settle and seek employment.
- Buckinghamshire has a high proportion of 16-17 year olds whose employment, education or training status is 'not known' (7% versus 2.4% nationally).²⁸
- The data available suggests that 16-17 year olds who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) or 'not known' in Buckinghamshire are more likely to be within a vulnerable group than the national average (31% versus 26%).²⁹
- 19% of 16-17 year olds estimated to be NEET in Buckinghamshire have Special Education Needs of Disabilities (with an Education, Health and Care Plan) compared with 10% nationally.³⁰
- In 2023, Buckinghamshire Council's care leavers team is supporting 416 young people to access support to overcome barriers to education and employment. The care leavers team also work alongside the children in care team in preparing a further 101 individuals to move across to the care leavers service at 18.

There is a statutory requirement for Local Authorities to have a local offer for NEET and unknown young people, care leavers and refugees. The entitlements are explained in the glossary.

The challenge of supporting individuals with barriers to employment, education and training is multifaceted and the response must be as individual as the person being supported. By working in partnership with education providers, communities, employers and the voluntary

²³ Census 2021

²⁴ Annual Population Survey, January to December 2022

²⁵ DWP StatXplore

²⁶ DWP, NOMIS

²⁷ Census, 2021

^{28, 29, 30} DfE, 2023

and community sector, Buckinghamshire will secure a user-led, bespoke response to:

- Increase the skills levels of those who are 'low skilled' or yet to attain qualifications through UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Adult Education Budget.
- Provide support to move economically inactive people towards employment and learning opportunities through UK Shared Prosperity Fund programmes.
- Develop a toolkit for employers which provides adjustments and case studies that may be used to adjust jobs to individual need, enabling employers to access the widest recruitment pool possible.
- Improve the number of Disability Confident Employers in Buckinghamshire.
- Provide sufficient high-quality nursery and childcare provision available for parents and carers to access.
- Ensure high parental take up of early years government-funded places for eligible from 9 months 2, 3 and 4 year olds.
- Promote Skills Bootcamps and apprenticeships as a route to re-enter the labour market and change careers.
- Work in partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions to raise awareness of sectors with high growth potential which could support career aspirations for individuals who are claiming out of work benefits.
- Increase the number of Supported Internships.

- Explore a guaranteed apprenticeship placement for all care leavers, who wish to undertake an apprenticeship.
- Explore additional support for employing ex-offenders, such as weekly payment of salary to enable financial security.

The Skills Strategy Board will monitor the provision of programmes and interventions. Successful delivery of this theme will be determined by:

- Decreasing the number of individuals with 'no qualifications' or yet to obtain basic skills.
- Decreasing the unemployment rate.
- Decreasing the number of economically inactive individuals who want to work but require additional measures to obtain employment.
- Decreasing the number of young people who are NEET or whose activity is 'not known' (in collaboration with the Education Strategy and Planning for Adulthood Team within Buckinghamshire Council).
- Increasing the number of paid internships across employers for individuals.
- Providing more apprenticeships for individuals with additional barriers to employment.
- Providing more opportunities for paid and supported internships.
- Increase the number of individuals aged over 50 who enter employment through 'returnerships'!
- Increase the number of disability confident employers from 52 in August 2023.³¹

³¹ DWP



UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND

We will work with employability support partners to actively target and support all economically inactive residents to move closer to the employment using the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), as well as collaborating with Jobcentre Plus and aligning with our Adult Education Budget provision. The following initiatives will be explored through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund:

- Provide intensive and wrap-around support to move economically inactive people closer towards mainstream provision and employment.
- Provide courses including life skills, career skills and basic skills (English, maths (via Multiply), digital and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).
- Provide tailored support to people in employment.
- Provide support to fund local skills needs.
- Interventions to increase levels of digital inclusion.

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE ADULT LEARNER AND FESTIVAL OF LEARNING AWARD WINNER: TYRESE



Tyrese found school extremely challenging and left without any GCSEs. Everything changed with her referral to First Steps to Learning course at Buckinghamshire Adult Learning, a course aimed at developing English, maths and digital skills for young parents.

"I was told at the Jobcentre that I would have a better chance at getting a job if I had maths and English qualifications. My kids really motivated me: I wanted to become the best version of myself for them and prove that even though I decided to settle down and have a family, I can still be successful.

Returning to learning has made a massive difference to my life. I suffer with depression and anxiety, but studying online with other people helped me relax and feel comfortable. The courses have made me realise I'm actually quite smart, so that has helped with my self-esteem. I find it much easier now to talk to people and socialise, and when I'm stuck on something I know I can ask for help.

Passing my Level 1 and 2 Functional Skills English and Maths has made my family very proud of me. I feel more confident about getting a job and know I'll be able to help the kids out with their homework when they're older. By achieving the qualifications I've worked hard for, I hope to show what amazing things mums can do whilst raising kids."

