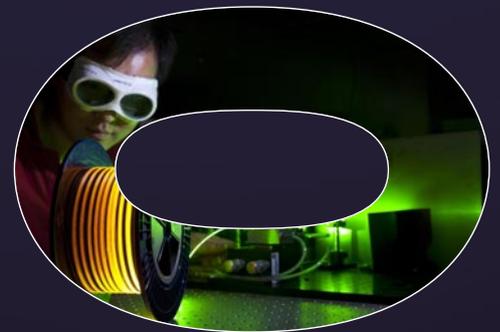




SOLENT  
LOCAL  
ENTERPRISE  
PARTNERSHIP

# SOLENT SKILLS ACTION PLAN & LOCAL SKILLS REPORT



FINAL REPORT

March 2021

#solent2050

# CONTENTS

Section	Page Number
1. Foreword by Rachael Randall, Chair of the Skills Advisory Panel	3
2. Introduction to the Skills Advisory Panel	4
3. Skills, strengths and needs	7
4. Skills Strategy	11
5. Skills Action Plan	15
6. Assessment of progress	19
7. Case Studies and positive impact stories	22
8. Looking forward	25

# 1. FOREWORD

## The pandemic means the SAP has never been more important

**Rachael Randall,  
Chair of the Skills Advisory Panel  
and Solent LEP Business Director**

As we publish this Skills Action Plan and Local Skills Report we are acutely aware that organisations and individuals continue to face enormous challenges arising from the global pandemic and, reflecting our gateway economy, an adjustment to new trading arrangements with the European Union. The Skills Advisory Panel (SAP) has, in the drafting of this report, articulated the need for skills development to be addressed as part of an integrated response, providing opportunities for our residents, workforce and our businesses to obtain the skills they need to remain competitive and to grow.

This Skills Action Plan and Local Skills Report builds on the Local Skills and Labour Market Analysis published in June of last year, and the Solent's Economic Recovery Plan, published last autumn, and sets out the strategic priorities and actions for the area.

This last year has undoubtedly been unprecedented, requiring rapid responses to a fast changing situation. In this regard the Skills Advisory Panel continues to gather intelligence and monitor the impact to our labour market and economy to inform the ongoing strategic response. It is becoming evident that the pandemic will result in some changes to the way we live and work over the longer term and it remains clear that the need to continue to develop a world-class talent base is central to realising our ambitions for the area.

Informed by the evidence base and extensive consultation, we have themed our approach under four interconnected strategic priorities, which form the basis of a more detailed action plan:



- Awareness and Aspirations;
- Brokerage: matching supply with demand;
- Core sectors and competencies; and
- Digital Inclusion.

Within this we have adopted a three-stage approach to reflect short, medium and longer term programmes of activity over the next five years, moving from short-term actions to ensure the skills system plays a key role in supporting our businesses and communities to restart, restore and recover to longer term transformational actions to place the Solent at the vanguard of approaches to climate change adaptation, as we travel along the pathway to Net Zero.

The Solent has a large business base, which draws its workforce predominately from within the area. Assumptions of homogeneous south east prosperity mask high levels of deprivation and educational poverty in coastal communities like Gosport, our two cities of Portsmouth and Southampton, and the Isle of Wight. It is not a level playing field and there is a need to focus activity to support young people and those in lower skilled jobs who are disproportionately adversely affected by the pandemic in employment and training.

In tandem we need to continue work, through our Careers Hub, to inspire all our young people still at school and college to study hard, supporting them to develop

the employability skills our employers require, and make them aware of the great jobs and future careers here for them in the Solent.

The pandemic is an economic shock not seen for a generation, adversely affecting key sectors such as hospitality, tourism, retail, transport, manufacturing and construction. In response we have set out plans which build on existing initiatives, such as the Solent Apprenticeship Hub, expanding the remit to develop an independent skills brokerage offer integrated with our business-focused Growth Hub.

This will simplify the landscape for business and individuals, respond to productivity issues and help address skills gaps. The pandemic has shone a light on the digital divide present in the Solent, and we recognise this must be addressed at all levels.

Finally, an employer-led approach informs the direction of travel set out in our Skills Action Plan and Local Skills Report, through innovative schemes such as the Centre for Civil Engineering and the recent submission to Government for an Institute of Technology in Maritime Technology and Engineering. In this respect the recent Further Education White Paper<sup>1</sup> is welcomed placing employers firmly in the driving seat alongside the acknowledgement of the role Colleges, and training providers play in delivering the skills employers and the economy need.

Bringing this all together, the work of the Solent Skills Advisory Panel has never been more important. Whilst it is right we celebrate our achievements in this report, there remains much work to do.



1. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/957856/Skills\\_for\\_jobs\\_lifelong\\_learning\\_for\\_opportunity\\_and\\_growth\\_web\\_version.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/957856/Skills_for_jobs_lifelong_learning_for_opportunity_and_growth_web_version.pdf)

## 2. Skills Advisory Panels - Introduction

The Solent Skills Advisory Panel brings together local employers and skills providers to pool knowledge on skills and labour market needs, and to work together to understand and address key local challenges.

### Skills Advisory Panels: The national context

Skills Advisory Panels (SAPs) bring together employers, skills providers and key local stakeholders to better understand and resolve skills mismatches at a local level. There are 36 SAPs across England as part of Mayoral Combined Authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships.

The Department for Education (DfE) supports SAPs with grant funding primarily to produce high quality analysis of local labour markets and Local Skills Reports. The Reports set out the local strengths and skills needs and how the SAP proposes its area addresses its key priorities. The Reports aim to influence local partners and feed intelligence to central government, including the national-level Skills and Productivity Board (SPB).

In January 2021, DfE published its White Paper “Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth,”<sup>1</sup> which set out a number of reforms aimed at putting employers more firmly at the heart of the skills system. The White Paper outlined plans to test in 2021-22, in a small number of areas, “Local Skills Improvement Plans” created by business representative organisations.

The White Paper committed to build on the work of SAPs to date. SAPs and their Local Skills Reports will continue as the DfE trailblazes “Local Skill Improvement Plans” and until any potential changes are made to a SAP’s remit and responsibilities.

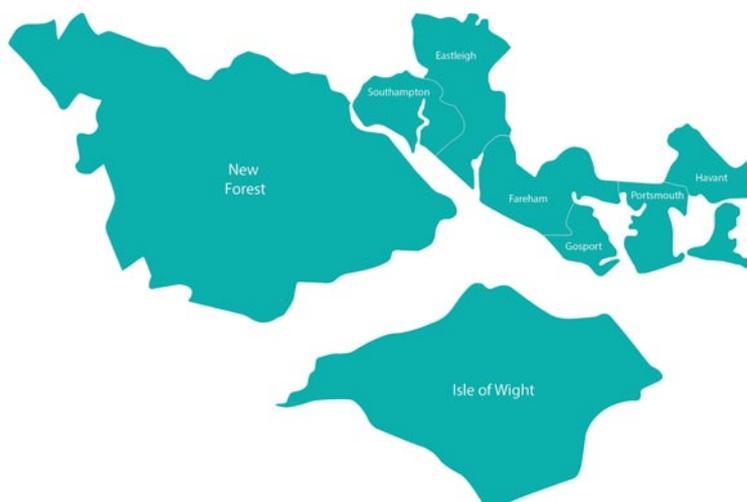
### A strong local skills partnership

The Solent SAP was established in April 2019 in response to government’s Industrial Strategy<sup>2</sup> as a means of enabling the Solent LEP to support employers, education providers and local government in identifying current and future local skills needs, and using this intelligence to shape the provision and funding of post-16 education and training and careers guidance.

In particular, the Solent SAP strengthens the capability of the Solent LEP to carry out high quality analysis which will be used to identify the skills and employment needs and priorities for the Solent economy, its businesses, resident workforce, to enable further economic growth and prosperity. To date this has included comprehensive Local Skills and Labour Market Analysis, published in June 2020<sup>3</sup>, as an important first step in providing a forensic understanding of the existing and future skills gaps and employment priorities to inform the ‘people’ component of our emerging Solent 2050 Economic Strategy<sup>4</sup>.

The Solent SAP meets a minimum of three times a year, with capacity to convene more frequently to respond to specific local requirements and challenges, and as situations arise.

