

Draft Hampshire Skills Strategy 2025

Hampshire Skills Strategy 2025

Building productivity and prosperity through people

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Contents

About this document.....	3
Foreword	5
Executive Summary	6
Part one: A skills profile of Hampshire.....	8
Part two: Skills priorities for Hampshire.....	20
Part three: Taking the priorities forward	23
List of Annexes.....	29

DRAFT

About this document

We know that Hampshire (referring to the whole of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight) is a great place in which to live, learn and work. Hampshire is well placed to help maintain and boost economic competitiveness and prosperity by supporting our residents to access education and training aligned to local skills needs.

Hampshire County Council last published a Skills Strategy and Action Plan in 2022. Since then, there has been considerable change with respect to skills policy and local governance including how we are organised to drive economic growth in Hampshire.

In June 2024, the **Hampshire Prosperity Partnership**¹, together with the Hampshire Prosperity Partnership Board, was launched to work collectively across sectors and the geography to the benefit of the regional economy. In September, the Board requested an updated skills strategy and action plan, developed in partnership with employers, providers² and local stakeholders.

In December 2024, the **Hampshire Skills Partnership**³ met for the first time with the purpose of working collaboratively across Hampshire's skills system to influence and shape provision to meet the current and future needs of employers, individuals and communities; to support participation, opportunity and prosperity for all.

The Hampshire Skills Partnership has also been charged with delivering this, updated skills strategy and action plan. This document – the **Hampshire Skills Strategy** – is a culmination of collaborative activity between key stakeholders across Hampshire.

Overview

In **Part one**, we present some insights and analysis into the Hampshire skills ecosystem. In **Part two**, we draw together the findings from the previous section to outline skills priorities. In **Part three**, we present an action plan for the next 12 months, with a clear message of innovative partnership working.

¹ Hampshire Prosperity Partnership: <https://www.hants.gov.uk/business/hampshire-prosperity-partnership>

² In this document, 'providers' refers to schools, colleges, universities and independent training providers.

³ Hampshire Skills Partnership: <https://www.hants.gov.uk/business/hampshire-prosperity-partnership/hampshire-skills-partnership>

Working towards Hampshire and the Solent

As we work towards becoming a Mayoral Combined County Authority⁴, it's important this Skills Strategy is read and considered in conjunction with other strategies and plans across the Hampshire and the Solent area. Many of these have helped inform this Strategy; including those listed in **Annex 2**. Where possible, the action plan in **Part three** has tried to capture related actions from these documents, where they align with the six priorities.

As part of the Devolution Priority Programme, the area will be required to submit a **Strategic Skills Plan** and an accompanying **Commissioning Plan**, to show how the area plans to use devolved Adult Skills Funding to deliver high-quality provision, meet local skills needs and improve outcomes for our residents. These are due to be submitted by December 2026, and it is intended for the Hampshire Skills Strategy to help inform both Plans, alongside the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) for the area and input from the Solent Growth Partnership.

⁴ Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation:
<https://www.hants.gov.uk/aboutthecouncil/governmentinhampshire/future-hampshire-solent>

Foreword

As Leader of Hampshire County Council, I am proud to introduce the Hampshire Skills Strategy — a vital blueprint for ensuring our residents and businesses are equipped for the future.

This strategy aligns closely with our new **Strategic Plan 2025 to 2028**, which sets out our commitment to delivering high-quality public services, fostering inclusive growth, and building resilient communities. Skills are central to achieving these ambitions. They are the foundation of a thriving economy, but their impact reaches far beyond the workplace.

Investing in skills means investing in people — in their health, wellbeing, and ability to participate fully in society. Whether it's supporting young people into meaningful careers, helping adults retrain and progress, or enabling employers to grow and innovate, a strong skills system benefits us all.

This strategy has been shaped through collaboration with providers, employers, and local partners. It reflects our shared ambition to unlock talent, remove barriers, and ensure that every resident — regardless of background or circumstance — has the opportunity to find their purpose and succeed.

Together, we will build a Hampshire that is not only economically strong, but socially inclusive and future-ready.



Councillor Nick Adams-King

Leader of Hampshire County Council

Executive Summary

Skills are the foundation of a thriving, inclusive and future-ready Hampshire. This strategy sets out a shared vision for how we can work together to strengthen our local skills system — ensuring that residents, employers and communities are equipped to meet the challenges and opportunities ahead. Developed in partnership with stakeholders across the region, it aligns with the Hampshire County Council Strategic Plan 2025 to 2028⁵ and supports wider ambitions for economic growth, health and wellbeing, and social inclusion.

Understanding Hampshire’s skills landscape

Hampshire is a region of economic strength and educational excellence, yet beneath this success lies a complex and evolving skills picture. **Part one** of this strategy presents a detailed analysis of the region’s skills ecosystem, highlighting demographic shifts, sectoral trends, and mismatches between supply and demand. Key challenges include an ageing workforce, uneven access to education and training, and persistent disparities in employment and attainment. The evidence points to a need for targeted, inclusive interventions to ensure all residents can thrive in a changing labour market.

Setting skills priorities for Hampshire

Drawing on the insights from **Part one** and extensive stakeholder engagement, **Part two** identifies six strategic priorities to guide future action:

Table 1: Skills priorities for Hampshire.

Curriculum development		Aligning education and training with local economic needs and growth sectors.
Opportunities to learn		Tackling barriers to participation and ensuring inclusive access to skills provision.
Careers navigation and support		Working with Careers Hubs and others to raise awareness of local career pathways and improving guidance for all ages.
Future-ready skills		Supporting residents to develop transferable and emerging skills, including digital, green, and soft skills.
Education and skills partnerships		Strengthening collaboration between employers and providers to enrich learning and work experiences.
Upskilling		Enabling employers to invest in workforce development and adapt to technological and economic change.

⁵ Hampshire County Council Strategic Plan 2025 to 2028:
<https://www.hants.gov.uk/aboutthecouncil/strategiesplansandpolicies/corporatestrategy>

Draft Hampshire Skills Strategy 2025

These priorities reflect the Hampshire County Council Strategic Plan 2025 to 2028 and national policy direction, including the Government's Modern Industrial Strategy⁶ and the Post-16 education and skills white paper⁷.

