

# Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership Skills Plan



**Draft V1.3 August 2015**

## **Introduction to Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership**

The Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership was approved by Government in July 2011 and the current board of 14 members has a vast array of experience in private, public and military backgrounds.

The Local Enterprise Partnership is a partnership between the two local authorities (Swindon Borough Council and Wiltshire Council) and businesses. We play a central role in determining local economic priorities and undertaking activities to drive economic growth and the creation of local jobs.

The SWLEP accesses Government funding, channelling investment into the region that will leverage even greater funding from private sector investors.

We believe we have a unique role that makes us different. We represent businesses and understand the needs of the business community, but have strong links into decision making within the public sector.

## **The Strategic Economic Plan and Skills Plan**

The Strategic Economic Plan sets out the vision for the area and outlines how a transformational economic growth programme will be delivered. The Skills Plan has been developed to ensure that there is the right mix of skills available in the area to achieve the vision and we would appreciate your response to the Consultation Questions attached.

We look forward to sharing with you responses in due course which will be used to influence the final document.

Many thanks

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### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 There is strong evidence that the supply of appropriate skills is a key factor to achieve economic growth. The creation of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) has been a pivotal development in the way local areas can access National and European funding to drive sustainable growth and Local Enterprise Partnerships have a key strategic role to play in skills policy in line with the recommendations of the Heseltine Review. It is our intention to complement and add real, tangible value to the already well-established Local Authority Area level strategies and plans and the achievements resulting from a successful track record of partnership working on the employment, education and skills agenda led by both the Wiltshire Education, Employment & Skills Board and Swindon Skills & Employment Board in their respective local areas.
- 1.2 This new Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership Skills Plan has been drafted to form an integral part of our refreshed Strategic Economic Plan (SEP). This sets out the overall strategic direction for Skills and will be followed up with a detailed delivery plan outlining specific activity to be carried out and quantitative objectives.
- 1.3 Our Vision for Skills below is written in the future tense in keeping with the style of our Strategic Economic Plan. In taking this approach we are attempting to provide a picture of what the skills scene in Swindon and Wiltshire would be like and what will have improved if we move forwards with our priorities.

### 2. Our Vision for Skills

- 2.1 We have a **skilled and competitive workforce**, meeting the needs of employers and driving business development and growth. Employers report that they are able to recruit locally and skills gaps have been reduced through more residents achieving higher level skills and closer partnerships between business and skills providers to deliver flexible training through a range of skills programmes including European Structural & Investment Funds Workforce Skills Programme and City Deal. There is now innovation in the skills system and transformative approaches to bringing supply and demand together as being demonstrated through the City Deal – an approach to increasing access to higher level skills provision and facilities in the area. Across the area there is now multi-campus Higher Education (HE) provision which has significantly increased the HE offer. This has resulted in the percentage of residents with a higher level qualification being above the national average and the higher level skills requirements of local businesses being met. Our SWLEP Skills Plan adds value to Local Authority level Skills Strategies.
- 2.2 **Young people are optimistic about their future**, have high aspirations and are able to achieve their potential. Attainment by 19 is above the national average and the number of young people progressing to higher level qualifications through attending a University full time or through the Higher Apprenticeship/Degree Apprenticeship has significantly increased. More young people are studying STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Maths) subjects and progressing to STEM careers or STEM related Higher Education. All 16 to 19 education and skills provision is good or outstanding; the highest quality academic teaching is working in tangent with equal value/equal quality Vocational Education and Training (VET). Outstanding leadership and management of schools and colleges sits alongside the committed and sustained involvement and investment of businesses and industry into all stages of education, providing resources, expertise and aspirational opportunities.