### The Solent LEP area



1. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/957856/Skills\\_for\\_jobs\\_lifelong\\_learning\\_for\\_opportunity\\_and\\_growth\\_web\\_version\\_.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/957856/Skills_for_jobs_lifelong_learning_for_opportunity_and_growth_web_version_.pdf)

2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/industrial-strategy-building-a-britain-fit-for-the-future>

3. <https://solentlep.org.uk/media/3114/solent-lep-skills-and-local-labour-market-report-june-2020-final.pdf>

4. <https://solentlep.org.uk/what-we-do/planning-for-solent-2050/>

# Solent LEP Skills Advisory Panel Members



Rachael Randall,  
Chair, and  
Principal & CEO,  
HTP Apprenticeship  
College



Lester Biddle,  
Technology  
Director, HT Training  
Ltd, and Chair of  
the Association of  
Learning Providers,  
Hampshire & IofW



Debbie Clement,  
Co-Founder &  
Director,  
Peopley Ltd



Blue Davies,  
Head of Training,  
British Marine



James Fitzgerald,  
Finance Manager &  
Corporate Finance  
Specialist,  
Portsmouth City  
Council (accountable  
body to the LEP)



Mike Gaston,  
Principal & CEO,  
Havant &  
South Downs  
College



Amelia Gould,  
Naval Ships Combat  
Systems Director,  
BAE



Julie Hall, Deputy  
Vice Chancellor,  
Solent University



Boyd Hatwood,  
Smaller Employer  
Engagement Team,  
Education & Skills  
Funding Agency



Anne-Marie  
Mountfield,  
Chief Executive,  
Solent LEP



Roy Haworth,  
Engineering Senior  
Manager,  
Airbus



Harry Cutty,  
Headteacher,  
Central School



Anna Marshall,  
District Operations  
Leader, Dorset,  
Wiltshire, Hampshire  
& IoW,  
Department for Work  
& Pensions



Carey Moore,  
Regional Director,  
Corporate &  
Commercial Banking  
at NatWest



Cllr Darren Paffey,  
Cabinet Member for  
Children & Learning,  
Southampton City  
Council



Cllr Barry Rickman,  
Leader, New Forest  
District Council



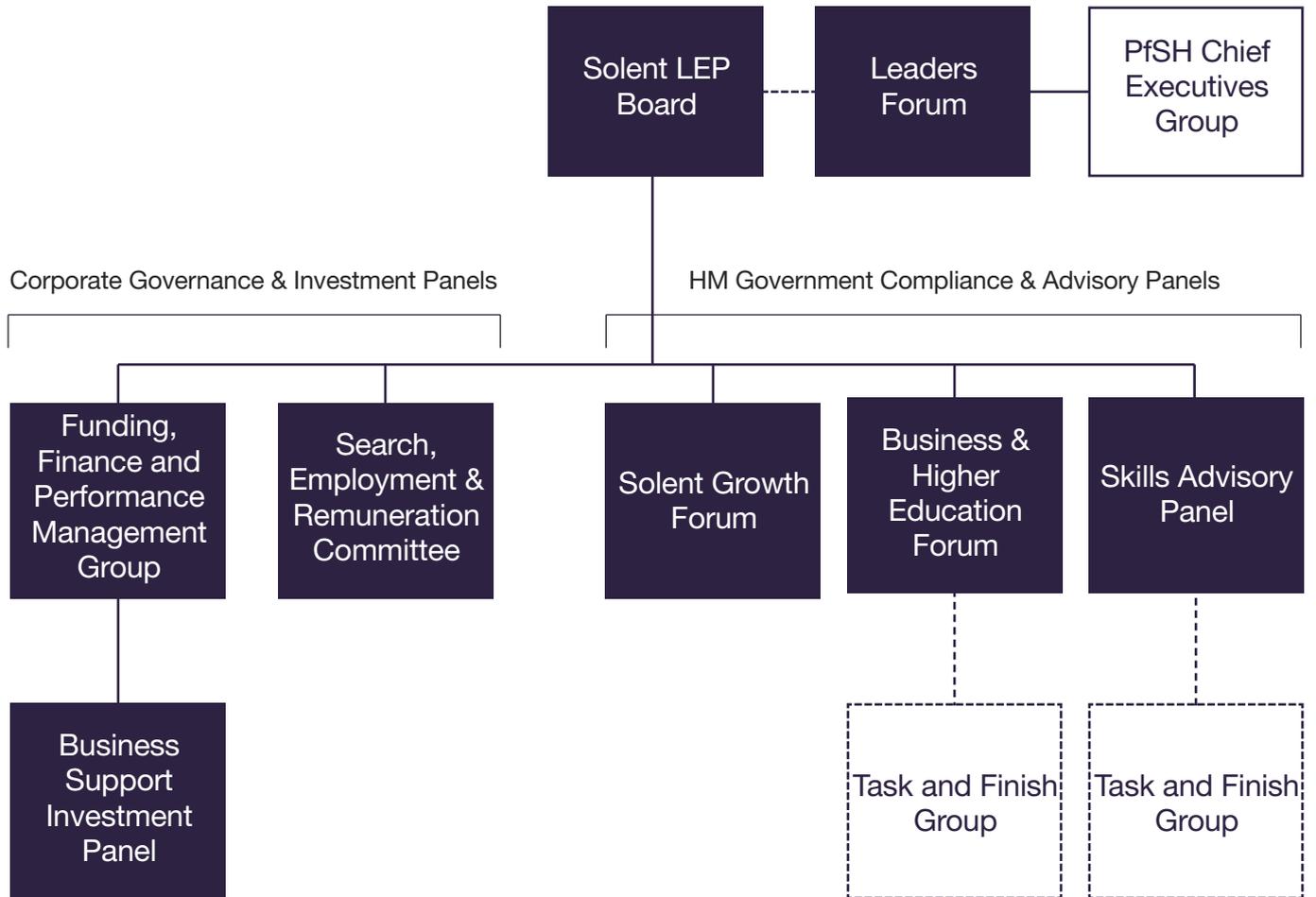
Kirsty Rowlinson,  
Head of Services,  
Action Hampshire



Captain Allan Youp,  
Royal Navy, Head of  
the Solent Maritime  
Enterprise Zone

# Governance

The Skills Advisory Panel sits within the Solent LEP Governance Structure as summarised below. The Panel has regard for, and acts in accordance with, the Solent LEP Assurance Framework<sup>5</sup>.



Further information about the Solent SAP, its membership and Terms of Reference can be found online<sup>6</sup>.

To find out more about the work of the Solent SAP, this report, or to engage in the local skills agenda please contact [info@solentlep.org.uk](mailto:info@solentlep.org.uk)

5. <https://solentlep.org.uk/media/3588/solent-lep-assurance-framework-february-2021-v2.pdf>

6. [https://solentlep.org.uk/media/3271/solent-skills-advisory-panel-tor\\_september-2020-final.pdf](https://solentlep.org.uk/media/3271/solent-skills-advisory-panel-tor_september-2020-final.pdf)

## 3. Skills strengths and needs

The Solent Skills Advisory Panel has mobilised to develop a comprehensive evidence base and understanding of the existing and future skills gaps and employment priorities for the area.

### Local Skills and Labour Market Analysis

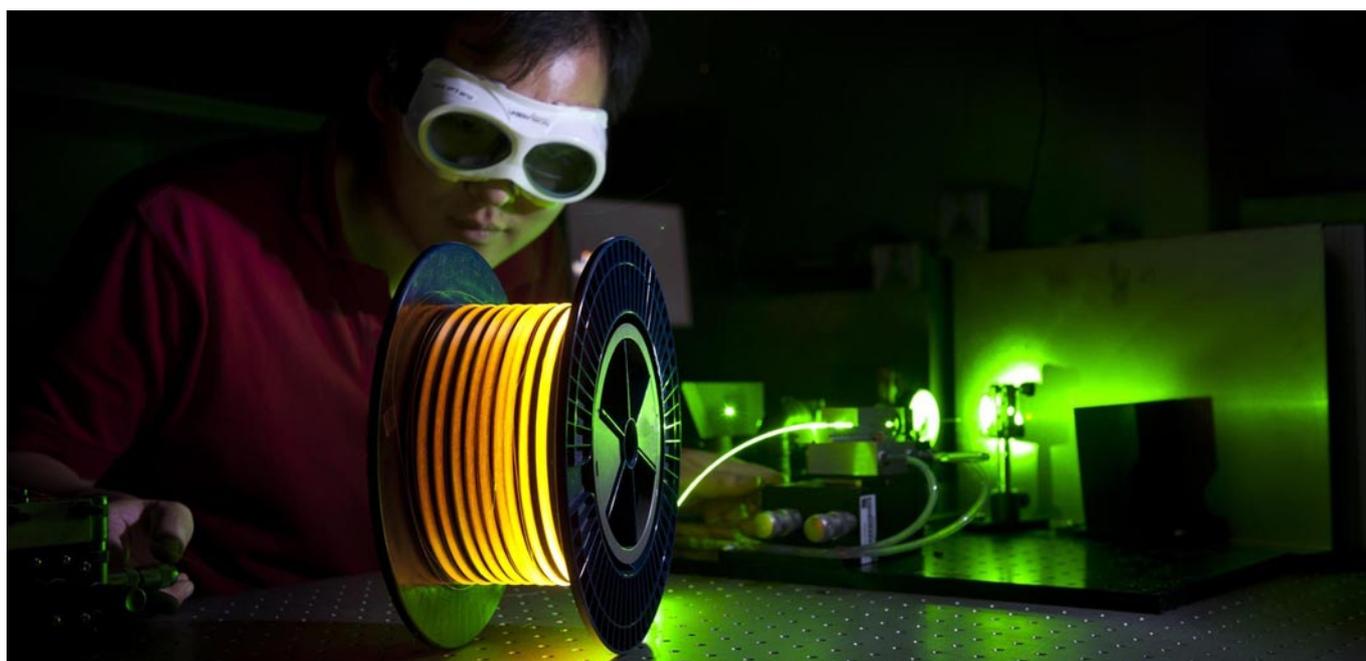
In June 2020, the Solent Skills Advisory Panel published the outcome of our Local Skills and Labour Market Analysis<sup>3</sup> to provide a forensic understanding of the existing and future skills gaps and employment priorities in our area. It provides a robust and comprehensive evidence base, covering the initial stages of the Skills Advisory Panel Analytical Framework guidance from the Department for Education<sup>22</sup>, and identifies a set of key structural priorities around which our Skills Strategy and Action Plan has been developed.