Taking action together

Part three sets out a 12-month action plan to deliver the Strategy, led by Hampshire County Council in partnership with employers and other key stakeholders. Actions are mapped to each priority and include targeted initiatives to support underrepresented groups, improve employer engagement, and build a more agile and inclusive skills system. A system that will help attract and drive inward investment to support productivity.

This Strategy also lays the groundwork for a future Strategic Skills Plan and Commissioning Plan, as part of the region's journey toward devolution and the establishment of a Mayoral Combined County Authority (MCCA).

⁶ Industrial Strategy: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/industrial-strategy>

⁷ Post-16 education and skills white paper: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/post-16-education-and-skills-white-paper>

Part one: A skills profile of Hampshire

Hampshire continues to be one of the UK's most economically significant regions, with high productivity, a diverse business base, and strong educational infrastructure. However, beneath this success lies a complex and evolving picture of demographic change, labour market disparities, and skills mismatches. With reference to **Annex 1**, together with additional analyses and inputs from wider stakeholder engagement activities, this section provides an analysis of the region's skills landscape, examining current and future demand and supply-side challenges.

The area is comprised of:

- £72.6 billion economy with labour productivity above the national average
- 76,600 business enterprises and 89,900 local business units
- 2.06 million people with a working age population of 1.27 million
- Four upper tier authorities and 11 district and borough councils
- 15 further education colleges and four universities
- ALPS ALPHI, representing over 60 training providers across Hampshire and Surrey
- Two economic growth boards
- Two Growth Hubs
- Two Careers Hubs
- Two Local Skills Improvement Plans

Demography and Labour Market

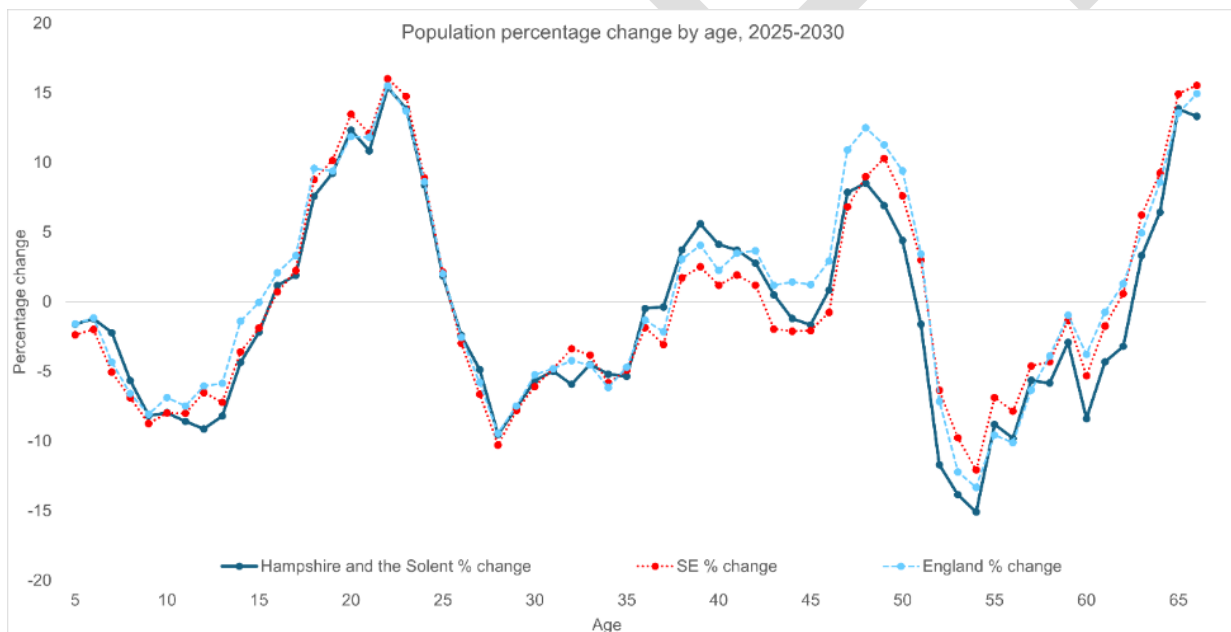
Hampshire is a region of unparalleled economic and geographical diversity – an asset rich landscape made up of coastal spaces, rural landscapes, national parks and major industry clusters⁸. The region's working-age population has grown modestly over the past three decades but is projected to decline by 2043, driven by ageing demographics. A closer analysis on population changes by age between 2025 and 2030 (see **Figure 1**, below) highlights implications for different age bands:

⁸ Economic Strategy for Hampshire. Committing to Prosperity | 2025 – 2027: <https://documents.hants.gov.uk/hampshire-prosperity-partnership/Economic-Strategy-For-Hampshire-2025-27-FINAL.pdf>

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- **Children (ages 5-14):** Declining numbers suggest potential school capacity adjustments⁹ and long-term workforce pipeline concerns.
- **Young adults (ages 16-24):** Growth, especially between ages 18-24, suggesting increasing demand for post-16 education and training and early employment support.
- **Mid-life adults (ages 50-55):** Significant decline, especially around age 54, may impact workforce availability, leadership succession, and skills retention in experienced roles.
- **Older adults (ages 65-66):** Notable growth in retirement-age population, indicating future demand for healthcare and social care.

Figure 1: Population percentage change by age, 2025-2030 for Hampshire and the Solent, South East region and England.



Source: ONS 2025, using 2018 based population projections

In 2024 Hampshire had a larger workforce, more people in employment (78.5% employment rate), fewer unemployed people and fewer economically inactive people than in 2019. That said, economic inactivity has actually risen in most areas except Portsmouth.

Gender and age disparities persist, with lower participation among younger and older workers, and a widening gender gap in employment. The Get Hampshire Working

⁹ The Guardian reports on the closure of 800 primary schools, nationally, by 2029 due to low birthrates: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2025/sep/25/low-birthrates-in-england-could-lead-to-closure-of-800-primary-schools-by-2029>

Draft Hampshire Skills Strategy 2025

Plan¹⁰ also makes it clear that of those economically inactive, women are disproportionately disadvantaged. Gaps in inclusivity and diversity of the labour market are also highlighted in the Enterprise M3 (including all of Surrey) Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP)¹¹.

