

Agenda Item 7: Current Skills Projects

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Summary

The paper highlights how engaging with employers and various skills groups we seek to understand current and future skills needs in influencing the system to ensure that the provision offer is better aligned to the needs of business. The paper also provides details of various current skills projects developed as a result of our knowledge of the data/evidence, research and engagement with employers enabling access the right skills at the right time, supporting business growth, innovation and prosperity.

The Business Board is requested to encourage other employers to engage in influencing and shaping the skills system and to promote the current projects across their sectors and networks.

Recommendation/Request

The Norfolk Business Board is requested to:

- Note the contents of the report
- Encourage other employers either on a sector or geographic basis to engage with and support the groups mentioned above in influencing and shaping the skills system to better align with business need, providing the right skills at the right time
- Promote the various current skills projects across their sectors and networks. To support promotion flyers and case studies in the form of social media or videos can be made available for any of the projects detailed

Background

1.1 The Norfolk Economic Strategy, known as the Norfolk Local Growth Plan [Norfolk's Local Growth Plan - Norfolk Business Board](#), sets out ambitious plans to drive and shape economic growth for the wider benefit of people, communities and businesses in Norfolk. In helping businesses to grow and innovate with access to the talent required with the right skills at the right time, this supports and enables the creation of more and better paid opportunities for residents. The strategy also highlights the need to proactively address inequalities particularly health inequalities, breaking down barriers to opportunity and ensuring that residents have access to skills pathways that enable them to access good jobs and career opportunities locally.

1.2 Norfolk has traditionally been seen as a low skill, low wage economy with workforce qualification levels below national averages, for example those aged 16-64 with a level 4 qualification or higher at just 33.1% compared to the East of England at 39.6% and the UK

at 43.2%. Norfolk also has higher than national averages or workforce age residents with no qualifications at 7% compared to the East of England at 5.8% and the UK at 6.4%.

1.3 Demand for skills and talent in Norfolk remains strong. For the 12-month period April 2023 to March 2024, across all industry sectors there were around 19,300 (25.8%) more unique vacancy postings for Norfolk jobs, compared with the previous 12-month period with the highest proportional increases in job vacancy postings in Construction (increase of 69.2%); Transportation and Storage (64.0%); Arts, Entertainment and Recreation (55.5%); Public Administration and Defence (55.4%); Manufacturing (55.1%); Wholesale and Retail Trade (49.7%); and Real Estate Activities (49.0%).

Source: Lightcast labour market analytics – unique job postings data Note: The unique posting count is the count of postings after the deduplication process has taken place. Deduplication is the process of identifying duplicate job postings and only counting one of the duplicates.

1.4 NCC seeks to engage with employers alongside utilising available data and research to understand skills needs, to influence the provision offer creating better alignment to the needs of business, providing the right skills at the right time to support business growth, innovation and prosperity.

Employer Engagement in the Skills System

Understanding current and future skills needs in Norfolk

In order to shape the skills system and provision to better align with the needs of employers we need regular and comprehensive dialogue with employers and extensive collaboration with a range of stakeholders and various fora including:

- ERB's – such as Norfolk Chamber of Commerce, Federation of Small Businesses
- Sector Specific Bodies such as EEEgR and East Wind
- The Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP)
- Education and Skills Providers
- Employers via sector skills groups, events, ad hoc engagement etc

Sector Skills Groups

Working with colleagues in Suffolk County Council (SCC) skills team through the Norfolk & Suffolk Skills Hub we support the ongoing development, coordination and ambition of these groups, gathering intel, testing assumptions on current and future demand and seeking to influence the provision landscape. Currently we support sector skills groups in the following sectors with an ambition to wider the reach in future:

- Digital
- Construction, (known as Building Growth)
- Agri Skills
- Green Skills for Net Zero
- Health & Social Care

District Assemblies

Operating across all districts in Norfolk these groups take a place-based approach to understanding skills needs, challenges and barriers, feeding intelligence into the wider skills system and the sector skills groups and where appropriate joining up the local system to create innovative solutions to local issues.