With a wide range of support from various networks and the services that were available, Tyrese was able to develop her skills and obtain the relevant qualifications that can help with entering the workforce.

(Source: Festival of Learning)



BOOSTING BUSINESS

Boosting Business, ensuring that Buckinghamshire is the best place to do business through effectively developing and utilising the skills of Buckinghamshire's people to improve productivity, profits and service levels.

Buckinghamshire's rich and vibrant economy is home to four world-class assets in priority growth sectors:

- Creative (Film and TV). Pinewood is an internationally renowned centre for film production, hosting Star Wars and James Bond productions, supported by Beaconsfield's National Film and Television School, the number one film school globally.
- High Performance Tech. A high-performance technology cluster has developed around the iconic F1 Circuit focusing on precision engineering with specialisations in additive manufacturing, aerodynamics and light-weight production methodologies.
- Space. Westcott Space Cluster is a centre of excellence in rocket propulsion research and development for SMEs and larger firms, as well as business incubation and innovation hubs.
- MedTech - Buckinghamshire has a heritage of working at the forefront of advances in health as the birthplace of the global Paralympic Movement and with the UK National Spinal Injuries Centre based in Stoke Mandeville.



These world class assets are supported by a wealth of supporting businesses and industries which make up the thriving Buckinghamshire economy:

- 31,200 businesses and employers.³²
- Buckinghamshire's economy is dominated by the service sector, which provides 85% of all local employee jobs.³³
- At a broad sectoral level, the health and social work sector provides the most jobs within the county (many of which are part-time).
- Predominance of small businesses as 41% of the workforce working for micro and small firms (employing fewer than 49 people), compared to 33% nationally.³⁴
- High levels of self-employment with 1 in every 6 people working in the Buckinghamshire economy is self-employed,³⁵ particularly within the county's creative and construction sectors.³⁶
- A small public sector (the second smallest of the 38 LEP areas).³⁷
- A large wholesale sector (particularly the wholesale of pharmaceutical goods, machinery and equipment, computers and software).³⁸
- A larger than average digital sector.³⁹
- One of the least 'self-contained' labour markets in England with high levels of commuting into and out of Buckinghamshire.

³² UK Business Count 2023, ONS (VAT/PAYE registered businesses)

³³ [Business Register and Employment Survey, 2022](#), ONS

³⁴ [Inter Departmental Business Register](#), ONS

³⁵ [Annual Population Survey \(12 months to June 2021\)](#), ONS

³⁶ [Annual Population Survey, ONS, Jul 2020-Jun 2021](#)

³⁷ [Business Register and Employment Survey, ONS, 2020](#)

³⁸ [Business Register and Employment Survey, ONS, 2020](#)

³⁹ [Ibid.](#)

⁴⁰ [Research Report: The contribution of the VCSE sector to health and social wellbeing in Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West](#)



Photo courtesy of the National Paralympic Heritage Trust

VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

Buckinghamshire's thriving voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector in Buckinghamshire which is made up of 2,400 registered organisations with an estimated annual value of £670m. It employs 11,000 paid staff (4.6% of employment) and engages around 47,000 regular volunteers per year, or 8.5% of the population.⁴⁰ Our volunteers gain experience that enhances their life prospects, from meeting new people and tackling social isolation, through to gaining valuable work experience of a sector or role which may lead to a career. The Skills Strategy Board supports the work of the Aylesbury Community Board in creating a Volunteering Strategy with partner organisations which highlight the range of opportunities and pathways these may lead to.

However, Buckinghamshire's productivity growth has been comparatively slow since the 2007-8 financial crisis and business growth and profits have been hampered. In Spring 2023, 33% of Buckinghamshire businesses responding to Buckinghamshire Business First and Buckinghamshire LEP's Business Barometer survey⁴¹ cited staff recruitment and retention issues as their main challenge for the year ahead and many said that this is inhibiting business growth. Contributory factors to Buckinghamshire employers' recruitment difficulties include:

- A reduced pool of labour - more people than normal taking early retirement at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic; an increase in people with long-term health issues and the UK's exit from the European Union reducing easy access to overseas workers.
- A skills mismatch - in 2019 the Employer Skills Survey measured the Buckinghamshire skills shortage vacancy base at 28%, compared to the national average of 25%,⁴² which suggests a greater mismatch between the type of skills sought by local employers and the skills held and jobs sought by local residents than elsewhere in the country.⁴³
- As recognised in the Facilitating Collaboration theme, employers report that new employees (particularly schools leavers and graduates) are not 'work ready' and lack the personal and social skills for employment.⁴⁴

- Attracting and retaining talent was cited as a factor to recruitment difficulties in sector employer group meetings, given the high levels of commuting and proximity to London and neighbouring cities.

The Buckinghamshire Local Skills Improvement Plan highlights particular skills shortages and skills gaps within the construction professional services sub-sector. Occupations include civil engineers, structural engineers, town planners and surveyors. Skills gaps include supervisory and management skills, along with net zero awareness and management. Barriers cited include a lack of specific higher-level provision in the county for civil engineers, chartered surveyors and town planners.