Job density remains below the national average, and between 2019 and 2023, the region lost around 16,000 jobs. The Isle of Wight was the only area to see job growth. Part-time work is prevalent, especially among women, and the gender pay gap remains significant. There is also significant commuting activity within the area as well as across neighbouring areas such as London, Berkshire and Surrey.

In summary: Strong employment but slow growth. An ageing and shrinking working age population with geographic, gender and age disparities.

Sectors and Industries

Local services (including, importantly Education and training) dominate employment (71%) in Hampshire, followed by High-value-added traded services (15%) and Primary/secondary industries (13%). Strategic sectors such as Health and Social Care and the Visitor Economy have seen strong growth, while Creative and Digital and Life Sciences have declined. Employment growth across most sectors has lagged behind national and regional averages.

Table 2: Key sectors for Hampshire.

The County Council has identified 12 sectors that are of particular importance to the Hampshire economy¹²:

- Aerospace, space and defence*
- Construction*
- Creative*
- Digital*
- Farming and rural economy*
- Health and care*
- Life sciences
- Logistics*
- Low carbon / green*
- Marine and maritime*
- Professional services*
- Tourism

* Indicates these sectors are listed in the one or both of the Local Skills Improvement Plans.

¹⁰ Get Hampshire Working Plan:

<https://www.hants.gov.uk/aboutthecouncil/strategiesplansandpolicies/get-hampshire-working-plan>

¹¹ EM3 LSIP: <https://www.surrey-chambers.co.uk/report/em3-including-all-of-surrey-ls-ip-final-report-2023/>

¹² Economic Strategy for Hampshire 2025-27: <https://documents.hants.gov.uk/hampshire-prosperity-partnership/Economic-Strategy-For-Hampshire-2025-27-FINAL.pdf>

Draft Hampshire Skills Strategy 2025

Hampshire has notable concentrations in Marine & Maritime, Aerospace & Defence, and Construction, but underperforms in Professional Services and Digital Technologies.

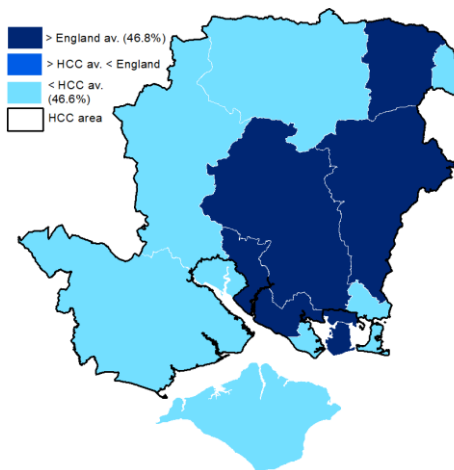
The Government's Industrial Strategy¹³ sets a commitment to, '*Enhance skills and increase access to talent by reforming the skills and employment support system to create a strong pipeline into the IS-8*'. The IS-8 sectors¹⁴ show mixed performance in Hampshire, with Clean Energy growing, while Digital and Technologies declined.

With respect to Low carbon / green, the EM3 LSIP reported there were around 35,000 green jobs in 2023 with forecast growth to around 57,000 by 2030¹⁵. The shift to a low carbon economy, with a focus on skills, is also a key part of the Solent LSIP¹⁶.

In summary: Government priority sectors are evident in Hampshire although there is work to be done to maintain employment growth; particularly in high-value-added traded services.

Skills Supply

Figure 2: Working age population with RQF4+ across Hampshire, 2024.



Source: ONS 2025

As shown in **Figure 2**, left, Hampshire has a highly qualified workforce, with 46.6% holding RQF Level 4+ qualifications. However, disparities exist, with Gosport, Havant, and the Isle of Wight lagging behind. Intermediate skills are well represented, reflecting the region's industrial base.

Key Stage 4 and 5 attainment is strong in Hampshire but weaker in Portsmouth and Southampton. Participation in further education and skills has declined – particularly among older adults with the rate of young people aged 16 to 17 in Hampshire, not in education, employment or training (NEET rate) in 2025 ranging

¹³ Industrial Strategy: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/industrial-strategy>

¹⁴ IS-8 sectors are the eight growth-driving sectors defined in the government's Industrial Strategy: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/industrial-strategy/industrial-strategy-sector-definitions-list>

¹⁵ Green skills demand in Surrey and North/Mid Hampshire: <https://wpieconomics.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Green-skills-demand-in-Surrey-WPI-Economics-and-Lightcast-report.pdf>

¹⁶ Solent LSIP: <https://www.hampshirechamber.co.uk/chamber-of-solutions/local-skills-improvement-plan/>

Draft Hampshire Skills Strategy 2025

from 3.8% (Isle of Wight) to 7.7% for Portsmouth.

Hampshire's mixture of coastal, rural and urban areas may also reflect evidence of differences in progression to higher education of young people from these different areas¹⁷. Collaborative initiatives such as SUN¹⁸ and HEON¹⁹ offer impartial and high-quality activities to target and support these young people to encourage participation in higher education. New Forest District Council also has a focus on inclusive growth, including support for NEET young people²⁰.

The Youth Voice Census 2025²¹ reports that, amongst young people, “...*wellbeing remains fragile, preparation for work is patchy, and opportunities to build skills and confidence are shrinking.*” Moreover, those furthest from education or work are left furthest behind – and this is true for all residents in such circumstances.

Apprenticeships remain vital, with advanced and higher-level programmes dominating and the area poised to see the impact of Foundation Apprenticeships and the introduction of apprenticeship units²². Graduate retention is relatively high in Portsmouth and Southampton, but net migration remains negative.

In summary: Highly skilled residents but not in all parts of the region and more young people are disengaging from education and training. For an inclusive skills system, support must target those furthest from education or work.

Skills Demand

Labour demand has cooled since the post-pandemic peak, with job postings falling by over 50% between 2023 and 2025. High-skilled occupations account for a third of demand, but the region lags behind national averages. Education, Hospitality, and Healthcare are the top career areas by demand, with Construction and Transportation showing strong growth.