Due to the timing of analysis, the Local Skills and Labour Market Analysis acknowledges the emerging impacts of Covid-19 on the skills ecosystem, but does not specifically consider what this means for the skills our businesses need.

### Priorities for addressing skills needs in the Solent

The Local Skills and Labour Market Analysis report identifies the following key priorities with regards to skills and employment within the Solent:

- Impact of autonomy on demand for labour and skills needed by our businesses; for instance maritime autonomy will accelerate as the sector shifts to greater digitisation and more autonomous and remotely operated vessels, as well as utilising autonomous onshore operational systems for mooring vessels to quays and docks (Smart ports).
- Importance of softer skills, such as social skills and communication skills.
- Boosting graduate retention rates from the Solent's universities, including by drawing on the Solent's competitive advantages around relative housing affordability to more effectively compete with London for graduate talent.
- Reducing the rate of young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) through skills participation and a more flexible and localised response.
- Addressing school underperformance and student attainment, inc at Key Stages 4 & 5.
- Tackling persistent pockets of skills deprivation and inequality across the Solent, some of which are likely to be exacerbated by Covid-19 and the disruption this has had upon learning.
- The need to ensure a strong supply of labour to replace those leaving the labour market.



3. <https://solentlep.org.uk/media/3114/solent-lep-skills-and-local-labour-market-report-june-2020-final.pdf>

22. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/924399/Skills\\_Advisory\\_Panels\\_Analytical\\_Toolkit.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/924399/Skills_Advisory_Panels_Analytical_Toolkit.pdf)

# 3. Skills strengths and needs

## Focus on: Key sectors and occupations

Beyond these overarching skills priorities, our analysis<sup>3</sup> also points to some particular skills needs and challenges associated with key sectors and occupation groups in the Solent:

- Occupational data suggests a 'mismatch' between the supply of and demand for skills in the key sectors of construction, business services, health & social care, and hospitality. Our data also suggests that skills shortages in the Solent LEP area tend to be at intermediate level (NVQ Levels 3 and 2), both upper-middle and lower-middle skilled occupations. Changes in job context and type of job tasks performed are expected to create a pressing need for higher qualifications (NVQ Levels 4 and 5) over the next 10 years.
- Within the Solent LEP area, skill gaps, where demand exceeds supply internally within a firm or organisation, are more prevalent in high-end private services such as information & communication but also evident in sales & customer service occupations and administrative occupations.
- There is ongoing demand for a highly skilled workforce in the Solent's key strategic sectors including high-tech

manufacturing, marine & maritime, visitor economy and transport. Research undertaken as part of the Solent's bid for an Institute of Technology underlines the importance of the skills our world-leading maritime sector needs to remain at the vanguard of maritime innovation, with employers identifying key skills challenges including artificial intelligence, robotics, marine engineering and seafarer expertise.

- More broadly, we know that demography, globalisation, competition, and technological change are some of the most important drivers behind the changing pattern of demand for employment and skills; our evidence suggests that out of 240,200 net job openings in the Solent LEP area over the next decade at least 93,600 jobs, or 39%, are projected to require a Level 4+ or higher skills.

Looking ahead we see strong demand for a skilled workforce in:

- Manufacturing, as one of the most important industrial sectors across the Solent;
- High-technology manufacturing, marine & maritime, the visitor economy and transportation & logistics;
- High-skill industries and occupations less susceptible to the impact of automation, including information & communication, professional, scientific & technical groups.



3. <https://solentlep.org.uk/media/3114/solent-lep-skills-and-local-labour-market-report-june-2020-final.pdf>

# 3. Skills strengths and needs

## The latest real-time data underlines the significant labour market impacts of Covid-19 as they continue to unfold across the Solent.

### Ongoing labour market disruption

The outbreak of Covid-19 has brought with it challenges for our economy unlike any that have been seen before. The ongoing economic impact on the Solent's economy, skills base and labour market cannot be underestimated and is likely to be extreme.

The local Claimant Count, a key indicator of unemployment, has increased sharply following the outbreak of Covid-19 and remains particularly high in our two cities of Southampton and Portsmouth, the Isle of Wight and Havant<sup>7</sup> (see Figure 2.1 below).

Reports of redundancies across the Solent are increasing, although the extension of the government's Job Retention Scheme into 2021 is likely to mask longer term impacts on our labour market.

Our young people are particularly vulnerable to Covid-19 induced unemployment, with lower skilled roles amongst those hardest hit by the economic disruption we have seen across 2020.

Much of the region's self employed workforce continue to rely on government support schemes to survive, with over two thirds claiming financial support as at end of October<sup>8</sup>.

Covid-19 has pivoted the short-term focus towards economic activity, whilst also accelerating longer term shifts in labour and skills demand as the local economy responds to the ongoing disruption and 'new normal'.

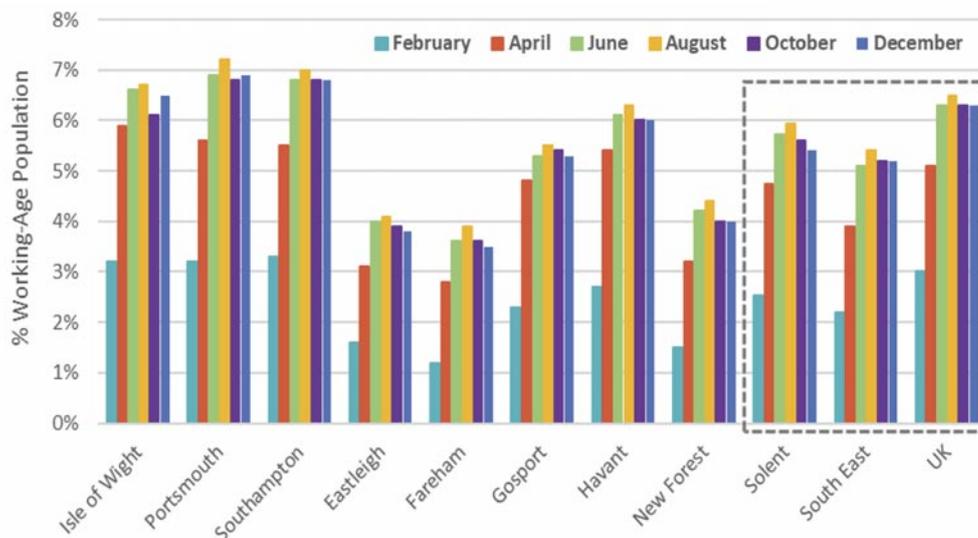
Since the onset of the pandemic, the Solent LEP has mobilised to provide a range of ongoing support for individuals and businesses across the region affected by Covid-19, for instance by establishing a dedicated Coronavirus Support Hub to help navigate this challenging period with a range of ongoing support, funding and up-to-date government guidance.

This locally grounded action has supported the government's national economic recovery response which includes targeted support programmes such as the Plan for Jobs<sup>9</sup> and its introduction of the Kickstart Scheme<sup>10</sup> and additional funding for sector-based work academies<sup>11</sup>.

As the economy begins to stabilise and return to growth, it will be critical that individuals are supported to identify alternative opportunities where needed, which may include using their transferable skills to consider moving into a different sector or setting up their own business. The SAP is committed to working with local partners, through this Skills Action Plan & Local Skills Report, to ensure every individual has access to opportunities to upskill and reskill, adapting existing skills provision so that it meets the changing needs of businesses and the aspirations of individuals.

Reflecting the rapidly evolving and dynamic situation, the Solent SAP will keep this emerging data under review, and will update our analysis over the coming months so that we fully understand the impact of Covid-19 on the skills ecosystem, and what this means for the skills our businesses need.