Health and social care is also a sector where skills gaps are present amongst professional service occupations. As has been the case nationally, there has been immense pressure on healthcare professionals in recent years which has led to higher than normal rates of retirement. The high cost of housing in Buckinghamshire has also made the county a less attractive option for overseas healthcare workers than in other parts of the country. This has also coincided with an increased demand for services and therefore skilled staff.

In recent years, Buckinghamshire firms have found it particularly difficult to recruit into high-skilled roles. Evidence from the 2019 Employer Skills Survey shows that Buckinghamshire has the highest proportion of high-skill roles identified as hard-to-fill of all 38 LEP areas. To drive long-term local economic growth, it is vital that we continue to source funding to bring to fruition skills-related investments that help create the talent pipelines required for our strategic growth sectors: space, creative, high-performance technology and health (MedTech).

⁴¹ 110 businesses responded to the survey

^{42, 43} 2019 Employer Skills Survey

⁴⁴ Buckinghamshire Local Skills Improvement Plan

It should also be recognised that employer investment in training has declined over recent years and 43% of Buckinghamshire businesses have not provided training to employees, compared to the national average of 39%.⁴⁵ Further, employers also report that 3.9% of Buckinghamshire employees are not fully proficient in their role and 7% of Buckinghamshire employers are not providing training to upskill their employees because they cannot find training in the relevant subject area, for example engineering is not currently taught in Buckinghamshire.

Higher level technical, professional and management skills are intrinsically linked with economic growth, productivity improvement, competitiveness, and innovation. Through consultation, employers have also reported a challenge of promoting employees who are technically competent but lack leadership and management skills. Training and learning opportunities not only unlock the productivity and efficiency of the employee, but also lead to better retention of employees as 94 percent of employees say they would stay at a company longer if it invested in their career development.⁴⁶ Research suggests that this is because the employee feels valued when given opportunities to learn, and instances of social learning (shared learning experiences, for example in cohorts or mentoring) creates a sense of belonging, develops the employees problem solving and idea-sharing skills and provides opportunities to develop communication and leadership skills.⁴⁷ It is recognised that the high levels of small businesses, self-employment and freelancing, particularly in the creative and construction sectors, create issues in terms of accessing upskilling, as individuals often have to pay for the learning opportunity and lose days of paid labour to access the training.

⁴⁵ 2019 Employer Skills Survey

⁴⁶ Workplace Learning & Development Report 2018 (LinkedIn Learning)

⁴⁷ [5 ways L&D is crucial for talent retention](#) (British Council)