¹⁷ New report shows coastal and rural young people missing out on higher education: <https://www.educationopportunities.co.uk/news/new-report-shows-coastal-and-rural-young-people-missing-out-on-higher-education/>

¹⁸ Southern Universities Network: <https://www.sunoutreach.org/>

¹⁹ Higher Education Outreach Network: <https://www.heon.org.uk/>

²⁰ New Forest Skills Action Plan 2025-2030: <https://democracy.newforest.gov.uk/documents/s33259/Appendix%201%20-%20Skills%20Action%20Plan.pdf>

²¹ 2025 Youth Voice Census Results: <https://www.youthemployment.org.uk/youth-voice-census/results/>

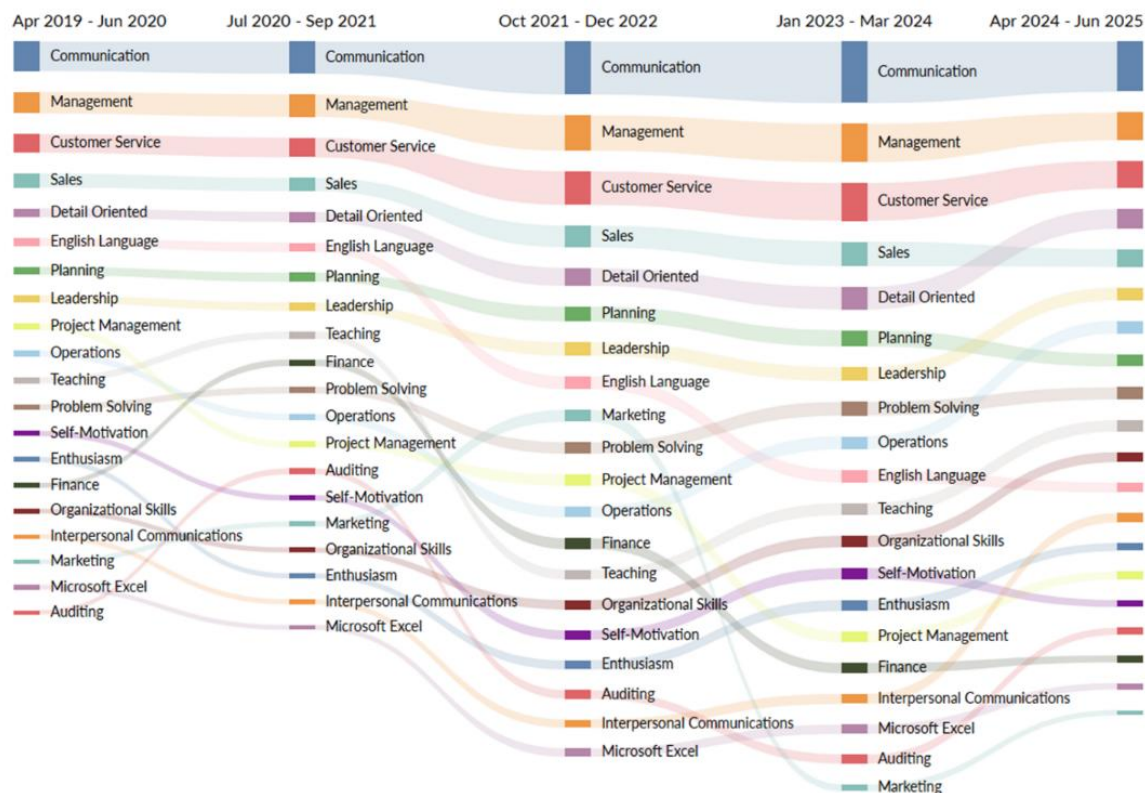
²² The Growth and Skills Levy: <https://find-employer-schemes.education.gov.uk/interim/growth-and-skills-levy>

Draft Hampshire Skills Strategy 2025

AI is reshaping demand, particularly in graduate-entry roles, raising concerns about overqualification and underemployment. The recent development of the Artificial Intelligence Growth Alliance²³ aims to offer leadership in this space and help develop a skilled and inclusive workforce.

Soft skills are increasingly viewed as transferable talents, usable in many, many roles, and are becoming as essential as hard, technical or specialised skills. **Figure 3** shows how the demand for skills has changed in Hampshire between 2019-2025.

Figure 3: Changing demands for skills in Hampshire, 2019-2025.



Source: Lightcast 2025

Future job growth is expected to be modest, with replacement demand driving most opportunities. Professional and caring occupations are projected to grow, while administrative and elementary roles may decline.

In summary: A cooling labour market with support needed for employers to increase recruitment activity and explore different ways to fill skills gaps.

²³ Introducing the AI Growth Alliance: <https://southcoastiot.ac.uk/ai-growth-alliance/>

Skills Mismatch

Table 3: Density of skills shortage vacancies, SSV, 2022 (SSV as a % of all employment).

Managers	6%
Professionals	17%
Associate professionals	13%
Administrative/secretarial occupations	10%
Skilled trades occupations	26%
Caring, leisure and other services	18%
Sales/customer service staff	9%
Process, plant and machine operatives	11%
Elementary occupations	14%

Source: ESS 2025

Skills shortages and gaps are prevalent, particularly in Health, Education, and Construction. These have also been reflected in the two LSIP reports. Around 33% of vacancies are hard to fill due to skills shortages. Skills gaps affect 18% of employers, with the highest density in Hotels, Restaurants, and Education²⁴.

Table 3 shows the highest incidence of hard-to-fill vacancies in Hampshire is found in skilled trade occupations, followed by caring, leisure and other service occupations, and professional occupations.

Skills underutilisation is also a concern, with over a third of establishments reporting staff with qualifications above job requirements. Where staff are unable to use their skills effectively at work, this is typically associated with poorer job satisfaction, lower earnings and worse career progression prospects²⁵. Those entering the labour market for the first time can often find themselves in this position and recent reports indicate graduates are facing a particularly challenging jobs market²⁶.

In 2024, around 198,000 employees (16%) in Hampshire received job-related training; a training rate higher than the South East (13%) and national (11%) averages. However, employer-led training is uneven (highest training rate in Portsmouth; lowest on the Isle of Wight), with 39% of employers providing no training.

In summary: Evidence of skills gaps, underutilisation of skills and little or no investment in staff training.

²⁴ The EM3 LSIP highlights challenges faced by education and training providers with respect to attracting, retaining and upskilling staff.