Figure 2.1: Claimant Count as a % of Working Age Population (2020)



Source: Lichfields analysis, based on ONS Claimant Count Experimental Data

7. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peoplenotinwork/unemployment/datasets/claimantcountbyunitaryandlocalauthorityexperimental/current>

8. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/self-employment-income-support-scheme-statistics-november-2020>

9. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-plan-for-jobs-documents/a-plan-for-jobs-2020>

10. <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/kickstart-scheme>

11. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sector-based-work-academies-employer-guide>

# 3. Skills strengths and needs

The Covid-19 pandemic will have far-reaching implications for the Solent's skills landscape and for the types of skills that our employers will need in future as society adapts to a 'new normal'.

## Implications of Covid-19

As we reflect on the short to medium term impacts of Covid-19 on our economy, it becomes increasingly apparent that the pandemic will have lasting effects on our day-to-day lives and the way in which people, businesses and society in general will operate in the years to come.

Although it is still too early to predict the full extent of this, we consider 'Life after Covid' will instigate some longer term 'paradigm' shifts and opportunities for local skills development here in the Solent, and we want to be ready to capture and facilitate these opportunities as we chart a course to economic recovery and growth.



Digital transformation  
Delivering digital skills inclusion



Towards a more dynamic workplace  
Implications of remote working and training for 'core' skills (such as communication, people management)



Increased environmental awareness & "green recovery" focus  
Adapting skills around technologies of the future and the pathway to Net Zero



Rediscovery of "proximity" and "local"  
A more self-sufficient labour market



Embedding health and wellbeing into our economic plan  
Skills innovation opportunities as society adapts to a 'new normal'



Levelling up economic opportunity  
Tackling skills deprivation and raising productivity

## 4. Skills Strategy

Underpinning our strategy are four overarching skills priorities around which our plan for future activities to realise the Solent's significant economic potential is framed.

Our strategy for transforming skills and developing a world-class talent base in the Solent is framed around four overarching, and overlapping, priorities: awareness and aspirations; skills brokerage; core sectors and competencies; and digital inclusion.

These draw together our extensive evidence base on local skills needs, consultation feedback from a wide range of skills providers and stakeholders, emerging implications of Covid-19 upon the area's labour market, and placing this

within the context of our ambitious long term strategy for growth and prosperity through Solent 2050<sup>4</sup>.

They provide an overarching framework to influence forthcoming skills related interventions and help inform investment decisions to support and stimulate sustainable economic growth in the area.

On the following pages we explore each of these skills priorities in turn.



### 1. Awareness and aspirations

Raising awareness of the many skills opportunities and pathways that are already available and addressing aspirations at an early stage to boost skills participation and development



### 2. Brokerage: matching supply

Enhancing employer engagement to better understand and broker local skills needs to ensure that skills provision can respond to local business and sector requirements



### 3. Core sectors and competencies

Reflecting the unique economic characteristics of the Solent and representation of key sectors that are driving demand for skills over the short, medium and longer term



### 4. Digital inclusion

Reducing barriers to accessing education and learning opportunities through a more inclusive skills environment supported by world-class digital infrastructure across the Solent

4. <https://solentlep.org.uk/what-we-do/planning-for-solent-2050/>

## 4. Skills Strategy



### 1. Awareness and aspirations

In the Solent we benefit from a talented labour market coupled with world-leading assets, including our three universities and a first class further education system.

Yet awareness of the many skills pathways that are available varies significantly within our population and business base, and low aspirations represent an overriding constraint to skills participation and development across many of the Solent's communities. Linked to this are key challenges with regards to poor attainment during school years, above average levels of young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) and ongoing disruption to the local jobs base caused by Covid-19 prompting many people to re-consider career options.

Through this strategy we want to raise awareness amongst both learners and employers of the varied skills opportunities and pathways available locally to better equip our workforce to respond to changing employer requirements. This includes boosting take-up of some of the more vocational and higher level technical routes to work, such as Degree Apprenticeships and T Levels by raising their profile as an attractive alternative to academic pathways.

More fundamentally, the local skills sector has an important role to play in addressing early years aspirations and inspiring the next generation to achieve their potential.

We need to get our young people excited about the economic opportunities on offer right here in the Solent and carefully nurture a pipeline of future talent that aligns with local economic need.



### 2. Brokerage: matching supply with demand

As we recover from the immediate economic challenges of Covid-19 and look ahead to develop a world-class talent base, we need to develop a more dynamic and agile skills ecosystem in the Solent that closes skills gaps and better matches skills demand with supply through closer collaboration between education, academia and industry.

Our evidence<sup>3</sup> base points to ongoing examples of skills mismatch within key sectors and difficulties retaining those that we work hard to upskill, such as graduates. The challenge has been made more pressing by the Covid-19 pandemic as employer requirements change and businesses struggle to navigate what is often seen as a confusing and complex skills landscape.

We require a more effective and comprehensive approach to employer engagement to better understand and broker local skills needs to ensure that skills provision can respond to the evolving requirements of local businesses and sectors.

This should focus in particular on 'hard-to-reach' SMEs that often lack the time, capacity and awareness to engage with skills providers but invariably share common concerns and workforce requirements.

Critical to this is simplifying the skills landscape across the Solent and the SAP has a key leadership role to play in signposting and brokering skills activity.

3. <https://solentlep.org.uk/media/3114/solent-lep-skills-and-local-labour-market-report-june-2020-final.pdf>

## 4. Skills Strategy



### 3. Core sectors and competencies

Our third priority reflects the unique economic characteristics of the Solent and representation of a number of key sectors (such as social care, logistics, construction, engineering, marine and maritime) driving demand for skills over the short, medium and longer term.

We need a more agile skills offer that can respond to changing economic need within our strategic sectors in a timely and innovative way to realise our potential as a world-renowned economic cluster by 2050. We want to invest in skills and talent development to support locally-significant industries and respond to innovation opportunities.

This is therefore presented as an overarching priority within our skills strategy, as opposed to framing our response around particular sectors or occupation groups.

Beyond specific sectors, the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted a wider range of cross-cutting competencies and softer skills that have become increasingly important as we adapt to new ways of working, particularly around digital capability, leadership and management and business resilience.

Over the short to medium term we must focus on entrepreneurial skills and supporting people through the business start-up journey as a route (back) into the labour market, for instance for those made redundant because of Covid-19.

And over the longer term, we must be more effective in getting young people 'work ready' through a more explicit and consistent focus on employability skills as part of the school curriculum and post-16.



### 4. Digital inclusion

As we look to level up opportunity across the Solent to ensure that everyone can benefit from a more prosperous and productive regional economy, our final skills priority is to tackle barriers that many of our communities continue to face in accessing education and learning opportunities.

Despite our recent success in establishing centres for skills excellence here in the Solent, pockets of skills deprivation and inequality persist and too many of our young people are falling out of the skills system before they reach the labour market, as evidenced by our high NEET rates.

Digital exclusion represents one of the most practical manifestations of skills inequality, and has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and associated reliance on digital connectivity to access education and learning opportunities.

As online learning (alongside virtual ways of working more generally) becomes embedded over the longer term, it becomes increasingly important that learners of all ages have the means to access skills provision in terms of both infrastructure and competency.

Working in partnership, we need to enhance the employability and labour market prospects for our most disadvantaged residents by targeting support services around core skills, vocational and job readiness training, work experience, job-search assistance, career guidance and through challenging social perceptions (linked to Priority 1).