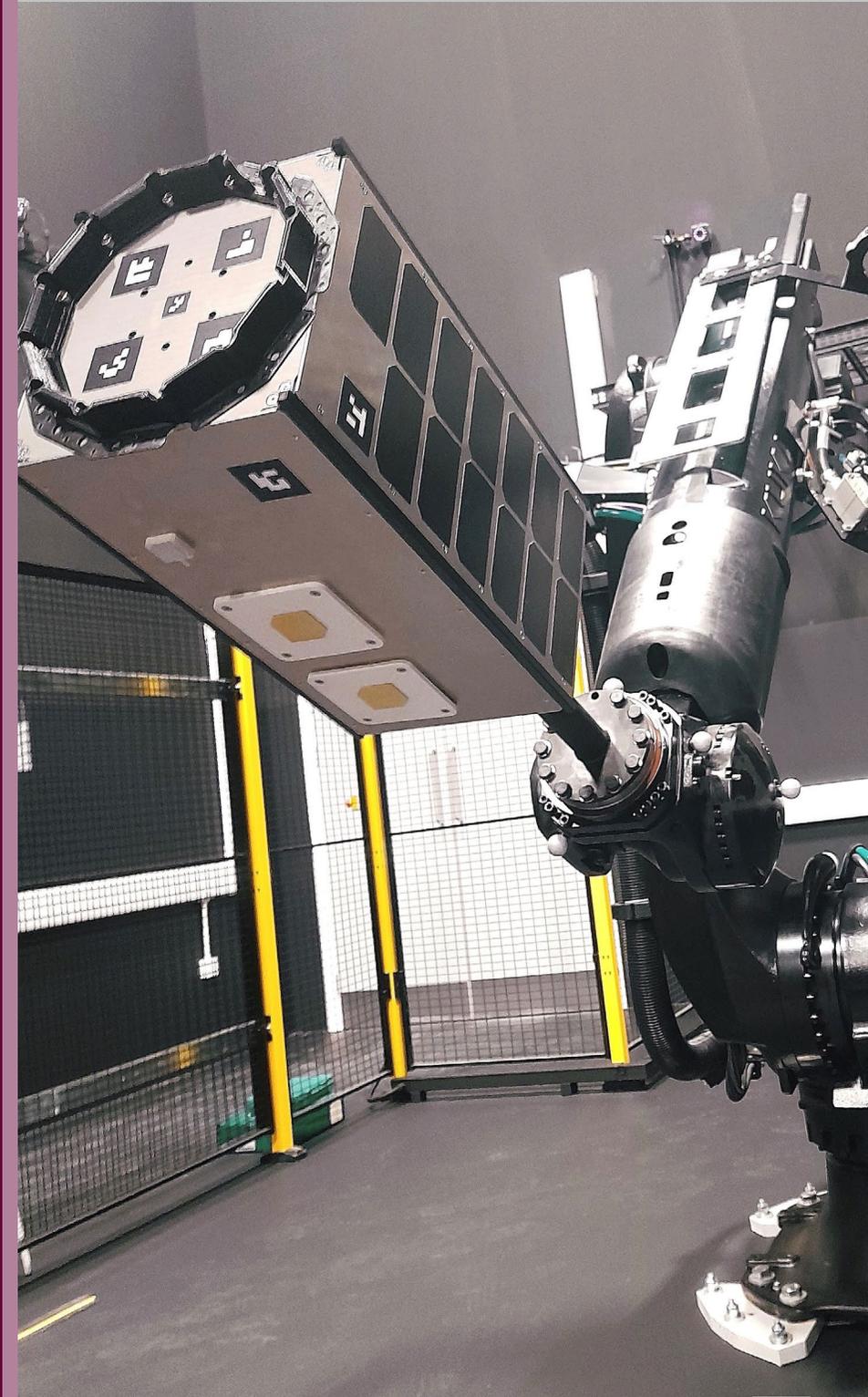


Photo courtesy of the Buckinghamshire LEP

Buckinghamshire's businesses and employers are key to defining and providing the jobs of tomorrow, and significant investment is required to boost our employers to flourish in the economy. Buckinghamshire will:

- Introduce new Skills Bootcamps in in-demand sectors, free at the point of access for the learner.
- Provide further Sector Based Work Academy Programmes (SWAPs) with employers.
- Introduce engineering provision at Buckinghamshire College Group through the Local Skills Improvement Fund, with clear pathways into higher education opportunities at Buckinghamshire New University.
- Develop a place-based approach to apprenticeships, using partnerships to:
 - Raise the profile and awareness businesses in Bucks to consider routes to upskilling which achieving business growth, through apprenticeships, T Levels and accredited and non-accredited continued professional development.
 - Map the existing apprenticeship provision offer to support employers to access the right, high-quality course for their workforce needs.
 - Commit to working with the LSIP sector employer groups to target sector skills shortages which can be delivered through apprenticeships in programmed cohorts.
 - Explore a programme of shared infrastructure for employers to access for supporting apprenticeships, such as shared performance management, rotational placements, apprenticeship levy transfers.

- Support employers to upskill and retain their existing workforce through short courses including sector-based Skills Bootcamps and apprenticeships, as well as leadership and management or mentoring courses.
- Develop Buckinghamshire-specific career pathways which map to high quality learning and development opportunities.
- Explore funding opportunities to strengthen the talent pipeline for Buckinghamshire's strategic growth sectors and key skills shortage occupations as identified in the LSIP.
- Develop a pilot initiative volunteering skills record, through the LSIP, for the Health and Social Care Sector to address work readiness skills, which may be rolled out to other sectors if successful.
- Promote volunteering as a pathway to employment, both in the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector and in the public and private sectors.
- Promote volunteering as an opportunity to gain soft skills for leadership and management.
- Facilitate the development of critical digital literacy, practical and interpersonal skills of new employees, as described in the work readiness model in the LSIP (figure 4.).
- Explore introducing social value conditions on contractors and creative productions taking place in Buckinghamshire to provide opportunities for local people, and a database of the available freelancers and facilities through Opportunity Bucks.
- Work with employers to compile a Buckinghamshire-specific Employment Toolkit which highlights existing measures and case

studies that employers may install to open their recruitment to the widest possible pool, such as adjusting shift times to allow for candidates to use public transport, or carving jobs to suit part-time workers.

For these measures to be successful, the Skills Strategy Board will work in collaboration with employers to scope and deliver high-quality training and initiatives which provide the in-demand skills required by the employer. Through investing in skills, Buckinghamshire businesses will be able to provide high quality services and goods, create profit, innovate and grow.

The Skills Strategy Board will measure the success of the Boosting Business theme by seeking to:

- Decrease the skills shortage vacancy base.
- Increase the demand for learning and training from employers, measured through the percentage of Buckinghamshire employers investing in training.
- Decrease the number of employers citing skills shortages as a barrier to hiring.
- Increase the number of apprenticeships, T level work placements and employee-participants in Skills Bootcamps.
- Commit to measuring the quality of training.
- Increase the number of individuals participating in leadership and management courses.