We would welcome input from colleagues within the Norfolk Business Board to any of these groups to increase and support our understanding of current and future skills needs, in seeking to influence and shape the provision offer. As we move forward with devolution, the intelligence from these and other groups will feed into commissioning of the Adult Skills Fund that will potentially be devolved to the new Norfolk and Suffolk Mayoral County Combined Authority for the academic year 2026/27. For more information, please contact mark.walker2@norfolk.gov.uk

Current Skills Projects

As a result of extensive and ongoing engagement with a wide range of stakeholders as mentioned above together with research both locally and nationally, and in conjunction with securing funding to develop and deliver projects, we have a range of skills interventions that seek to deliver the skills that employers in Norfolk need.

Short interventions

Norfolk and Suffolk Skills Bootcamps Programme

Skills Bootcamps [Skills Bootcamps - skills for life - Suffolk County Council](#) are short employer led programmes of training for adults (aged 19 or over) aimed at meeting business needs:

- They are procured and delivered locally and nationally
- They aim to help individuals move into employment, grow their business if self-employed, or into a new role with new responsibilities if already employed, at the same time as equipping our businesses with the skills they need.
- In the current financial year (FY) 2024/25 the Department for Education (DfE) is providing over £2m to SCC, to procure and deliver Skills Bootcamps locally on behalf of Norfolk & Suffolk
- Locally, the offer includes over 30 subject areas including construction, coding, digital, early years, engineering, welding, offshore wind technicians, HGV, land-based, education, green skills, logistics, care, leadership and management.
- The SCC Skills Bootcamp team is also overseeing the finalising of outcomes from previous 'waves' of delivery (in FY 2023/24) as well as preparations for 'Wave 6' in FY 2025/26.
- Skills Bootcamps have been locally commissioned in Norfolk and Suffolk since August 2022 resulting in hundreds of vacancies being filled, new contracts for the self-employed and employees gaining progression or new responsibilities.

Current Performance and Impact

Wave 5 (FY 2024/25):

- Target of 560 learner starts during the FY 2024/26, actual 391 as of the end of December 2024, confident of achieving our target
- Information will be gathered over the course of 2025 regarding the outcomes for these learners (e.g. employment, career/employment progression) and the benefits for businesses (e.g. recruitment and growth) in demonstrating the impact of the training offered.

Wave 4 (FY 2023/24): Information on the impact of the previous wave of bootcamp provision is still being finalised, however current stats show:

- 541 learner starts (outperforming expectations of 496)
- Anticipating that final data from providers will confirm:
 - 78% of learners completed their course (slightly lower than the 80% target)

- 65% of learners who completed their programme achieving a positive 'outcome' as a result of their training within 6 months of completion (lower than the 75% target)

Future Plans

In summer 2024, SCC submitted proposals to the DfE for further Skills Bootcamps delivery totalling £4.1m for Norfolk and Suffolk in the FY 2025/26. This proposal would result in the delivery of programmes to 1,345 learners across 14 sectors from Agriculture to the Visitor Economy, aligned to the requirements of the regional economy.

Although we are awaiting formal confirmation from Government there is confidence within the system that the local delivery of the Skills Bootcamp Programme will continue.

For more information on the current Skills Bootcamps offer please contact skillsbootcamp@suffolk.gov.uk

Future Skills Now (FSN)

- FSN [Future Skills NOW - Norfolk County Council](#) is a United Kingdom Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) funded project available only in the North Norfolk District Council geography during the FY 2024/25.
- The project aims to identify the key training requirements for the North Norfolk workforce, with a focus on the Visitor Economy and Advanced Manufacturing/Engineering sectors.
- FSN is piloting some modular, flexible, responsive training opportunities to test pathways for North Norfolk businesses.

Current Performance and Impact

The project has been hugely successful in all aspects, exceeding the targets set, creating a legacy of engaged businesses and motivated upskilled individuals.