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- 2.3 The **Swindon and Wiltshire Employability Charter** has led to a greater engagement of business in education, with employers fully involved in the curriculum and young people have good employability skills. There is an effective employability curriculum across all education and skills providers backed up by impartial Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG). Progression from post 16 learning into work is good and all young people have progression plans at the end of their courses. Employers report that young people are well prepared at interview and for the workplace. Young people, their parents and carers are well informed about future Higher Education and employment opportunities and feel inspired by the wide range of opportunities. There is good information available about the opportunities in the priority sectors across the SWLEP area. Fewer young people are leaving learning to become NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training).
- 2.4 **European Structural Investment Fund (ESIF) provision has led to more residents who have previously been excluded from the labour market or who were long-term disengaged, being able to contribute** and businesses are benefitting from a wider pool of talent. Innovative approaches to working with young people not in education, employment or training has led to our youth unemployment rate continuing to reduce and is well below the national average. There are now effective pathways to employment to support vulnerable young people and adults to achieve their potential. Businesses are benefitting from the skills and experience of the older workforce who were not economically active. Our economy offers jobs and opportunities for everyone, with different skills and qualifications, regardless of age or personal circumstances. Levels of individual and area-based deprivation are low, and we are pushing them down further through the constant creation of new economic opportunities and the promotion of aspiration and enterprise. There is active collaboration between the public and private sectors, with the Voluntary and Community Sector also playing an important role in ensuring that opportunities are open to everyone.
- 2.5 **At least 20% of employers across the SWLEP area employ Apprentices** and the number of Higher Apprenticeships is growing year on year. There is a successful Traineeship programme in place across the area and this forms part of a clear pathway to employment/Apprenticeships. There are Apprenticeship champions in each school and this has led to an increased awareness of Apprenticeships by staff and young people and this is now seen as a pathway to higher level skills. The area's public sector and Voluntary/Community Sector (VCS) partners are actively contributing to Apprenticeship growth.
- 2.6 SWLEP has worked effectively with businesses within its priority sectors to **identify skills gaps and challenges and approaches to work more closely with skills providers** is in place. Businesses are clearly articulating demand and sector forums across the SWLEP area involving businesses, skills providers, SWLEP and Local Authorities are developing innovative solutions. Businesses have workforce plans in place aligned to their business plans and are in many instances driving the skills agenda, influencing the skills offer in the area. There is strong investment in skills and skills development is seen as a key contributor to growth and increased productivity. The 16-19 offer provides an effective pipeline of skills and is developed in partnership with business. Communication, engagement and support for Small and Medium Sized Enterprise (SMEs) and Micros have improved enabling many more to understand and take up the offer.
- 2.7 **There is now a strong link between skills development and wider priorities in the SEP including flagship activities such as Porton Science Park and the Defence College of**

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**Technical Training (Lyneham).** Innovation and Entrepreneurship is an integral part of the curriculum, supported by the partnerships with business and the focus on STEM and preparation for progression to employment in the priority sectors. The role that resource efficiency/sustainable technology, a 'hydrogen economy', digitalisation and innovation plays within priority sectors has been explored between business and skills providers and there is an agreed approach to ensuring these cross cutting themes are well embedded into the curriculum and skills provision.

**2.8 Skills support is part of a coherent single business support offer** which can be accessed through one system. Businesses can access information through the Swindon and Wiltshire Business Hub. The hub is well used by businesses and provides information on the workforce skills offer, how to engage in Education/Business activity including sector forums and the Employability Charter.

**2.9 SWLEP is working strategically with the Skills Funding Agency (SFA), Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)** and the further and higher education sector to ensure skills and employment funding meets the needs expressed by employers in the local area. The Apprenticeship Growth Strategy has led to SWLEP, SFA, Local Authorities (LAs) and businesses working together to maximise the opportunity that Apprenticeship funding presents. SWLEP and the SFA has also worked strategically with skills providers to ensure the SEP vision is delivered including a significant increase in Advanced and Higher Apprenticeships. Skills providers are working together to effectively engage employers and use funding innovatively to meet local need. SWLEP has acknowledged the critical importance of a strong school and further education sector and has set up bi-annual education and skills forums to ensure good communication with the education and skills providers and to monitor progress in the SEP. The FE college sector has made a significant contribution to the SEP, due to its volumes of learners and significance to support vocational education and has worked collaboratively across the SWLEP area to deliver vocational skills provision to meet the needs of employers.

**2.10** SWLEP has worked with its partners to ensure that **areas of investment directly contribute to the SEP priorities** and that the additional investment is leading to employment, job creation or increased Gross Value Added (GVA), hence linking capital investment to skills priorities. Capital investment has supported the development of increased Higher Education presence across the SWLEP area which has raised the profile of higher education as a local progression route and has led to aspirations of young people being raised.

**2.11** A number of **inter-LEP working arrangements** are in place and is supporting innovation across the area. Work with priority sectors has benefitted from this approach, for example, by developing a common approach to working with the Construction sector.