# 4. Skills Strategy

## Delivering our skills vision for Solent 2050

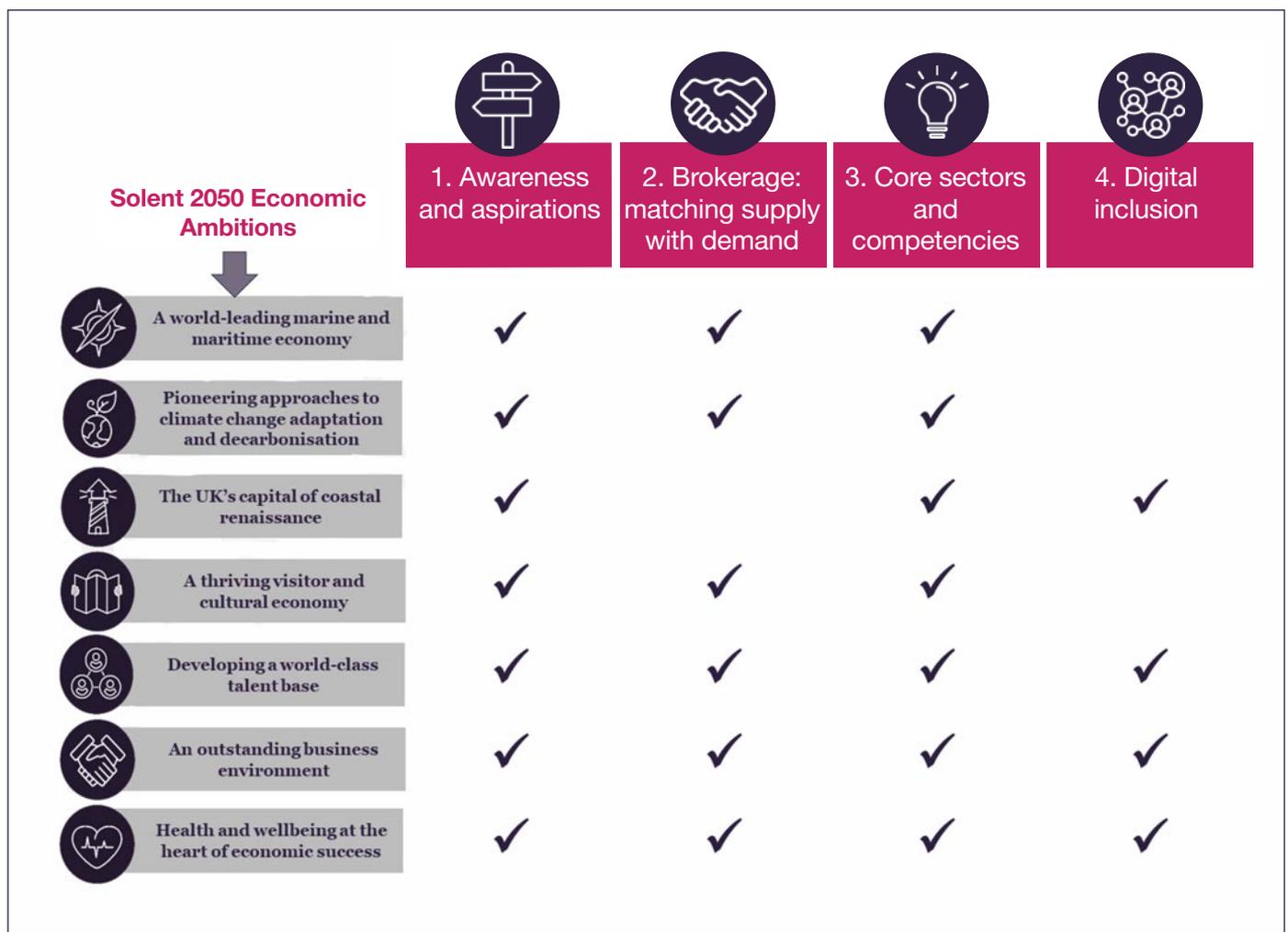
The Solent's people are its greatest asset and our human capital will prove to be a key driver of local competitiveness and productivity growth, and an important part of our area's recovery response to Covid-19. This is reflected within our forthcoming long-term Economic Strategy, Solent 2050<sup>4</sup>, underpinned by a skills system that nurtures and develops the right talent to meet market demand, to enable the Solent realise its potential as a world-renowned economic cluster by 2050.

Underpinning the overall Solent 2050 vision are seven key ambitions around which our plan for future activities to transform the Solent is framed. This includes our commitment to develop a world-class talent base here in the Solent by "helping people at all stages of their career build the skills they need to respond to new technology and drive an innovative knowledge-based economy".

This acknowledges the need to develop a more dynamic and agile skills ecosystem that closes skills gaps through closer collaboration between education, academia and industry need, especially given the changing requirements of employers, such as the need for more digital skills and reacting to the impacts of automation.

Earlier this year, the Solent LEP prepared an Economic Recovery Plan<sup>13</sup> to set out a dynamic package of actions and interventions to bring forward to support and position the Solent for recovery and growth in line with the long-term objectives set out in Solent 2050. This starts to identify short to medium term skills priorities and interventions to deliver as the first step in this journey to 2050.

As shown to the right, the four skills priorities we set out in this Skills Action Plan & Local Skills Report align well with the overarching economic ambitions to boost productivity and prosperity through Solent 2050, and showcase how we intend to develop a world-class talent base in the aftermath of Covid-19.



4. <https://solentlep.org.uk/what-we-do/planning-for-solent-2050/>

13. <https://solentlep.org.uk/media/3268/solent-economic-recovery-plan-25920.pdf>

# 5. Skills Action Plan

## Priority 1: Awareness and aspirations

On this page we detail future actions and interventions to address our first skills priority to raise awareness of the many skills opportunities and pathways that are already available and address aspirations at an early stage to boost skills participation and development.

This broadly follows a three stage approach to reflect short, medium and longer term programmes of activity over the next five years. Further details are included at Annex C.



1. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/957856/Skills\\_for\\_jobs\\_lifelong\\_learning\\_for\\_opportunity\\_and\\_growth\\_web\\_version\\_.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/957856/Skills_for_jobs_lifelong_learning_for_opportunity_and_growth_web_version_.pdf)

12. <https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/>

# 5. Skills Action Plan

## Priority 2: Brokerage - matching supply with demand

On this page we detail future actions and interventions to address our second skills priority to enhance employer engagement to better understand and broker local skills needs to ensure that skills provision can respond to local business and sector requirements.

This broadly follows a three stage approach to reflect short, medium and longer term programmes of activity over the next five years. Further details are included at Annex C.

Short Term	Medium Term	Long Term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Provide an overarching role in coordinating ongoing labour market intelligence on key sector/employer needs in the Solent and feeding this to local skills providers, as we evolve through the next stages of the Covid-19 pandemic.</li><li>● Establish a single source/point of access for independent skills and apprenticeship brokerage for the Solent, fully integrated with the existing Growth Hub offer in order to more effectively understand local employer requirements and match these with tailored skills provision.</li><li>● Proactively respond to the Skills for Jobs White Paper<sup>1</sup> which seeks to put employers at the heart of post-16 skills, including by developing a Local Skills Improvement Plan to shape technical skills provision to better meet labour market skills needs in the Solent.</li><li>● Through the Solent Careers Hubs, work with our schools, colleges and universities to explore tailored careers support for recent graduates, to help increase their chances of securing employment or further education within the region.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Build on the success of the Solent Apprenticeship Hub to showcase Apprenticeship opportunities for all ages and expand the Hub's remit to provide a comprehensive skills brokerage service to local employers.</li><li>● Explore the potential to establish new modes of learning and support, such as a virtual job club/ brokerage scheme within the Solent to include a redundancy 'triage' service to help connect people to new training and employment opportunities.</li><li>● Strengthen existing pathways between the private sector and academia to increase higher level skills retention by more effectively linking graduates with local firms.</li><li>● Undertake a strategic review of skills provision and mix across the Solent to identify gaps and areas of under/over provision. Within the context of the Further Education White Paper, this should also consider future areas of changing skills demand (for instance, around running logistics operations).</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Continue to expand the resources and remit of the Solent Apprenticeship Hub to secure a sustainable future that is embedded within the local employer brokerage ecosystem.</li><li>● Expand programmes to link local students and graduates with local employers through initiatives to help drive adoption and innovation within key business sectors and Solent SMEs.</li><li>● Work with local partners to elevate the contribution that the Solent's social enterprises can make in developing a more dynamic and agile skills ecosystem locally. Linked to this, explore opportunities to develop a dedicated Social Enterprise Hub in the Solent to help signpost skills development opportunities on an ongoing basis.</li></ul>



1. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/957856/Skills\\_for\\_jobs\\_lifelong\\_learning\\_for\\_opportunity\\_and\\_growth\\_web\\_version.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/957856/Skills_for_jobs_lifelong_learning_for_opportunity_and_growth_web_version.pdf)

# 5. Skills Action Plan

## Priority 3: Core sectors and competencies

On this page we detail future actions and interventions to address our third skills priority which reflects the unique economic characteristics of the Solent and representation of key sectors that are driving demand for skills over the short, medium and longer term.

This broadly follows a three stage approach to reflect short, medium and longer term programmes of activity over the next five years. Further details are included at Annex C.



# 5. Skills Action Plan

## Priority 4: Digital inclusion

On this page we detail future actions and interventions to address our fourth skills priority to reduce barriers to accessing education and learning opportunities through a more inclusive skills environment supported by world-class digital infrastructure across the Solent.

This broadly follows a three stage approach to reflect short, medium and longer term programmes of activity over the next five years. Further details are included at Annex C.



27. <https://theskillstoolkit.campaign.gov.uk/>

## 6. Assessment of progress

The Solent Skills Advisory Panel plays a leading role in championing the skills agenda across the Solent, underpinned by our growing collective understanding of key skills gaps and needs locally.

### Taking a local leadership role

Since its formation in 2019, the Solent SAP has forged a strong leadership role on skills in the local area, engaging extensively with Panel members, employers and providers and linking educational institutions with the local labour market to advise on and help implement funding and investment decisions for local skills provision.