We also recognise that some vacancies are difficult to fill due to external factors, such as the high cost of housing and limited transport. The Skills Strategy Board will cross-collaborate with the relevant place-based strategy through the theme a whole system approach and measure increased GDP.



BUCKINGHAMSHIRE MIND

Buckinghamshire Mind is a mental health charity who bring volunteers onboard to help with providing vital mental health support across the county. The benefits are far reaching:

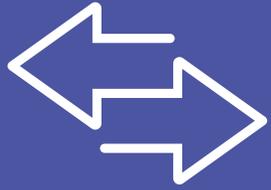
- Buckinghamshire Mind secures the resources to deliver the service, as well as potential talent pipelines for paid employment opportunities.
- Volunteers gain the in-demand skills required for employment, as well as the ability to test career opportunities before committing to studying and the opportunity to benefit their community.
- Individuals accessing the resource gain support at the point of need.
- Communities benefit as individuals are supported to overcome challenges.

Marian started to volunteer with Buckinghamshire Mind in 2022 as a trainee counsellor and, in Spring 2023, successfully applied for a job as a counsellor for Buckinghamshire Mind's Rough Sleeper Initiative programme. Volunteering enabled Marian to gain strong networks of volunteer counsellors and experienced professionals which provides a sounding board for Marian to discuss support and approaches for her clients.

Marian reflects that volunteering has been critical in getting that experiential exposure of supporting clients that can't be gained from studying alone. The experience provided opportunities to develop skills such as working in a team, communicating effectively and how to problem-solve together with someone to work with the issues at hand.

"I could not have gone into this job without the experience and support from volunteering."





ANTICIPATING CHANGE

Anticipating change will actively prepare for and respond to the evolving labour market because of the fourth industrial revolution, changing practises and economic shocks.

Buckinghamshire has been outpaced by other areas of the UK in terms of Gross Value Added per hour worked, while Gross Domestic Product and productivity growth have been slow. The fourth industrial revolution presents a solution to boost our economy and drive good growth for everyone in Buckinghamshire. For example, PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP estimates that the UKGDP will be 10.3% higher in 2030 as a result of harnessing artificial intelligence, just one of the disruptive technologies driving this industrial revolution. This is the equivalent of an additional £204.5 billion nationally and an additional spending power of £2,295 per household annually.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ [The impact of artificial intelligence on the UK economy - PwC UK](#)



Photo courtesy of the University of Buckingham

Driving innovation through connectivity, analytics and intelligence, human-machine interactions and advanced engineering will transform the economy as employers benefit from increased efficiency, higher productivity and profit. Meanwhile, employees benefit from increased wages associated with higher profits and, where harnessed responsibly, technological innovation can free employees from the dull, dirty or dangerous tasks and free up capacity for rewarding, safe jobs demanding human-centred problem solving and communication.⁴⁹

Technological change can also help to reach sustainable solutions to the challenge of reaching net zero as a tertiary outcome – whether this is through employers cutting out wastage in production or households understanding their existing heating consumption patterns through smart devices to shift away from peak hour use and to more efficient, cost effective and potentially renewable methods.⁵⁰

However, the effects of automation are not guaranteed to be equal:

- In the UK, it is estimated that up to 20% of jobs could be automated across all industry sectors by the late 2020s.⁵¹
- Women are more likely to be affected by automation (23%) than men (17%).
- 11% of jobs linked to higher education graduates are classified as roles at high risk of automation, compared to 23% of jobs roles completed by employees holding A levels, NVQs, higher apprenticeships or 24% risk of job automation employees educated to GCSE or lower.
- McKinsey warn that two-thirds of the UK workforce could lack basic digital skills by 2030, while more than 10 million people could be under-skilled in leadership, communication, and decision making.⁵²

⁴⁹ [The Fourth Industrial Revolution: what it means and how to respond | World Economic Forum](#)

⁵⁰ [A sustainable future | Nesta](#)

⁵¹ [Will robots really steal our jobs? \(pwc.co.uk\)](#)

⁵² [Facing the future: Britain's new industrial revolution | McKinsey](#)



The stark differences in the effects of automation risks creating further divergence in the employability and social mobility outcomes for our employees and communities.

Upskilling, retraining and exposing the future workforce to new opportunities will be key to ensuring that all residents, communities, employees and employers can benefit from the fourth industrial revolution. The Skills Strategy Board partnership is determined to harness the benefits of the fourth industrial revolution by:

- Working with employers and learning providers to ensure that reskilling opportunities are high-quality and provide the essential qualifications required to fulfil the role. This learning may be undertaken through Skills Bootcamps or Sector Based Work Academies, with the intention to introduce bite-sized accredited, non-accredited and employer-recognised badges to show upskilling and continued professional development.
- Promoting existing upskilling and work-based training solutions that our employers may not be aware of, for example through the National Careers Service.
- Inspiring future generations to pursue career pathways new and emerging occupations through the Bucks Skills Hub.
- Collaborating with partners to deliver on the Digital Strategies for Buckinghamshire, ensuring that all residents, communities and employers have access to high-speed, reliable internet capability to enable connectivity and access on-demand learning, upskilling and pathways to employment.