FSN - Outputs	Apr 2024 – 3 rd Feb 2025	Target	% Target Achieved
Number of people referred from partners onto upskill courses	539	280	192.5%
Number of people in employment engaging with the skills system	261	140	186.4%
Number of people who have completed a course or gained a qualification following support	91	60	151.6%
Completed Business Skills Audits	83	60	138.3%
Percentage of match funding contributed by businesses	46%	25%	Not applicable

Future Plans

Unfortunately, it is not possible to continue FSN in the FY 2025/26 as UKSPF funding allocations to Districts Councils have been substantially reduced. We are searching for alternative funding sources for the FY 2026/27 as we have an ambition to roll out this successful, impactful model across Norfolk.

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships Norfolk (AN) [Home | Apprenticeships Norfolk](#) is an umbrella service for all things Apprenticeships providing free advice, guidance and a 'one stop shop' for employers looking to offer apprenticeships, together with support for individuals seeking to secure an apprenticeship and other actors in the system such as providers, parents, and careers advisers. In recent years AN has secured c£2M of external funding to develop and deliver a number of innovative projects [Grants and Incentives from Apprenticeships Norfolk |](#)

[Apprenticeships Norfolk](#) designed as a result of extensive market engagement and research aimed at stimulating growth in apprenticeships in Norfolk, supporting social mobility and economic growth.

The Norfolk County Council Apprenticeship Strategy 2023 – 2025 [NCC Apprenticeship Strategy 2023-2025 | Apprenticeships Norfolk](#) articulates some of the benefits to businesses of investing in apprenticeships including:

- 98% of businesses currently employing apprentices state they bring additional benefits - among the most cited benefits were 'addressing skills shortages' and 'providing value for money'.
- One third of employers say apprentices improve diversity within their business.
- As a key source of learning & development, apprenticeships support increased employee engagement, retention, wellbeing and mental health.
- Even during training, apprentices deliver a return of c£2,500 (in some cases significantly more).
- Many employers recoup the cost of training before the completion of the apprenticeship and others within a time frame as short as 1-2 years.
- Firms that invest in apprenticeship programmes also report other benefits, including reduced recruitment costs, enhanced job satisfaction among workplace supervisors and achievement of corporate social responsibility outcomes.

Current Apprenticeship projects include:

Levy Support Scheme (LSS)

The [Levy Support Scheme](#) LSS aims to:

- Connect Norfolk businesses to share unspent apprenticeship levy funds through levy-transfers.
- Enable local businesses access local training funding and keep apprenticeship levy funds in Norfolk.
- Offer a bespoke matching service and wraparound support to Norfolk employers that want to get involved.
- easy to donate or request funding
- Keep it simple - online 'expression of interest' forms – easy to donate or request funding

Current Performance & Impact

Since commencing in April 2023

- c£2.5m of unspent levy funds utilised (original target £1m)
- 272 apprenticeship starts, in 184 businesses (plus pipeline requests)
- 178 existing employees and 109 new recruits
- Level 2 through to Level 7 apprenticeships have been funded

Future Plans

Whilst we are conscious of the Government's policy on reforming the Apprenticeship Levy to create a new Growth and Skills Levy, the detail and the timeframe is not yet clear. In the meantime, we will continue the LSS project until the end of March 2026 when we anticipate the impact of policy reforms will be clearer. For further information on the LSS please contact apprenticeships@norfolk.gov.uk

Building Futures (BF)

BF [Building Futures - Apprenticeship incentive grant](#) is an apprenticeship project funded by UKSPF aiming to stimulate apprenticeship opportunities from SME's based in Broadland or South Norfolk District Council geographies by recruiting a new apprentice of any age living

in those districts. The current project concludes at the end of March 2025, we are working with Broadland and South Norfolk District Councils to secure funding for the FY 2025/26.

The project offers Package of Support (Financial and Practical) to businesses:

1. Grants for non-levy paying businesses to incentivise taking on an apprentice (of any age)
2. Enhanced grants for non-levy paying businesses to incentivise taking on a 'green' apprentice (of any age) – this will be based on [IfATE categorisation](#) of a dark green apprenticeship.
3. Inclusion of training tools to encourage increased retention (Employer Induction & Mentoring Training)
4. 'Introduction to carbon literacy' module for all employers.
5. Free Skills Analysis for businesses engaged in project
6. Free and impartial wraparound support to navigate the apprenticeship onboarding process
7. Added Value: LSS may be able to provide Levy Transfers for businesses who are required to co-invest the 5% contribution to the apprenticeship training cost.