²⁵ Over-skilled and underused: Investigating the untapped potential of UK skills (CIPD, 2018): https://www.cipd.org/globalassets/media/knowledge/knowledge-hub/reports/over-skilled-and-underused-investigating-the-untapped-potential-of-uk-skills_tcm18-48001.pdf

²⁶ UK graduates facing worst job market since 2018 amid rise of AI, says Indeed (Guardian): <https://www.theguardian.com/money/2025/jun/25/uk-university-graduates-toughest-job-market-rise-of-ai>

Common themes

In addition to the insights above, through stakeholder engagement and with reference to the two LSIPs, the following five themes are important to consider in identifying skills priorities for Hampshire:

Cross-cutting transferable skills

Across multiple industries, employers consistently emphasise the importance of transferable skills – those foundational capabilities that enable individuals to adapt and thrive in diverse roles and plot pathways through their careers. While sector-specific knowledge remains valuable, many employers prefer to shape technical skills internally, placing greater value on attributes such as communication, digital literacy, and professionalism. Analysis of job postings and stakeholder feedback highlights three areas for cross-cutting skills development: **Employability skills** (e.g. *communication, customer service and problem solving*), **Digital skills** (see below), and **Professional skills** (e.g. *management, sales/business development and entrepreneurialism*) – each essential for building a resilient and versatile workforce²⁷.

The importance of Professional skills was also highlighted in the report on green skills, commissioned by the EM3 LSIP and Surrey County Council²⁸. This report highlighted the significance of **Green skills** (as opposed to Green Jobs²⁹) as the transition to a low-carbon economy accelerates. These skills – ranging from *sustainable practices and energy efficiency* to *environmental awareness and circular economy principles* – are increasingly relevant not only in traditionally green sectors but also in construction, transport, manufacturing, and beyond.

Recent research from the University of Southampton³⁰ has highlighted significant barriers to entry into green careers, particularly for young people and under-represented groups, due to limited careers information. The report highlights an urgent need for better definitions of green skills, alongside improved education and training provision that reflects the breadth of green job opportunities across Hampshire. It also recommends further work to develop careers resources and secure investment to support green skills development and respond to the climate crisis.

With reference to **Digital skills**, at a national level, the demand for specialised IT skills continues to rise. For example, within the IT sector, cybersecurity is a top priority at a time when daily headlines about data breaches and cyberattacks remind us that these

²⁷ Reflected by both LSIPs as well as external stakeholder activity as part of the development of this Strategy.

²⁸ Green Skills Demand in Surrey and North/Mid Hampshire:

<https://wpieconomics.com/publications/green-skills-demand-in-surrey-and-north-mid-hampshire/>

²⁹ Green Skills for Green Jobs: <https://carbonliteracy.com/green-skills-for-green-jobs/>

³⁰ Improving access to green careers in Hampshire and the Solent:

<https://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/conservation/green-halo-partnership/greenprint/green-careers-report/>

Draft Hampshire Skills Strategy 2025

incidents are no longer anomalies and increasingly closer to home³¹. Across the region it is widely accepted AI is changing how we live and work—and it's happening fast. To keep up, we need to ensure residents and businesses understand not only how to use AI, but how to use it well.

Stakeholders reported that **Automation** (including AI) is a regional strength and area of focus due to its cross-cutting nature and impacts. As we see increased adoption of automation in industry, we recognise the need for some skills such as technological, social and emotional will rise while demand for some physical and manual skills will fall³². Our schools, colleges, universities and independent training providers are all exploring ways to utilise AI but also keen to work with employers to understand their applications and skills needs.

In September 2025, the Solent Growth Partnership won the opportunity to run an **AI Skills Partnership Pilot**³³ to connect regional employers, training providers, and public and private sectors to deliver AI skills that meet local economic needs and opportunities. This Pilot will also form the basis of a national model of AI skills provision.

Regional strength: Defence

Alongside Automation, **Defence** was an industry highlighted by stakeholders as another area of strength for Hampshire which has one of the largest Armed Forces communities in the UK and is the only local authority with military bases for all three of the Armed Forces Services (Royal Navy, British Army and Royal Air Force)³⁴.

As well as supporting these communities, Hampshire has a rich history of manufacturing, research and development, and contributing to military capabilities for the UK. It fosters collaboration between the Ministry of Defence (MOD), industry and education and training providers. Related activities range from (e.g.) drone manufacturing to maritime; food security to satellite technology and composite technology to cybersecurity.

In September 2024, the South East Regional Defence and Security Cluster³⁵ was launched, creating a nationally recognised hub for defence and security companies. It will combine cutting-edge research facilities, industry leaders, and a highly skilled

³¹ IT World of Work 2025 Outlook – UK: https://www.manpowergroup.co.uk/b_it-world-of-work-2025-outlook-uk/

³² Skills shift: Automation and the future of the workforce: <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/skill-shift-automation-and-the-future-of-the-workforce>

³³ AI Skills Partnership Pilot: <https://solentgrowthpartnership.co.uk/new-partnership-to-build-ai-skills-for-future-growth/>

³⁴ Background to our support for the Armed Forces Community in Hampshire: <https://www.hants.gov.uk/community/armedforces/background>

³⁵ South East Regional Defence and Security Cluster: <https://www.hants.gov.uk/business/southcentralrdsc>

Draft Hampshire Skills Strategy 2025

workforce. Hampshire is becoming an ideal location for defence businesses to establish and train their workforce.

Barriers to learning

One of the priorities in the Hampshire County Council Strategic Plan is to maximise opportunities for employment and inclusion by equipping people with the right skills now and in the future³⁶. This benefits those who are able to access and participate in education and skills training but can disadvantage those who face barriers to learning. Unionlearn presents a list of common barriers to learning (**Table 4**) and these have been used to group different groups to target in delivering the Strategy (**Annex 3**).

Table 4: Common barriers impeding access to learning.

Barrier	Description
Social and cultural barriers	peer pressure and family background
Practical and person barriers	transport; time; disability; caring responsibilities; childcare; finance; cost; age; language; and lack of access to information
Emotional barriers	lack of self-esteem or confidence due to low skills levels; negative personal experience of learning; previously undetected or unaddressed learning disabilities; social problems such as unemployment, abuse or bullying
Workplace barriers	time off; access; discrimination; unsupportive managers; shift work; isolation

Source: Unionlearn: <https://www.unionlearn.org.uk/common-barriers-learning>

With a key focus on working with employers to drive growth and opportunity through education and training, the Government's Post-16 education and skills white paper³⁷ is a crucial policy reference to focus and drive this theme as part of the Strategy, with specific reference to barriers faced by particular groups of (e.g.) young people (especially NEETs), adults, undergraduates and postgraduates.