- Working with employers to recognise excellent employment practices and deliver a toolkit of case studies and implementable solutions which opens the recruitment pool to the widest possible selection by using the Institute for the Future of Work's Good Work Monitor as a framework and exploring the different access to employment, status and autonomy and access to learning opportunities as a starting point.

Buckinghamshire will measure success based upon:

- Decreased skills gaps within the existing workforce.
- Increase the in number of 'good jobs' using the Institute for the Future of Work's Good Work Monitor definitions, monitored against access, status and autonomy, pay and conditions.
- Increased number of enrolments and completions in courses which provide digital or green skills.
- Decreased percentage of employers who have not provided training.
- Increased demand for leadership, communication and decision-making training.

LUNAZ

Lunaz currently offers the UK market a more sustainable, functionally better, and less expensive alternative to buying new electric vehicles by restoring vehicles historically deemed to be at the end of their life due to mileage, age, or mechanical condition. At Lunaz, engineers remove combustion engines and fuel tanks and replace the powertrain with a Lunaz-designed battery and motor to run the vehicle, before fully refurbishing the vehicle to a high standard. As well as securing a new lease of life for luxury cars, Lunaz is unlocking the power of upcycling and removing heavy-diesel polluters from Buckinghamshire Council's fleet of refuse trucks.

Over the last 5 years, Lunaz has grown rapidly from the founding 5 members of staff to over 150, with ambitions to grow further. As a company built on innovation, Lunaz recognise that training and upskilling of staff is critical to the success and growth of the company, both to grow current employees and attract future talent.

Further, Lunaz recognise that training and development of staff leads to better retention and working practises. Lunaz recently invested to support the career aspirations of a Senior Technician to become Health and Safety Manager with a certified NEBOSH qualification. Recognising this employee's practical knowledge of the business as a technician made him the perfect candidate to support, lead and communicate better working practices to colleagues. This in turn helped to retain the knowledge which may have otherwise been lost.

It's also demonstrating to other colleagues and employees if you're good at what you're doing, we want to reward you and develop you within the business. But we've also acknowledged that there is a level of training that goes with it.



Photo courtesy of Lunaz



WORKING TOGETHER TO ACHIEVE CHANGE

The action plan details the specific actions, descriptions and measures that the Skills Strategy Board will oversee in delivering against our Vision:

VISION:

Buckinghamshire: A place with a future-focused, agile and dynamic employment and skills system that assures the needs of employers, individuals and communities are met in order to contribute to the growth and productivity of the local economy.

The action plan will be reviewed and updated on a regular basis. New interventions may be added at any time.

The action plan is available on [Buckinghamshire Council's website](#).



APPENDIX A: SKILLS STRATEGY BOARD

The overall purpose of the Skills Strategy Board is to support place-based economic growth through the development of a more effective post-16 technical education, skills and employability ecosystem to meet current and future workforce needs.

The Skills Strategy Board will set the vision and strategic direction to ensure that everyone in Buckinghamshire, irrespective of their working age, is effectively supported to access and play a full and active role in their local employment market. The Skills Strategy Board will design and deliver the strategic vision with support from and through local partnerships to understand and address key local challenges.

- Chair: Nick Braisby (Buckinghamshire New University)
- Executive Lead: Liz North (Buckinghamshire Council)
- Martina Porter (All Spring Media)
- Beth Baker (University of Buckingham)
- Jenny Craig (Buckinghamshire College Group)
- Simon Jones (Cottesloe School)
- Tracy Hartley (John Hampden Grammar School)
- Juliet Anderson (Buckinghamshire Health and Social Care Academy)
- Anita Cranmer (Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services)
- Joseph Baum (Deputy Cabinet Member for Skills)
- Philippa Batting (Buckinghamshire Business First)
- Sarah Murphy-Brookman (Buckinghamshire Council)

APPENDIX B: PLACE BASED GROWTH BOARD STRUCTURE



APPENDIX C: GLOSSARY

Skills

The Innovation Skills Framework Summary definition of skills is 'the socially determined personal capacities that can add value (to a process, organisation, or endeavour) and can be enhanced or developed through learning and development.'⁵³ This Skills and Employment Strategy will cover all individuals over 16 years of age and all levels of learning entry level (basic skill formation, for example English for Speakers of Other Languages) through to post-graduate and higher technical qualifications. Learning will be encouraged throughout including formal, informal and transferrable opportunities for individuals to develop throughout their lifetime.

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are paid employment opportunities which incorporates on-the-job experience bolstered with classroom-based learning. Apprenticeships are offered in a range of sectors and occupations, from level 2 (equivalent to GCSEs) to more advanced apprenticeships that go up to degree level. Anyone over the age of 16 can undertake an apprenticeship.