Current Performance and Impact

- Over 110 business engaged in discussions about apprenticeships
- £121,00 of grants committed across both districts
- 52 'new' apprenticeship starts, including 3 enhanced 'dark green' apprenticeships
- Apprenticeship starts at L2, L3, L4 and L6
- Apprentice ages range from 16 up to 40+

Future Plans

As detailed above we are working with South Norfolk and Broadland District Councils to secure funding to continue BF in the financial year 2025/26. For further detail please contact apprenticeships@norfolk.gov.uk

Supporting Individuals into work and increasing the talent pipeline

Working Well Norfolk (WWN)

WWN [Working Well Norfolk - Seetec](#) is a Department for Work and Pensions funded pilot project, originally funded until 31st March 2025, it provides intensive bespoke support to individuals who wish to work and have a health condition (either mental or physical) to overcome barriers to accessing or to remaining within the labour market. For employers it can provide a means to accessing a wider talent pool or support to retain valuable expertise and skills encouraging employers to understand and implement specific flexibilities or adjustments required by an individual.

Current Performance and Impact

WWN has been hugely successful in supporting individuals to access or to be retained in the labour market:

- As of 31st January 2025, 1934, individuals had been referred to the programme against a target of 1433
- Of those 1250 had enrolled onto the programme, target 1240
- 988 individuals had commenced the programme, target 930
- 449 individuals had been supported to access or to be retained within the labour market, target 471

Future Plans

WN has been granted an extension until September 2026 and will be accepting referrals until the end of September 2025 (with a year to support individuals), Connect to Work, as a strategy within the Get Britain Working White Paper [Get Britain Working White Paper - GOV.UK](#) will launch in October 2025 providing continuity of service for both individuals and employers. For more information, please contact hannah.parnell@seetecpluss.co.uk

Supporting Young Peoples' Employability

Boost

Boost provides individualised support to young people aged 16- 30 across West Norfolk and Breckland offering employability support, basic skills, training and mentoring [Boost | Boost | Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk](#) and [BOOST - Breckland Council](#) Boost is partly funded from UKSPF via the Borough Council and Kings Lynn and West Norfolk and Breckland District Councils and supports young people seeking to move into the labour market as well as those who are in employment but feel they would benefit from some training, supporting employers in growing their skills base to meet current and emerging needs. Boost provides holistic, wrap around support and has had a positive, and in some cases, life changing, impact on the young people supported, increasing their employability and providing a wider pool of local talent to recruit from. We would welcome more employers engaging via offering work placements, taster days, tours etc that will also showcase local businesses, the many and varied career paths they have to offer.

Current Performance and Impact

Boost Kings Lynn is currently in its third year of operation having previously been funded via Kings Lynn Towns Deal project and during the FY 2024/25 has been expanded across the whole district

Kings Lynn Boost Performance to 3rd February 2025

Outputs	Target	Total	% of target achieved
Total participants registered/engaged	200	276	138%
Socially excluded people taking part in an activity	135	154	114%
People supported to engage in job searching	75	89	118%
Outcomes/Results			
People in employment or self-employment after support	30	33	110%
People gaining qualifications, licences and skills	15	31	206%

Breckland Boost is in its first year of operation and is embedding itself into the skills system

Breckland Boost Performance to 3rd February 2025

Outputs	Target	Total	% of target achieved
Total participants registered/engaged	No target set	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Socially excluded people taking part in an activity	200	90	45%
People supported to engage in job searching	70	48	69%
Outcomes/Results			
People in employment or self-employment after support	20	13	65%
People gaining qualifications, licences and skills	30	14	47%

Future Plans

We are working with the Borough Council of Kings Lynn and West Norfolk and Breckland District Council to secure funding for a further year of both projects in the FY 2025/26. For further information please contact boost@norfolk.gov.uk or boostbreckland@norfolk.gov.uk

Recommendation/Request

The Norfolk Business Board is requested to:

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