Over this time, our work has focused on:

- Ongoing intelligence gathering and review to maintain an up-to-date and clear understanding of current and future local skills and labour market needs, particularly during recent months as Covid-19 labour market impacts evolve in response to each phase of the pandemic.
- Co-ordinating the work of the SAP with the LEP's wider delivery plans and strategy, and providing a focal point for future skills funding opportunities.
- Through our role in championing the skills agenda in the Solent, liaising with government to raise awareness of particular skills issues affecting our area and seeking to secure support for our skills priorities. This Skills Action Plan & Local Skills Report provides valuable insight and evidence to support this lobbying role going forward.
- Continuing to liaise with government in respect of new skills and employability related funding initiatives, including those announced in the Spending Review<sup>14</sup> and Budget 2021<sup>15</sup>, such as the UK Shared Prosperity Fund with its key focus on coastal communities and deprived towns.

Through this activity the SAP has led the regional debate on the skills dimension of the levelling-up agenda, bringing partners together to tackle issues of skills and digital inclusion across our communities (see priority 4 of our Skills Strategy) and through our strong links with local education and training providers we work extensively with local schools to influence the future talent pipeline and raise aspirations at an early age.

Looking ahead, our SAP will lead the way in embedding reforms to post-16 technical education and training, as set out in the recently published Skills for Jobs White Paper<sup>1</sup>,

within the Solent's skills ecosystem, and early stage discussions are already underway to begin to take this forward locally.

### Enhancing local knowledge

Through preparation of our comprehensive Local Skills and Labour Market Analysis in 2020<sup>3</sup> the SAP has been able to develop a forensic understanding of the existing and future skills gaps and employment priorities in our area.

This has been supplemented through more recent research and intelligence gathered from key skills partners and stakeholders as we have developed our new skills strategy and accompanying action plan for the Solent, set out in this report.

Feedback from our partners has helped to shape our key skills priorities for the coming years and we look forward to working with the Solent's skills community to collectively transform the region's skills base as we realise our potential to become a world-renowned economic cluster by 2050.

Forthcoming SAP meetings will be used as a key opportunity to monitor and gather latest intelligence and feedback from the Solent's skills community regarding current and future skills needs, and how these are changing in response to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

Specifically in relation to our locally significant marine and maritime cluster, the Maritime UK Solent business community are working together to identify emerging skills gaps in the sector. Work has been undertaken to better understand the impact that cessation of cruise industry activity has had on the supply chain economy and employment in the region, following discussion at the MUK Solent Board meeting in November.

There is also a piece of work in development led by the Royal Navy and Maritime UK to make a bid to the Department for Education to form a National Maritime Skills Academy. Careers engagement opportunities for maritime employers is included in each monthly newsletter and network meeting, whether that be regarding virtual work experience or Enterprise Adviser vacancies.

1. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/957856/Skills\\_for\\_jobs\\_lifelong\\_learning\\_for\\_opportunity\\_and\\_growth\\_web\\_version.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/957856/Skills_for_jobs_lifelong_learning_for_opportunity_and_growth_web_version.pdf)

3. <https://solentlep.org.uk/media/3114/solent-lep-skills-and-local-labour-market-report-june-2020-final.pdf>

14. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/spending-review-2020-documents>

15. HM Treasury, Budget 2021, available online at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/budget-2021-documents>

## 6. Assessment of progress

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Shaping more responsive skills provision locally lies at the heart of the Solent Skills Advisory Panel's leadership role, and we are actively influencing skills and training provision through the Panel's collective responsibilities.

### Impact on local skills provision

A key part of the Solent SAP's leadership role has focused on engaging with our Panel members and wider networks of skills providers to share information and intelligence on changing skills and labour market requirements across the Solent with the aim of shaping more responsive skills provision locally.

In addition, many of our SAP panel members are actively championing this agenda as part of their respective roles in facilitating wider skills networks across the Solent:

- SAP member Lester Biddle chairs the ALPHI<sup>16</sup> network, a constitution of 40 FE and HE providers across the Solent which meets bi-monthly to discuss the skills needs of the local area. Drawing on his role within the SAP, Lester is influencing the provider network to consider their offer and identify gaps in provision which could be explored for commercial opportunities from ALPHI members.
- At a local level, Panel member Councillor Darren Paffey has been able to feed intelligence collated via the Solent SAP on future skills gaps and needs into the development of Southampton City Council's Economic and Green Growth Strategy 2020 – 2030<sup>17</sup> which builds on Southampton's ongoing economic growth and Green City agendas to set out plans to restore and renew Southampton's economy as a greener, fairer and healthier city. The emerging Strategy places people at the heart of the Council's approach and links skills needs with economic opportunities arising from the Green City Charter and growing tech sector.
- Anna Marshall, DWP's Operations Leader for Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, provides a critical role as part of the Solent SAP to signpost evolving areas of jobseeker support, working closely with skills providers and other regional stakeholders to ensure our residents are supported (back) into work, particularly within the challenging labour market context induced by Covid-19.

- Amelia Gould brings a wealth of business intelligence to the panel. As a Chartered Engineer, Fellow of the IET, and senior leader in the global Maritime Defence sector, Amelia has expertise in transformational change management and strategic workforce planning. As a STEM Ambassador, Amelia is passionate about promoting engineering as a career for young people, and in particular supporting women to enter the industry, volunteering for a number of educational charities to inspire and influence young people.

### Covid-19 recovery and renewal plans

The SAP has been heavily engaged in discussions and ongoing dialogue regarding Covid-19 recovery across the Solent since the start of the pandemic in early 2020.

Recovery has formed a key topic of discussion at all SAP meetings over the past year, and key panel members have participated in a series of focused virtual workshops convened by the LEP as part of the development of the Solent Economic Recovery Plan<sup>13</sup>.

Many of the skills actions set out in this publication represent recovery priorities for the next few years, and dovetail with the LEP's more comprehensive Economic Recovery Plan<sup>13</sup> which can be viewed online.

Our work to support individuals and businesses across the Solent in the ongoing response to the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the wider activities to transform local skills and develop a world-class talent base set out in this Strategy and Action Plan, cannot be achieved without the continued support of our SAP business, academic and public sector members, as well as a wide range of skills delivery and strategic partners.

We look forward to strengthening these working relationships to ensure the Solent not only recovers from current challenges, but also lays the foundations to secure future prosperity for all in the years ahead.

13. <https://solentlep.org.uk/media/3268/solent-economic-recovery-plan-25920.pdf>

16. <https://www.alphi.org.uk/>

17. <https://www.southampton.gov.uk/council-democracy/have-your-say/economic-green-growth-strategy.aspx>

## 6. Assessment of progress

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Through the Skills Advisory Panel, the Solent's skills community has come together to develop a skills strategy and action plan with key activities already underway as part of the region's wider Covid-19 recovery response.

### Skills action plan

Many of the specific actions and interventions identified within our skills action plan are already underway, particularly those actions relating to supporting economic recovery in the short term. In many cases, we have been able to make early progress by building on existing, successful partnerships such as the Solent Apprenticeship Hub and Solent Careers Hub and mobilising through the LEP's emerging £1bn economic recovery road map to prioritise key investments to stimulate skills development, business growth and innovation.

Since the onset of the pandemic, the Solent LEP and its partners have mobilised quickly to provide a comprehensive range of ongoing support for employers and individuals across the region, and these continue to evolve in response to the changing economic situation. A summary of key support measures are shown to the right. These have driven and underpinned the direction of travel to a more integrated business and skills offer for the area over the course of the last 9-12 months, as a direct result of responding to the economic and labour market impacts of Covid-19.

Building on this progress, a key objective for the Solent SAP is to create an online skills portal that brings together information on skills careers and showcases our key sectors and employers in a central, easy-to-navigate place. This will help to establish a 'no wrong door' approach to business engagement and skills development across the Solent that can support lifelong learning and address issues of aspiration and awareness. Further detail about this and our other objectives is provided in our Skills Action Plan (see Annex C).

We have seen the Covid-19 pandemic accelerate longer term economic drivers of skills demand (for instance around increased autonomy and greater digitisation) so looking ahead this underlines the important shift towards an increasingly highly skilled technical workforce that our skills community in the Solent must respond to. Our ambition to develop an Institute of Technology will be key in this respect, to fuel the growth of the UK's globally leading Solent maritime cluster as it makes a paradigm shift towards autonomy and green fuels, developing employer-led progression routes for our young people to realise rewarding careers and in doing so, support the levelling-up agenda in the Solent.