Digital poverty

Digital exclusion affects up to 19 million people across the UK and, as core, local services increasingly move online, this exclusion is creating new forms of disadvantage³⁸ proficiency in digital skills. Although Hampshire has a strong Digital

³⁶ Hampshire County Council Strategic Plan: Outcome 1: <https://www.hants.gov.uk/aboutthecouncil/strategiesplansandpolicies/corporatestrategy/outcome1>

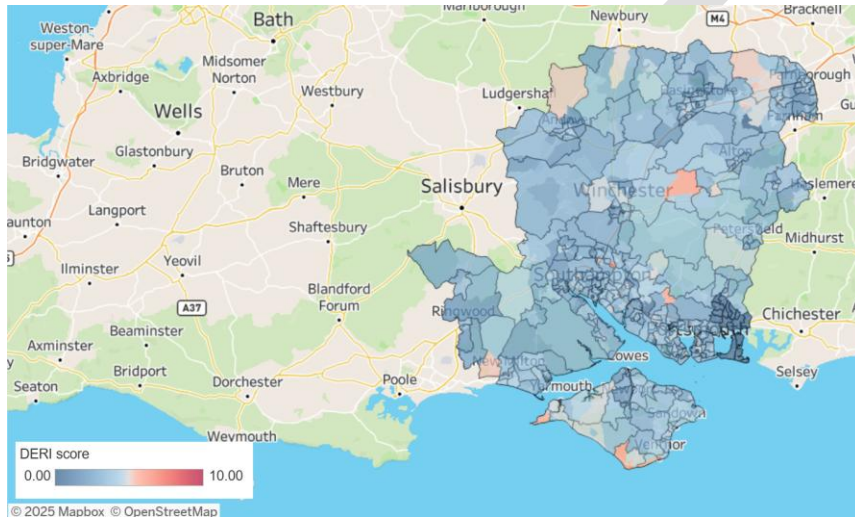
³⁷ Post-16 education and skills white paper: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/post-16-education-and-skills-white-paper>

³⁸ National Delivery and Advocacy Plan 2025 (Digital Poverty Alliance): <https://digitalpovertyalliance.org/national-delivery-plan-2025/>

Draft Hampshire Skills Strategy 2025

profile³⁹ and good digital connectivity, deprivation exists. For example, when applied to Hampshire, the Digital Exclusion Risk Index⁴⁰ ranges from 0.14 (low risk) in Sarisbury, Fareham to 5.96 (medium risk) in Eastleigh Central (**Figure 4**). The government's Digital Inclusion Action Plan identifies five broad demographic groups particularly at risk of digital exclusion: low-income households, older individuals, disabled people, people experiencing unemployment and seeking work, and young people (including those not in education, employment or training)⁴¹.

Figure 4: Digital Exclusion Risk Index for Hampshire.



Accessible careers support for all ages

The Government's Post-16 education and skills white paper also sets out clear action to reduce young people becoming NEET, including provision of high-quality information, advice and guidance of careers and information on local options and provision. This links well to concerns raised during stakeholder engagement activities as well as those about potential mismatches between young peoples' expectations versus the reality of the labour market⁴². However, with continued shifts in career behaviours, across the working age population, there also needs to be a recognition for careers support for all ages – not just those looking to join the labour market for the first time.

³⁹ Business in Hampshire: Digital: <https://www.hants.gov.uk/business/business-in-hampshire/sectors/digital>

⁴⁰ Digital Exclusion Risk Index: https://public.tableau.com/views/DigitalExclusionRiskIndexv1_6/DERIhomepage?:showVizHome=no&:embed=yes?https://public.tableau.com/views/DigitalExclusionRiskIndexv1_6/DERIhomepage?:showVizHome=no&:embed=yes

⁴¹ Digital Inclusion Action Plan: First Steps: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/digital-inclusion-action-plan-first-steps/>

⁴² Referenced in the Youth Voice Census 2025 and also in a 2022 report from City & Guilds: <https://www.cityandguilds.com/news/december-2022/youth-misspent-uncovering-harsh-realities-for-britains-young-people-in-todays-job-market>

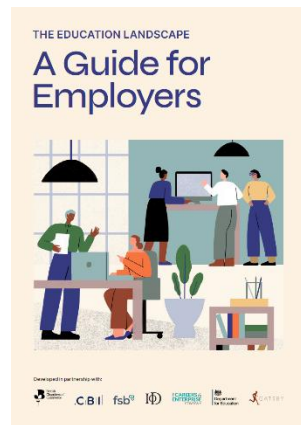
Draft Hampshire Skills Strategy 2025

The white paper states that the new Jobs and Careers Service will work to ensure that employer engagement and support for jobseekers is joined up locally.

Timely delivery of future skills

Feedback from providers, in particular, related to previous government-funded programmes where significant investments were made in new facilities and equipment, designed to help train and equip new cohorts of learners with the skills they need for pioneering jobs in (e.g.) low carbon sectors. However, the uptake from employers was not always as expected and some providers had to adapt to use the facilities and equipment in other ways – perhaps with other groups of learners, whilst local industry caught up. Providers are keen to invest in new facilities and equipment but with teaching space often at a premium, they also want reassurance from employers that the investments will deliver strong returns that will benefit their learners.

Education of employers



The EM3 LSIP reported the education and training offer is often perceived by employers as extremely broad and complex, making it difficult for them to navigate and understand – especially SMEs that make up around 99% of the area’s business base. Assets such as The Education Landscape⁴³, alongside similar resources from the Careers and Enterprise Company⁴⁴, explain how education and training is changing to better meet business needs, the main ways to get involved, and the key benefits of doing so. However, with changes to central and local governments often come further changes to the skills system and therefore, there need to be strong working

relationships and mechanisms between providers and employers to update and inform.

In **Part two**, these insights are brought together, alongside reference to national skills priorities, to create a set of skills priorities for Hampshire.