### 3. SWOT Analysis

**3.1** The key challenges and opportunities in Table 1 below have been identified based on the SWLEP ESIF Strategy, Local Economic Assessment, current SWLEP Strategic Economic Plan, Wiltshire Education, Employment and Skills Strategy and Swindon Skills and Employment Strategy. Additionally, evidence has been gathered from the Wiltshire Employer Forum and IMPRESS HR, the Swindon Skills Mapping and Brokerage Service, a

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SWLEP-wide Construction Workshop and City Deal Business and Learner Engagement 'proof of concept' activities.

*Table 1: SWOT Analysis*

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Opportunities</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employment rate above UK average.</li> <li>• Unemployment rates significantly reduced and below UK average.</li> <li>• Percentage of residents claiming Job Seekers Allowance significantly reduced and below UK average.</li> <li>• Relatively low rates of long-term unemployment.</li> <li>• Population growth above national average since 2001.</li> <li>• High proportion of workers employed in the knowledge economy, especially business and professional services</li> <li>• High and rising number of Apprenticeship starts for 16-18 year olds in Swindon</li> <li>• 16/17 year olds participating in learning above UK average</li> <li>• Reducing levels of NEET in Wiltshire</li> <li>• High proportion of population in Wiltshire with higher level skills</li> <li>• High proportion of residents qualified to Level 2</li> <li>• Range of large businesses and business headquarters in Swindon.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key sectors - Defence Industries, Life Sciences, Knowledge Intensive sectors, Advanced Manufacturing, Engineering, Financial Services, Low Carbon, Tourism, Land-based including Food &amp; Drink, Digital &amp; Creative. Other sectors including Health and Social Care are not an identified priority sector but are strategically significant.</li> <li>• Strong employment growth forecast, especially in professional services.</li> <li>• Leisure sector in Swindon Town Centre.</li> <li>• Higher Education model across the SWLEP area.</li> <li>• Major construction projects, e.g. Defence Technical College and Swindon Town Centre regeneration plans.</li> <li>• ESIF Skills for Inclusion, Skills for Growth funding.</li> <li>• Government agenda for Employer Led Skills solutions.</li> <li>• Apprenticeships at all levels – government funding priority</li> <li>• Reducing levels of 16-18 not-knowns</li> <li>• Army 2020 Rebasing project - 4,000 additional Army personnel and dependents into a concentrated area in the South Wiltshire. By 2020 almost 25% of the Army's strength will be in this area.</li> <li>• Two new STEM themed UTCs in the SWLEP area.</li> <li>• City Deal - a transformative programme that aims to maximise the economic potential of the area through the provision of HE to both Armed Forces leavers and local employees to address the key economic challenge around</li> </ul>

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<b>Weaknesses</b>	<b>Threats</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• STEM skills shortage across all key sectors and hard to fill vacancies e.g. Health and Care Sector, Education Sector etc.</li> <li>• Low proportion of population in Swindon with higher level skills. Low rates of participation in Higher Education in Swindon and Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) 'Cold Spot'. No actual University presence in the area.</li> <li>• Very low levels of higher level skills attainment amongst young people. Moreover, this gap is much wider in Wiltshire and Swindon than in England overall for young students from materially deprived backgrounds participating in HE at age 18 or 19 than students from less deprived backgrounds. Some areas in Wiltshire have very low levels of graduate level attainment.</li> <li>• Below average attainment levels at GCSE and Level 3 attainment by 19 well below national average in Swindon.</li> <li>• NEETs above national average in Swindon and EET outcomes for care leavers in Wiltshire are significantly behind South West and national rates.</li> <li>• Urgent need to narrow the FSM attainment gap in Wiltshire and KS5 performance is poor across the board in Wiltshire.</li> <li>• Insufficient numbers of children and young people in good and outstanding schools in Swindon.</li> <li>• Urgent need to raise the quality of the FE estate in Wiltshire which is recognised as the 2nd poorest FE estate nationally.</li> <li>• High % of firms reporting skills gaps and high % of firms reporting young people poorly prepared for work.</li> <li>• Image of Swindon Town Centre a barrier to attracting talent and high levels of out-commuting in Wiltshire</li> <li>• Gross average weekly pay is much lower in Wiltshire than South West and</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: right;">Higher Level skills locally.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High proportion of employment in the public sector in Wiltshire.</li> <li>• Growing demand for graduates/skilled labour but low Higher Education participation rates in some areas.</li> <li>• Significant demographic change in Wiltshire including an extreme aging population and fluctuations in the population of young people and an increased birth rate.</li> <li>• GVA challenges through skills shortages/gaps in some sectors and some geographic areas of Wiltshire.</li> <li>• Higher than average house prices in Wiltshire.</li> <li>• 98% of employers in Wiltshire employ less than 50 people. Large firms with 200+ staff account for just 0.5% of businesses.</li> <li>• Transportation issues associated with Wiltshire's rurality - Approx. 40% of the population live in settlements of fewer than 5,000 people.</li> <li>• Ageing population</li> <li>• Reduction in funding for further education.</li> </ul>