T Levels

2-year courses which are broadly equivalent in size to 3 A Levels. T Level courses have been developed in collaboration with employers and education providers at national level so that the content meets the needs of industry and prepares students for entry into skilled employment, an apprenticeship or related technical study through further or higher education.⁵⁴ Like an Apprenticeship, T Levels include on-the job experience through an industry placement of at least 315 hours (the equivalent of 45 days).

Sector Based Work Academy Programmes (SWAPs)

SWAPs help unemployed people aged 19+ who are not on other Jobcentre Programmes fill local job opportunities. SWAPs include some short up-front skills training, plus insight into jobs with a sponsoring employer who guarantees participants a job interview. SWAPs can link to any job area (including apprenticeships) with skills shortages. They give people with barriers to work a better chance of getting a job, and help employers select better candidates that they will be able to retain for longer. Jobcentre Plus and its' delivery partners carry out all of the eligibility checks for candidates wanting to access a SWAP. Buckinghamshire residents have accessed 96 SWAPs in the 2022 calendar year.

⁵³ [Innovation Skills Framework \(innovationcaucus.co.uk\)](https://www.innovationcaucus.co.uk)

⁵⁴ [Introduction of T Levels - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

Skills Bootcamps

Short courses which offer 60 to 100 guided learning hours over a maximum of 16 weeks in sector-specific subjects to fill local or national skills gaps, as detailed in the Buckinghamshire Local Skills Improvement Plan. Skills Bootcamps deliver learning at levels 3-5 (medium to higher level technical skills), with some level 2 in Construction. Adults over the age of 19, residing in England and meeting certain residency requirements can access a Skills Bootcamp, which has a guaranteed job outcome such as an interview, sustained employment or access to an accelerated apprenticeship. There is one sector-specific Skills Bootcamp currently delivered in Buckinghamshire by Flannery Plant Hire in construction. Residents and employees may access the national offer, though the journey to sign up to a bootcamp is complex, the learning is not tailored to Buckinghamshire's employer needs and the Bootcamps are often sold out.

Buckinghamshire Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP)

Buckinghamshire Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), delivered by Employer Representative Body Buckinghamshire Business First. LSIPs provide an agreed set of actionable priorities that employers, education providers and stakeholders in a local area can get behind to drive change⁵⁵ within vocational education. Developing the LSIP included data provided by over 800 businesses and feedback from 435 businesses and 22 education and training providers. The Skills Strategy Board endorses the LSIP findings. The Buckinghamshire Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), delivered by Employer Representative Body Buckinghamshire Business First conducted extensive research to determine the priority sectors for skills investment in line with growth projections. The LSIP identified the following sectors as high growth potential:

- Engineering
- Construction
- Film and TV
- Digital
- Health and Social Care

The Skills Strategy Board endorses the Buckinghamshire LSIP.

⁵⁵ Local skills improvement plans (LSIPs) and strategic development funding (SDF) - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Local Skills Improvement Fund

A programme of mainly capital funding from central Government which is designed to enable further education providers across a geographic area to respond collectively to the priorities in the local skills improvement plans (LSIPs).

Guided learning hours (GLH)

Guided learning hours, or GLH, is the time spent by a learner being taught or instructed under the direct supervision of a lecturer, supervisor, or tutor. This can either be online or face-to-face and can include class time, tutorials, live online sessions, and structured online learning.⁵⁶

Horizons

Buckinghamshire Council's employment programme to help individuals overcome multiple barriers to employment with job matching support and ongoing personal development and career progression advice for employees and managers.

Refugee support

Buckinghamshire has a statutory responsibility to provide support to unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) who may present locally or arrive through the National Transfer Scheme that allocates UASC to local authorities. This support includes provision of placements in good or outstanding schools wherever possible, and assistance to attend further and higher education establishments. Options for employment are discussed regularly as part of the individual's pathway plans and opportunities are provided including mentoring, apprenticeships and guaranteed interview schemes.

In addition to this, the Council has welcomed approximately 2,000 refugees, predominantly from Ukraine and Afghanistan, who face multifaceted challenges when developing their skills to settle and seek employment. Some high-skilled individuals from Ukraine face the issue that their qualifications and employment history are not recognised, and we will work with partners Pensions to provide a qualification matching service, as well as a skills audit against previous employment. The main factor inhibiting employment opportunities for all refugees who are seeking work is proficient English language skills, to which we are currently looking at how we provide greater support through more community based lessons as well as helping women to access lessons around childcare demands.

Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) (including Special Educational Needs and Disabilities)

Buckinghamshire has a high proportion of 16-17 year olds whose employment, education or training status is 'not known' (7% versus 2.4% nationally) ([DfE, 2023](#)). The data available suggests that 16-17 year olds who are Not in Education, Employment or Training

⁵⁶ [Regulatory information | CIPD](#)

(NEET) in Buckinghamshire are more likely to be within a vulnerable group than the national average (source: DfE) (31% versus 26%). (DfE, 2023). 19% of 16-17 year olds estimated to be NEET in Buckinghamshire have Special Education Needs of Disabilities (with an Education, Health and Care Plan) compared with 10% nationally (DfE, 2023).