⁴³ The Education Landscape: <https://educationlandscape.org.uk/>

⁴⁴ Careers and Enterprise Company: <https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/employers/>

Part two: Skills priorities for Hampshire

In **Part one**, we presented an analysis of the region’s skills landscape, examining current and future demand and supply-side challenges. During two stakeholder workshops, discussions took place to identify the key skills priorities that would address the challenges – and more – and provide a framework to create an action plan.

In October 2025, the Government also published their **Post-16 education and skills white paper**⁴⁵, outlining how they will work with employers to drive growth and opportunity through education and training. This has been a useful reference point in putting together this action plan and it reminds us about the importance of employer engagement.

Without employer engagement, none of these priorities will be addressed. Hence, you will see opportunities for employers to engage throughout the action plan in **Part three**.

1. Curriculum development

Why is this a priority?: Feedback from stakeholders was that education and training should be informed by the Industrial Strategy growth-driving sectors (the ‘IS-8’ sectors)⁴⁶ as well as local skills priorities – key industries; green skills; growth skills and jobs but also transferable professional skills such as entrepreneurialism, innovation, sales / business development and resilience. These would help individuals both preparing to enter the labour market for the first time, as well as those looking to progress or change careers to thrive and prosper. This aligns to priorities 1 and 2 from the Hampshire County Council Strategic Plan.

Where are the gaps?: Training in professional skills; training in green skills (e.g. circular economy); skills dashboards to highlight and inform opportunities.

⁴⁵ Post-16 education and skills white paper: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/post-16-education-and-skills-white-paper>

⁴⁶ Industrial Strategy Sector Definitions List: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/industrial-strategy/industrial-strategy-sector-definitions-list>

2. Opportunities to learn

Why is this a priority?: Stakeholders highlighted the importance of localised information and support to help individuals overcome barriers to learning. It was recognised those furthest from learning (and the labour market) would need the most support – including community-based foundation level skills in literacy, numeracy and digital. It was also stressed that ‘digital’ solutions would not be appropriate in isolation but should complement face-to-face engagements with individuals (especially where there is evidence of digital poverty). This aligns to priorities 1, 2 and 3 from the Hampshire County Council Strategic Plan.

Where are the gaps?: Learn more about transport as a barrier to learning; digital inclusion support; employer investment into training; support for working parents and carers.

3. Careers navigation and support

Why is this a priority?: Stakeholders fed back that increased awareness of local key industries and jobs can help drive demand for skills. This will need to be a collaboration between employers and providers (including schools). By improving the awareness and understanding about the employment opportunities in different industries (especially where stereotypes can be broken), individuals are more likely to be inspired and drawn towards priority areas and follow suitable career pathways. This aligns to priorities 1 and 2 from the Hampshire County Council Strategic Plan.

Where are the gaps?: Accessible, high-quality careers information; employers’ guide to supporting young people, including NEETs; working towards a local Jobs and Careers Service.

4. Future ready skills

Why is this a priority?: Although technical skills can be taught and developed, employers continue to report it remains a challenge to find candidates with the right mix of employability skills. Job postings data echoes this, reflecting an opportunity for a laser focus on supporting residents to identify and access transferable skills to help them grow and prosper. This aligns to priorities 1 and 2 from the Hampshire County Council Strategic Plan.

Where are the gaps?: AI skills and leadership; prioritising green skills; employability skills provision.

5. Education and skills partnerships

Why is this a priority?: A key aim of the LSIP programme is to support greater collaboration between providers and employers and encourage innovative join-up between skills offers and work programmes. The Hampshire Skills Strategy is an opportunity to build on this work. This aligns to priority 4 from the Hampshire County Council Strategic Plan.

Where are the gaps?: Mechanism for business development leads to come together; work experience and volunteering programme for young people; coordinated skills and knowledge exchange programme.

6. Upskilling

Why is this a priority?: Where employers are holding back on recruiting new workers and replacing staff, this presents an opportunity to invest in training to address skills gaps and support growth. From the advances in AI to reskilling for Net Zero targets, employers that commit to upskilling programmes and in-work training with local providers will find themselves better equipped to compete and scale, make the most of new opportunities, and adapt in the face of change. This aligns to priorities 1 and 2 from the Hampshire County Council Strategic Plan.

Where are the gaps?: Upskilling needs across industry clusters; AI skills; co-location of skills activity.

In **Part three**, these insights are brought together in an Action Plan that will be delivered across 12 months. This part also makes reference to target groups for consideration.

Part three: Taking the priorities forward

The following tables present actions for the six priorities, for delivery over the next 12 months. Although Hampshire County Council will lead on delivery of these actions, employer engagement and collaboration with other partners will be key. As the Employer Representative Body for the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) and a business network, Hampshire Chamber of Commerce will be a key delivery partner.

During some of the external stakeholder activity as part of the development of this Strategy, partners were asked to help identify target groups that would be important to consider in making an inclusive skills strategy. The full list is presented in **Annex 3** and they broadly relate to those with:

- **Practical and personal challenges** (e.g. Age, disability, education / employment status)
- **Social and cultural challenges** (e.g. Deprived communities, ethnic minority groups, housing circumstances)
- **Workplace / employment-related challenges** (e.g. Armed forces, Economically active but facing challenges in the labour market, Sole traders)

Action Plan

Priority 1: Curriculum development

No.	Action and description	Measurements of success	Key partners	Delivery timetable
1a	Training in professional skills: Work with providers to develop training in entrepreneurialism, innovation, business development and resilience.	Delivery of training in at least three of the professional skills areas.	Local Government, Employers, Hampshire Chamber of Commerce, Providers	Summer 2026
1b	Addressing skills gaps in the circular economy: Work with employers and providers to identify and address skills gaps to help grow the circular economy.	Evidence base in 'Skills gaps in the circular economy' and delivery of related training.	Local Government, Employers, Providers	Spring 2026

Draft Hampshire Skills Strategy 2025

1c	Provision of skills dashboards: Provision of annual skills dashboards, with key economic, labour market and skills insights.	Publication of one set of skills dashboards.	Local Government, Providers	Summer 2026
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Priority 2: Opportunities to learn