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<p>national average. In Swindon, resident's population averages are above that of SW but slightly below national. In-work poverty is becoming a real issue in Wiltshire.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 18-24 year olds as a proportion of the overall claimant count is reducing but still higher than South West and national rate. Higher rates of 50+ unemployed in Wiltshire than South West and nationally.</li> </ul>	
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4. Objectives and Priorities:

Within our SWLEP Skills Plan we have identified the following 4 Objectives each with their own set of Priorities outlined in Table 2 below. The SWLEP Skills & Employment Subgroup is charged with developing a delivery plan to implement activities and programmes that achieve our objectives and priorities. The delivery plan will be SMART and include clearly articulated actions, outputs and outcomes.

1. **Improve the skills system** - making the education and skills system more effective and responsive to the needs of employers and learners. Ensuring the role and contribution of all parties (employers, learners, providers and funders) is understood and leads to effective practice with funding directed to meet local gaps and priorities.
2. **Skills for growth** - helping businesses develop skilled workforces that will support long term sustained growth and improved productivity within the local economy.
3. **Skills for inclusion** - supporting the development of an inclusive economy, helping people to overcome barriers to employment, to enter and stay in the workforce for example improving resilience and adaptability.
4. **Maximise the impact of skills to deliver the wider priorities within the Strategic Economic Plan** – recognising the central role skills have as an enabler of other SEP priorities

Table 2: Priorities by Objective

Objective 1: Improve the skills system	
<b>Priorities:</b>	
1.1	Develop a culture of investment in skills and training and understanding of the benefits/impact to productivity. Encourage and support employers to develop innovative workforce solutions. Build on activity already being undertaken by employers to train and up-skills their workforces e.g. opportunities to lever additional investment through City Deal ESIF Workforce Skills.
1.2	Invest ESIF funds to improve understanding and evidencing demand from employers and employer representative organisations e.g. Federations of Small Business (FSB), Chamber of Commerce, Business Improvement Districts and learners, linked to priority sectors and other 'significant' sectors. Clarity re employer requirements vs young people preferences. Set up sector forums across SWLEP to ensure the education/skills offer meets needs.
1.3	Develop coherence in the skills offer with an effective strategy for engaging and communicating with employers, current and future workforce and training providers.
1.4	Ensure effective communication and promotion of the skills offer and the work of the

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SWLEP.	Offer an impartial voice to support employers/learners to broker the most effective provision.
1.5	Maximise the use of current resources and potential funding streams to mitigate the impact of funding reforms through effective working and influence through funding bodies including EFA/SFA/HEFCE and maximising value for money through commissioning. Drive for more local determination of funding for skills.
1.6	Encourage further collaboration between education and training providers including the sharing of good practice, innovative approaches and the sharing of resources and partnering arrangements to stimulate and meet need. Bi-Annual Education & Skills Forums.
1.7	Maximise Local Growth Fund infrastructure investment to support improvements to the local infrastructure network, travel and transport options to increase accessibility of skills and employment opportunities.

**Objective 2: Skills for Growth**

<b>Priorities:</b>	
2.1	Raise aspirations and achievement, including CEIAG with a particular focus on STEM and progression to higher level learning. Ensure parents, carers and professionals have good quality information to support young people’s decision making.
2.2	Develop a SWLEP wide STEM Plan and ensure schools/colleges benefit from high quality additional STEM tuition with teachers working with STEM industry specialists.
2.3	Develop a SWLEP wide HE Plan.
2.4	Provide continuous locally based Higher Education input into schools.
2.5	Increase the number of residents with higher level skills and increase access to higher education provision, including securing considerable growth in Higher Apprenticeships.
2.6	Deliver the City Deal Skills Development Programme ensuring it capitalises on existing strengths - local HEI engagement needs to be maintained and grown and ensure Higher Apprenticeships are maximised.
2.7	Identify key SWLEP-wide activity that supports the achievement of Local Authority led Apprenticeship Growth Plans. Ensure SWLEP maximises Apprenticeship funding as the largest Government investment in skills.
2.8	Develop workforce skills - bridging the local skills gaps particularly for priority sectors. Ensure ESIF funding builds capacity within providers.
2.9	Ensure that strategically important learning and skills providers have access to appropriate LEP funding streams to achieve capital and revenue objectives which will support the achievement of LEP growth priorities.
2.10	Delivery of SWLEP-wide Enterprise Adviser Project and implementation of an Employability Charter for the SWLEP area outlining the role that education and business play in preparing young people for the world of work and strengthen routes to employment and learning pathways – including Traineeships, Apprenticeships in order to improve Education, Employment and Training (EET) outcomes.
2.11	Improve engagement with the schools sector to ensure their potential contribution to the priorities are maximised, recognising the central role schools have to the enhancement of the quality of provision that will enable vital skills development to occur.