Buckinghamshire Council has a statutory duty to track and record destinations for all young people in Buckinghamshire aged 16-18 years (school years 12 and 13) whilst recognising that the primary responsibility for this lies within schools and settings. The Education Strategy has targets the support to those who are NEET through the partnership-led NEET solutions panel to support the statutory work and improve the support offered to young people in Buckinghamshire to access sustainable progress into Employment, Education and Training opportunities. Additional support will be provided for NEET individuals with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) through the SEND Inclusion Strategy, including developing a SEND employment forum and providing an upskilling careers conference to support school Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCO) and Careers Leads to develop high quality Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) which can be used in to support individual placements, careers and educational outcomes. This ensures expertise and partner resource is fully utilised, to more flexibly respond to the needs of anyone who is NEET. The Skills Strategy Board will continue to collaborate with partners to increase the opportunities for individuals through work experience and will support the development of an outcomes toolkit to help individuals and provide greater diversity for education opportunities and placements for post-16 SEND individuals.

Care leavers

A care leaver is a young person between the ages of 18-25 who had been in the care of the local authority for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14, including some time after their 16th birthday. The local authority has corporate parenting responsibilities for these young people.⁵⁷

Buckinghamshire Council's Leaving Care Team currently supports 416 young people and works alongside the Children in Care Team in preparing a further 101 individuals to move across to the service at 18. In 2023, 64% of Buckinghamshire's care leavers were in education, employment, training. In response to this the team hosted an event in October 2023 designed to support young people into careers and training. The leaving care service are also working with the HR and recruitment teams to identify vacant positions within Buckinghamshire Council and are actively supporting young people to apply. The Horizons service has been set up within Buckinghamshire Council to provide additional support prior to, during, and after recruitment which helps to maximise the

⁵⁷The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000

employability and retention of our local care leavers. In addition to this links have been made with external organisations including John Lewis partnership who are offering ringfenced roles for care leavers.

Buckinghamshire Council have a statutory duty to support care leavers, devising individualised Pathway Plans and supporting young people to navigate adulthood and independence whilst overcoming barriers such as poor mental health, confidence issues and gaps in education.

Supported Internships

Supported Internships prepare young people with a learning disability or autism for competitive employment. This partnership between Stony Dean School and Bucks Adult Learning provides a bespoke springboard from education into the world of work for each intern and is designed to develop transferable skills, knowledge and attitudes in preparation for paid employment. Through specialist training and direct work placements, interns develop employability skills, self-confidence, job specific skills whilst working alongside employees in a real employment setting. 13 supported internships were provided in 2022-23, and we will work with the National Development Team for Inclusion (NDTI) and partners to increase the programme for future years.

UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF)

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) supports the Government Levelling-Up agenda. It also indirectly replaces the European Structural and Investment Fund of 2014-2020. The UKSPF has three 'priorities' that flow from the over-arching Levelling-Up 'missions'. The stated overall aim is 'close the gap between top-performing and other areas'. The three priorities are: Community and Place, Supporting Local Business, and People and Skills.

The People and Skills investment priority relates to:

- Mission 9. By 2030, pride in place, such as people's satisfaction with their town centre and engagement in local culture and community, will have risen in every area of the UK, with the gap between the top performing and other areas closing.
- Mission 1. By 2030, pay, employment and productivity will have risen in every area of the UK, with each containing a globally competitive city, with the gap between the top performing and other areas closing.
- Mission 6. By 2030, the number of people successfully completing high-quality skills training will have significantly increased in every area of the UK. In England, this will lead to 200,000 more people successfully completing high-quality skills training annually, driven by 80,000 more people completing courses in the lowest skilled areas.

- Mission 7. By 2030, the gap in Healthy Life Expectancy (HLE) between local areas where it is highest and lowest will have narrowed, and by 2035 HLE will rise by five years.
- Mission 8. By 2030, well-being will have improved in every area of the UK, with the gap between top performing and other areas closing.⁵⁸

Returnships

Government-funded courses for adults over the age of 50 to help gain sector- and job-specific skills to get a job or progress in the workplace, including confidence and work readiness skills.

Enterprise Advisers

Enterprise Advisers are professionals from any industry, including HR, who volunteer to work directly with a school or college to develop a strong careers programme and help create opportunities for young people.⁵⁹

APPENDIX D: SOURCES

National and Buckinghamshire Context: The Buckinghamshire Economy and Labour Market: An Overview (Buckinghamshire LEP, 2023).

⁵⁸ [UK Shared Prosperity Fund: prospectus - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/uk-shared-prosperity-fund-prospectus)

⁵⁹ [CIPD Trust - Become an Enterprise adviser | CIPD](https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/developing-the-workforce/enterprise-adviser)