No.	Action and description	Measurements of success	Key partners	Delivery timetable
2a	Transport as a barrier: Work with providers and employers to learn more about transport as a barrier to learning for post-16 education and skills training.	Evidence base on transport as a barrier to learning.	Local Government, Employers, Providers	Summer 2026
2b	Digital inclusion: Strengthen local understanding and capacity to deliver joined-up digital inclusion support.	Collaborative digital inclusion programme.	Housing associations, Local Government, Employers, Providers	Autumn 2026
2c	Employer investment into training and progression: Support development of an employers' guide to Good Work and ensure there is consideration of support for training and progression.	Delivery of an employers' guide to Good Work.	Local Government, Hampshire Chamber of Commerce, Employers, Providers	Spring 2026
2d	Support for working parents and carers: Build on previous activities for employers to highlight support for working parents and carers and the childcare sector.	Delivery of a series of activities for employers.	Local Government, Employers	Spring 2026

Priority 3: Careers navigation and support

No.	Action and description	Measurements of success	Key partners	Delivery timetable
3a	Library of jobs and careers factsheets: Create, publish and circulate a suite of jobs and	Publication of jobs and careers factsheets.	Careers Hubs, Local	Summer 2026

Draft Hampshire Skills Strategy 2025

	careers factsheets, linked to key sectors and priority occupations.		Government, Providers	
3b	Employers' guide to supporting young people: Work with the Hampshire Careers Hub to create an employers' guide supporting young people to thrive at the start of their careers.	Production of employers' guide, including focus on NEET young people.	Careers Hub, Local Government, Hampshire Chamber of Commerce, Employers, Providers, VCSEs ⁴⁷	Spring 2026
3c	Working towards a local Jobs and Careers Service: Collaborate with Jobcentre Plus and others to explore and test ideas for a local Jobs and Careers Service.	Agree and action at least three collaborative ideas, including one focusing on NEET young people.	Jobcentre Plus, Careers Hubs, Local Government, Employers, Providers, VCSEs	Autumn 2026

Priority 4: Future ready skills

No.	Action and description	Measurements of success	Key partners	Delivery timetable
4a	Regional AI skills and leadership strategy: Work with the AI Growth Alliance to develop a regional AI skills and leadership strategy.	Produce a regional AI skills leadership strategy.	Artificial Intelligence Growth Alliance, Employers, Future Towns Innovation Hub	Spring 2026
4b	Green skills: Support development of refreshed Climate Change Strategy and Waste and Resources Strategy with references to skills and training.	Hampshire County Council to adopt refreshed Strategies with reference to skills and training.	Local Government, Employers, Providers, VCSEs	Autumn 2025 – Summer 2026
4c	Employability skills: Support development of new employability skills provision.	Delivery of employability skills training.	Local Government, Employers, Hampshire Chamber of	Autumn 2025 – Spring 2026

⁴⁷ Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise organisations

Draft Hampshire Skills Strategy 2025

Commerce,
Providers

Priority 5: Education and skills partnerships

No.	Action and description	Measurements of success	Key partners	Delivery timetable
5a	Business development leads: Establish and foster a mechanism to bring together business development / employer engagement leads from providers.	At least three fora where business development / employer engagement leads come together.	Local Government, Hampshire Chamber of Commerce, Providers	Summer 2026
5b	Young peoples' work experience and volunteering programme: Work with the Hampshire Careers Hub to develop a young peoples' work experience and volunteering programme.	Delivery of young peoples' work experience and volunteering programme.	Careers Hubs, Local Government, Employers, Providers, VCSEs	Spring 2026
5c	Coordinated skills and knowledge exchange opportunities: Work with providers to agree a common approach to coordinate skills and knowledge exchange opportunities with employers.	Evidence of a common approach to coordinate skills and knowledge exchange between providers and employers.	Local Government, Employers, Providers	Spring 2026

Priority 6: Upskilling

No.	Action and description	Measurements of success	Key partners	Delivery timetable
6a	New training provision to upskill IT professionals in AI: Focus on AI development, machine learning, data science and prompt engineering.	Development of new training provision on at least one of the specified areas.	Local Government, BCS ⁴⁸ , Employers, Providers	Autumn 2026

⁴⁸ BCS is the Chartered Institute for IT: <https://www.bcs.org/>

Draft Hampshire Skills Strategy 2025

6b	Co-location of skills: Work with providers to identify opportunities for co-location of skills activity.	At least three examples of co-location of skills activity.	Local Government, Employers, Hampshire Chamber of Commerce, Providers	Summer 2026
6c	Cluster engagement: Engage with Industry Clusters across Hampshire to identify priority upskilling needs and work with providers to address*.	Evidence base on upskilling needs and evidence of engagement with providers to address.	Local Government, Employers, Providers	Spring 2026

* With particular reference to, for example, Apprenticeships, Skills Bootcamps and the introduction of the Lifelong learning entitlement⁴⁹.

What we are doing next

Performance delivery

Performance for delivery of the Hampshire Skills Strategy will be via quarterly reporting against the action plan to the Hampshire Skills Partnership. These reports will also be made available to the Hampshire Prosperity Partnership Board.

Responding to opportunities

The Hampshire Skills Partnership strives, *'To ensure all agencies are working together to provide the skills and opportunities needed to drive economic growth and ensure an inclusive and prosperous regional economy'* (Hampshire Skills Partnership Vision⁵⁰)

Related to this, the Partnership will consider and respond to changes to skills policy and explore funding opportunities, including those linked to the Modern Industrial Strategy.

Joined up local skills strategy

In 2026, during the establishment of the MCCA for Hampshire and the Solent, we will work with partners to create a Strategic Skills Plan and Commissioning Plan to show how the area plans to use devolved Adult Skills Funding to deliver high-quality provision, meet local skills needs and improve outcomes for our residents. We will also

⁴⁹ Lifelong learning entitlement: what it is and how it will work:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/lifelong-learning-entitlement-lle-overview/lifelong-learning-entitlement-overview>

⁵⁰ Hampshire Skills Partnership: <https://www.hants.gov.uk/business/hampshire-prosperity-partnership/hampshire-skills-partnership>

Draft Hampshire Skills Strategy 2025

work closely with Hampshire Chamber of Commerce to support the development of the new Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) for the area. This continued partnership approach aims to align strategy, maximise collaboration and reduce unnecessary duplication.

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List of Annexes

Annex 1: Hampshire Skills evidence base

Annex 2: Strategic context and alignment

Annex 3: Target groups for Hampshire Skills Strategy activity

Annex 4: Acknowledgements

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