**Objective 3: Skills for Inclusion**

<b>Priorities:</b>	
3.1	Realise the potential of people in low wage work – providing good quality training and development for them in their current role or to progress.
3.2	Utilise the potential of older workers – supporting older workers to extend their working lives should they wish/need to and supporting employers to recognise and harness their

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skills and experience.

- 3.3 Develop innovative approaches to supporting younger workless people – having programmes in place that recognise potential and address barriers to sustained employment.
- 3.4 Support the development of high quality, effective and impartial Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) for the current and future workforce ensuring employers in the SWLEP area participate fully with tailored programmes for Key Stages 2, 3 and 4.
- 3.5 Promote social inclusion – ensuring that employers can benefit from diverse and inclusive workforces and programmes are in place to address barriers to EET for vulnerable/marginalised groups.

**Objective 4: Maximise the impact of skills to deliver the wider priorities within the Strategic Economic Plan**

**Priorities:**

- 4.1 Strengthen the link between skills and wider business support through developing a coherent single business support offer with skills support seamlessly embedded.
- 4.2 Ensure skills development supports competitiveness and business Growth and develops the economy's future leaders and managers.
- 4.3 Ensure skills development supports priority sector development.
- 4.4 Ensure skills development supports sustainable technology and the development of a low carbon economy.
- 4.5 Ensure skills development supports innovation.
- 4.6 Ensure skills development supports place based and priority growth areas including town centre development/place shaping, Corsham Institute, Porton Science Park etc.
- 4.7 Link capital investment to skills priorities, e.g. employment and skills priorities embedded into LEP construction/infrastructure schemes.
- 4.8 Assess the scope for inter-LEP working and define the key skills issues that would be best approached regionally/nationally and develop the infrastructure for effective engagement and collaboration.

**5. Outcomes:**

Outcomes will be defined within the Delivery Plan but are anticipated to include the following:

- Job creation
- GVA
- Training
- Qualifications
- Increased investment in skills
- Skills system which is employer led
- Reduction in skills shortages
- Increase in higher level skills
- Young people able to complete for jobs
- Needs of priority sectors met
- Skills to drive innovation in place
- SWLEP is able to influence national policy, funding and approaches to meet local skills needs

**6. Planned and proposed investments:**

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Current areas of investment include City Deal (£1.4M) and ESIF, Skills for Growth and Skills (£18.6M plus match funding). The work to identify additional areas of investment to achieve the priorities is to be completed and will be taken forward by the SWLEP Skills & Employment Subgroup.

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**Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership  
Skills Plan  
Draft for consultation**

Consultation Period: From 27<sup>th</sup> August 2015 to 25<sup>th</sup> September 2015

**Consultation Questions**

Below are some questions to prompt thought. Please add any comments that you feel are appropriate.

- 1. Do the objectives take account of the most pertinent issues for employers and does the draft Plan prioritise the right work?**
- 2. Please inform us of anything you feel may have been overlooked and would like to suggest for inclusion?**
- 3. Has the draft Plan increased your awareness and understanding of the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership's priorities in relation to Skills?**

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**4. Does this Draft Plan make clear how the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership intend to affect change and improvement and what difference it will make?**

**5. Are there any ways in which you might be able to support us to achieve our objectives?**

We value the time you have taken to consider our draft Skills Plan and welcome any additional comments below:

Please return your completed consultation form to [deborah.house@swlep.biz](mailto:deborah.house@swlep.biz) including "Skills Plan Consultation" in the subject line. All feedback submitted by midnight on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2015 will be considered as we finalise the Plan.