### Our Covid-19 recovery response

The Solent LEP and partners have put a range of business support measures in place over the course of the last year to directly respond to the 'survival' phase of economic recovery, including:

- 18,000 Solent SMEs have received Coronavirus grant funding from the Small Business Grants Fund or Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Business Grants Fund, administered by local authorities.
- 202 applications have been made to the LEP's dedicated Coronavirus funding packages, with over £2m LEP investments approved to date.
- Over £34m LEP capital investment was announced over summer 2020 to kick start recovery, leveraging just under £190m of wider investment.
- 100,000 visits have been made to the LEP's dedicated Coronavirus Support hub<sup>18</sup> and over 4,700 individual business interactions have taken place with the Solent Growth Hub team and Coronavirus Taskforce since early April.
- Our Restart and Recovery & Kickstarting Tourism Grant Funding programme has supported over 200 SME businesses in the Solent to adapt and diversify in response to the continuing impacts of Covid-19 and lockdown measures.
- Our two dedicated Rural SME Funds within the New Forest and Isle of Wight, which support SMEs to develop alternative ways of working during the Covid-19 pandemic, have supported over 58 projects to date, helping to safeguard 143 FTE jobs in total.
- Through Crowdfund Solent, which was launched in November 2019 to support SMEs to keep trading, maintain cash flow and to stay connected with their customers during these uncertain times, we have approved 91 applications with a total value of £214,993 LEP investment.
- The Solent LEP Restart, Restore and Recover Loan Fund has received applications seeking just over £6m loan funding to support businesses to deliver their recovery plans.

18. <https://solentlep.org.uk/coronavirus-support-hub/>

## 7. Case studies and positive impact stories

Here in the Solent we have a strong track record of collaboration across the public, private and third sectors to respond to our changing skills needs and develop innovative delivery models.

### CASE STUDY: Solent Careers Hub

Raising awareness and aspirations at an early age: The Solent Careers Hub works collaboratively with every Solent secondary school and College to provide support and resources to generate localised careers information advice and guidance.

Closely linking with employers across our key sectors, the Solent Careers Hub seeks to ensure:

- An increased number of encounters between young people and employers take place;
- Local labour market information is effectively utilised within the curriculum;
- Increased encounters with further and higher education, particularly for those young people from disadvantaged backgrounds;
- Every school develops a stable careers programme to raise the aspirations of our young people; and



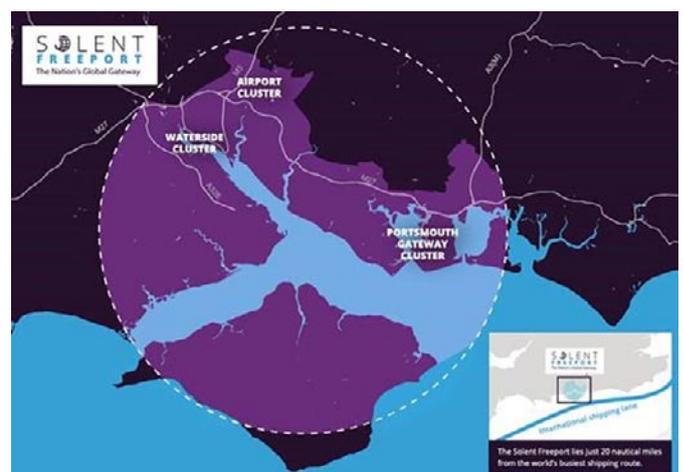
- Opportunities are created for employers and business to engage effectively with education.

### CASE STUDY: Solent Freeport

Delivering world class employer-led training facilities for our key growth sectors: Following the announcement in Budget 2021 that Solent Freeport has been selected to progress to the next stage of Freeport designation, we have been working with Government on the next steps to formally establish Solent Freeport as a national hub for global trade and investment, promoting regeneration and job creation, and serving as a hotbed for innovation.

As part of this work, the LEP and the bid coalition are working together to explore how this flagship economic growth programme can deliver world-class employer-led training facilities for our key growth sectors.

This includes an ambition to establish a Green Growth Institute within the Freeport to pioneer green growth skills and innovation, drawing on our existing expertise in low carbon technology and recent investment into pioneering innovations. The Green Growth Institute will secure a critical pipeline of high tech talent and skills for the region to provide the green growth leaders and green entrepreneurs of the future, helping to meet the



government's objective for Freeports to create high-skilled jobs in ports and the areas around them, with a particular sectoral focus on port logistics, the visitor economy and petro-chemicals<sup>26</sup>.

26. <https://www.solentfreeport.com/>

## 7. Case studies and positive impact stories

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### CASE STUDY: CEMAST



A Centre of Excellence for STEM skills and training in the Solent: The £12m Centre of Excellence in Engineering, Manufacturing and Advanced Skills Training (CEMAST) opened at the Solent Enterprise Zone in September 2014.

Specialising in STEM skills, the college trains more than 900 full and part-time learners, apprentices, and employees per week to support local companies in the development of new engineering and manufacturing

solutions. CEMAST is the main learning centre for students in apprenticeship programmes with leading companies such as BAE Systems, GE Aviation, Virgin Atlantic and Burgess Marine.

Since it opened, the CEMAST campus has become renowned as a pioneering state-of-the-art facility in terms of its industry-leading workshops, technology and equipment, providing students with a unique and industry-standard training environment.

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### CASE STUDY: Institute of Technology

Pioneering higher technical education for our world-leading marine and maritime economy: The Solent LEP is committed to establishing an Institute of Technology (IoT) in the Solent through the Government's second wave IoT programme to support vocational professional pathways into the Solent's maritime and coastal industry as well as associated advanced manufacturing and technical pathways.

This would spearhead the delivery of higher technical education in STEM subjects to underpin productivity

growth within the Solent's world-leading marine and maritime economy.

IoT's are a new type of institution, with a prestigious and distinct identity delivering higher level technical education with a clear route to high skilled employment. They represent collaborations between employers, further education colleges and universities, drawing on the assets of existing high-quality providers to attract learners and a wide range of employers.

## 7. Case studies and positive impact stories

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### CASE STUDY: CECAMM, Isle of Wight



**Championing specialist employer-led skills delivery for engineering:** The Solent is proud to be home to the Centre of Excellence for Composites, Advanced Manufacturing and Marine (CECAMM) based in Whippingham on the Isle of Wight. It is a specialist centre for engineering, aimed at creating a world-class workforce in response to the skills required by local businesses, including marine and maritime businesses. The Centre

works closely with MHI Vestas Offshore Wind in co-developing offshore wind as an economically viable and sustainable energy resource. Extensive consultation was undertaken with a cross section of local employers and stakeholders to ensure that the development not only meets the needs of the strategic priorities but also creates a clear pathway for developing local skills at CECAMM and employment on the Island.

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### CASE STUDY: Maritime UK Future Skills Award 2020

**Recognising our commitment to world-class education and training:** In November 2020, a judging panel of international maritime leaders announced the Solent as the winner of the national Future Skills award.

The Maritime UK awards, run by industry, for the benefit of industry, recognised our substantial contribution to the future of the sector. Working with industry partners such as GKN, BAE Systems, MHI Vestas, QinetiQ and the

Royal Navy, alongside local schools, colleges and universities, we have invested over £20m in world-class education and training facilities to support 5,000 new learners every year. The Solent LEP and SAP is delighted that our pioneering activity across education, training or apprenticeship development, to help match available skills to the emerging and future requirements of the industry has been recognised nationally.

## 8. Looking forward

### Understanding the impact of Covid-19 on the Solent economy

The economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has been felt across the UK, but the spatial impact has not been even. The pandemic has impacted disproportionately on areas such as the Solent that due to its trading gateway function and significant visitor sector. The legacy of the pandemic will be pronounced, and with us for several years, and so necessarily influences the actions we need to take as we look forward to a brighter future.

The scale of the challenge ahead is large. The Solent economy is understood to have shrunk by between 9.6% (£2.98bn) and 11.1% (£3,44bn) in 2020 – faster than the UK economy<sup>23</sup> – and 27,000 jobs are expected to have been lost<sup>13</sup>.

There has been a 122% rise in those claiming unemployment benefit, with young people accounting for over 50% of the increase in unemployment. The number of young people out of work in the Solent increased by 4,600 to 13,700 and the youth unemployment rate increased from 10% to 15.7% in the year to September 2020<sup>23</sup>.

By mid-February 2021, online job postings in the Solent LEP area were 36% lower than in February 2020 and High Street activity has declined by more than 50%<sup>24</sup>. A key role for the Skills Advisory Panel, will be to develop and consider the evidence of the impact of the pandemic on the skills ecosystem in the Solent.

As the economy starts to recover, we must confront the challenges created by Covid-19 and minimise the risk of

lasting economic damage from this crisis across all parts of the Solent.

Jobs are undoubtedly the key economic priority. There will be a period of adjustment, as jobs are lost and people find new work in growing businesses or identify new opportunities to start their own. That is why it is important that we focus on delivering employment support, including work search or support with retraining, to those who need it most, from helping the recently unemployed to swiftly find new work, to offering greater support for people who will find that journey more difficult.

As the data above evidences, our young people are particularly vulnerable to Covid-19 induced unemployment, with lower skilled roles (such as those in our visitor sector) amongst those hardest hit by the economic disruption.

Creating opportunities to improve the skills of people in all parts of the Solent is critical to the future success of our local economy. We need to ensure a strong recovery from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly for young people who have lost out on precious learning and employment opportunities.

Improving our skills is also central to levelling up opportunity, as differences in skill levels provide a key part of the explanation for differing output across the Solent – for example, productivity per worker varies across the Solent from £39,700 in the Isle of Wight (some 17% below the national average) to £53,900 in Eastleigh (12.7% above the national average)<sup>25</sup>. These gaps may widen when the full impact of the pandemic manifests, and our approach may need to become even more targeted.



13. <https://solentlep.org.uk/media/3268/solent-economic-recovery-plan-25920.pdf>

23. SLEP (2021) Monthly Intelligence Dashboard – February 2021, and NOMIS, Nomis - Official Labour Market Statistics: <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/>

24. SLEP (2021) Monthly Intelligence Dashboard – February 2021 and Emsi, Analyst: Labor Market Analytics for Colleges & Universities: <https://www.economicmodeling.com/analyst/>

25. Linchfields (2019) Solent Economic Profile: <https://solentlep.org.uk/media/2691/16346-solent-economic-profile-report-final-july-2019.pdf>

## 8. Looking forward

### National policy direction

Alongside Budget 2021<sup>15</sup>, the Government published its plans to support economic growth - Build Back Better: Our Plan for Growth<sup>19</sup>, which seeks to tackle long-term problems to deliver growth that creates high-quality jobs across the UK with a guiding focus on achieving:

- A levelling up the whole of the UK,
- Transition to net zero, and
- A vision for Global Britain.

To achieve this, three core pillars of growth are identified: Infrastructure, Skills, and Innovation, demonstrating the important role skills will play in supporting economic recovery. In relation to skills, the Government propose to support productivity growth through high-quality skills and training:

- Transforming Further Education through additional investment and reforming technical education to align the post-16 technical education system with employer demand.
- Introduce the Lifetime Skills Guarantee to enable lifelong learning through free fully funded Level 3 courses, rolling out employer-led skills bootcamps, and introducing the Lifelong Loan Entitlement.
- Continue to focus on the quality of apprenticeships and take steps to improve the apprenticeship system for employers, through enabling the transfer of unspent levy funds and allowing employers to front load apprenticeship training.

The Skills for Jobs White Paper<sup>1</sup> sets out how the Government propose to reform Further Education so it supports people to get the skills the economy needs throughout their lives, wherever they live in the country, increase productivity, support growth industries, and give individuals opportunities to progress in their careers. This is proposed to be delivered by:

- Putting employers at the heart of the system so that education and training leads to jobs that can improve productivity and fill skills gaps.
- Investing in higher-level technical qualifications that provide a valuable alternative to a university degree.
- Making sure people can access training and learning flexibly throughout their lives and are well-informed about what is on offer through great careers support.

- Reforming funding and accountability for providers to simplify how funds are allocated, give providers more autonomy, and ensure an effective accountability regime which delivers value for money.
- Supporting excellent teaching in further education.

This policy direction aligns strongly with this Skills Action Plan and provides a guiding framework for the SAP as we look forward.

### Opportunities as we look forward

The actions set out in this Solent Skills Action Plan & Local Skills Report and the Solent LEP Economic Recovery Plan<sup>13</sup> align strongly with the areas Government is targeting to ensure skills provides a core pillar of recovery. The focus on addressing significant skills gaps at higher technical levels to provide the technicians, engineers, health and social care professionals to meet the many vital challenges we face, from building a green economy to meeting the health and care needs of our ageing population, is clear. Investing in these skills at both a local and a national level is critical to improving our productivity and international competitiveness.

The pandemic has highlighted the important role of our health service sector and the key role that health professionals play in a resilient economy.

We will work with the University of Portsmouth and Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust to test the feasibility of developing a medical education facility in the Solent, and explore associated opportunities to grow a medical technology cluster locally. This has the potential to provide an important new pathway to a key sector and strengthen the resilience of the Solent economy.

Budget 2021 also saw the Solent Freeport proposal progress to the next phase of development. Solent Freeport has the potential to attract £2billion investment and create 52,000 jobs (including half of these in the Solent)<sup>26</sup>, through opening the potential to bring tax reliefs, simplified customs procedures and streamlined planning processes to promote regeneration and innovation.

1. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/957856/Skills\\_for\\_jobs\\_lifelong\\_learning\\_for\\_opportunity\\_and\\_growth\\_web\\_version.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/957856/Skills_for_jobs_lifelong_learning_for_opportunity_and_growth_web_version.pdf)

13. <https://solentlep.org.uk/media/3268/solent-economic-recovery-plan-25920.pdf>

15. HM Treasury, Budget 2021, available online at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/budget-2021-documents>

19. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/build-back-better-our-plan-for-growth>

26. <https://www.solentfreeport.com/>

## 8. Looking forward

Focused on some of the Solent's most disadvantaged communities, the Freeport will see high quality employment space created, with investment specifically targeted at state-of-the-art growth sectors and ground-breaking approaches to decarbonisation. The proposal includes plans to work with the area's three world-class universities and research assets, and establish a dedicated Solent Freeport Green Growth Institute to provide a centre of excellence in green skills and jobs to enable the Solent to provide a talent pipeline of the green engineers and entrepreneurs of the tomorrow.

Solent University has submitted a bid to Government for an Institute of Technology (IoT) that will spearhead the increase in higher-level technical skills in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths in the Solent, with a focus on Maritime, Advanced Manufacturing and Digital.

Should the submission move forward the SAP will play an important role in supporting the development and delivery of the IoT.

The LEP has noted the release of the Further Education Capital Transformation Fund<sup>20</sup> to improve college estates, and the T Levels Capital Fund<sup>21</sup> to support capital projects for T Level delivery from the 2022 to 2023 academic year. Both grant fund opportunities require local match contributions of at least 50%. To support our FE sector the LEP has recently invited applications for loan funding of up to 30% of total project costs to contribute to the local match component.

The LEP will continue to consider opportunities to use its resources to support the FE sector to improve its estates and deliver employer-led skills and training.

The Skills for Jobs White Paper<sup>1</sup> sets out proposals to establish Pathfinder College Business Centres concentrating on local priority sectors.

The focus of College Business Centres will be on supporting local businesses to increase levels of innovation and productivity by:

- meeting and driving demand for technical skills by harnessing business intelligence to improve education provision so that learners develop skills that employers need and that lead to rewarding work;
- supporting employers to understand how investment in skills, new technology and innovative practices can drive increased productivity;

- nurturing the development of entrepreneurial talent. This aligns strongly with the need for brokerage identified within this Skills Action Plan, and the Pathfinder opportunity is something that the SAP will promote for the Solent.

The forthcoming Solent 2050 strategy<sup>4</sup> will be a key document, setting the economic strategy for the Solent economy as it emerges from the pandemic and looks to re-position itself within a post-pandemic world and post EU trading landscape. The work we have done to date to develop Solent 2050 identifies the following seven strategic priorities of the Solent LEP:

- Priority 1: A world-leading marine and maritime economy
- Priority 2: Pioneering approaches to climate change adaptation and decarbonisation
- Priority 3: The UK's capital of coastal renaissance
- Priority 4: A thriving visitor, creative and cultural economy
- Priority 5: Developing a world class talent base
- Priority 6: An outstanding business environment
- Priority 7: Health and wellbeing at the heart of economic success

Whilst developing a world-class talent base is, rightly, a priority of its own, securing the skills employers needs will be critical to driving forward all other priority areas.

Of course, the Covid-19 pandemic has caused us to take stock of the work we have done to develop Solent 2050. The pandemic has had an immediate and deep impact on a range of sectors that will need to be addressed in the short term.

However, the pandemic has accelerated a range of trends that will impact the pace of change. Examples include the increase in homeworking (and the impact of this for apprenticeships and training); the move to online retail (and the implications of this on entry-level employment for young people); the need for digital infrastructure and digital skills, online learning opportunities; and the role of health and wellbeing in a resilient economy, amongst others.

Accordingly we are progressing work to better understand these trends and ensure that they are reflected within the final Solent 2050 strategy and we look forward to working with you to in this regard.

1. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/957856/Skills\\_for\\_jobs\\_lifelong\\_learning\\_for\\_opportunity\\_and\\_growth\\_web\\_version.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/957856/Skills_for_jobs_lifelong_learning_for_opportunity_and_growth_web_version.pdf)

4. <https://solentlep.org.uk/what-we-do/planning-for-solent-2050/>

20. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/further-education-capital-transformation-fund>

21. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/t-levels-capital-fund>



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