

Opportunities For a Skills & Employment Reset in West Sussex

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Report prepared by always possible for West Sussex County Council, October 2020 - January 2021



Section	Page
CONTEXT.....	2
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	2
PURPOSE OF THIS PROJECT.....	4
ENGAGEMENT AND RESEARCH.....	7
LANDSCAPE OF EXISTING PROVISION.....	12
WHAT REMAIN THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES?.....	15
WHAT WILL HAVE THE BIGGEST IMPACT?.....	18
MATRIX OF PRIORITY INTERVENTIONS.....	36
SKILLS ACTION NETWORK.....	37
NEXT STEPS.....	38

Executive Summary

In summer and autumn 2020, extensive stakeholder group and 1:1 conversations and a series of desk-based research projects, were undertaken to ascertain the current position of the labour market, business confidence and the impact of COVID-19 on the West Sussex skills and employment agenda.

The report¹ was published in December 2020, and included a comprehensive matrix of headline areas of concern and priority (also known as thematic), and of the different age groups experiencing slightly different levels of impact from the pandemic and economic disruption.

These priority areas were then discussed with a wide range of stakeholders from across the county and interrogated further, testing whether the data collected mirrored the day-to-day experience of leaders from business, education, careers services and local government.

This follow-up report now presents the results of that interrogation, with an exploration of ideas and options for action, all mapped against the matrix of priority subject areas and audiences as proposed initially.

There is a clear 'golden thread' of thought that leads from the data to the suggested response throughout the two reports.

A collaborative effort in the short and longer terms

West Sussex already benefits from some exemplary employment and skills support services, high quality further and higher education and ambitious business networks – shared in their goal to grow a prosperous and inclusive economy.

However, there are also significant gaps in the skills and employment landscape – some long-standing and some exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic. There are concerning numbers of people who risk long-term unemployment, and cornerstone industries in West Sussex that are facing unprecedented difficulty through no fault of their own.

A multi-pronged approach is needed, focused around some core areas of intervention – building on and expanding existing activities whilst bridging the identified gaps.

This report offers more suggestions for intervention than can viably be delivered, but it is a blueprint for action to which many different stakeholder organisations can return. The underpinning vision born from conversations and county-wide engagement, is for an increased level of cooperation, collaboration and joining up across the county, and of organisations from business, public service, education and existing skills groups working together to deliver a cohesive programme of

skills and employment activities, for the benefit of West Sussex residents.

Inclusive growth

Our research is clear in its conclusion that there is work to do to create a level playing field of opportunity in West Sussex. In light of this, this report makes the following suggestions:

- Big innovation and technical skills investment opportunities in Crawley should be actively designed to ripple out to the whole county
- Specific and targeted interventions for people with protected characteristics are needed - particularly older workers, BAME workers, women returners and young people
- Additional and targeted support for small and micro businesses around resilience and digital transformation for long term survival is a priority
- Bold public awareness campaigns about opportunity, aspiration and pathways forward for all West Sussex residents feeling uncertain about employment prospects should be created

¹ Source: [Current and Projected Employment and Skills Landscape in West Sussex](#)

Executive Summary

Ambitious growth

The West Sussex response to COVID-19 is not about simply recovering from loss or repairing damage. There is a huge opportunity for inward investment, greater collaboration between strategic authorities and delivery partners, and a new story about the value of building a high-skilled, high growth career in the county. Our suggestions include:

- A deep focus on STEM skills, particularly at advanced levels – with incentives, renewed training offers and greater opportunity for scientists, engineers and technologists who traditionally look to London
- A suite of brokerage tools, support, capacity and guidance for recently unemployed jobseekers and businesses determined to thrive despite the disruption – matching skills to opportunities
- A cohesive pitch to make West Sussex an early adopter in the government's new Plan For Jobs and Skills For Jobs plans – making the most of Kickstart and apprenticeship reform as well as extra investment in College Business Centres and a Local Skills Improvement Plan
- Being prepared for the bounceback from badly affected industries, such as aviation and tourism, so that when the time is right West Sussex has an even stronger offer to the labour market than before

All of these ideas are set in more detail below, and continue to be stress-tested and interrogated. The next report will set out a small number of interventions and, in more detail, focusing on a pipeline of projects and activity where we might have the greatest impact and moving them towards a first phase, viable action plan.



Purpose of This Report

In late Summer 2020, West Sussex County Council commissioned strategic development consultancy always possible to consider three questions.

1 What has the immediate impact been on skills, training and employment in West Sussex as a result of the coronavirus pandemic - **where are we now?**

2 What could the local authority do to mitigate challenges and build on opportunities as part of a strategic recovery response - **what happens next?**

3 What would a pipeline of targeted projects and support activity look like, if limited resources were to have the greatest impact - **what shall we do?**

This report seeks to answer the second question, with a clear line of sight to the third.

Building on the insights, data and engagement evidence presented in the first report, this follow-up will focus on the target audiences and the matrix of priority interventions - and what specific ideas will have the biggest impact on long-term raising of skills levels in-line with both emergency and sustainable economic recovery.

We are also considering available resources for intervention, not just financial – but also in time, expertise, delivery skills and political will. We will be making some suggestions on which stakeholders might be considered ARSCI for each initiative. ARSCI stands for accountable, responsible, supportive, consulted and informed – and can help to determine roles within a collaborative and cross-sector approach.

In the first report, we touched on the UK Government's 'Plan For Jobs', and pledges around the Kickstart scheme for the under-25s, incentives to recruit apprentices and commitments around investment in capital for Further Education colleges.

These schemes are all welcome, as is any investment in employment, skills and training. However, there are emerging complexities about the structure of the opportunities and how funding will be allocated and accessed. For example, there are many commercial operators, colleges, business networks and non-profit organisations already offering services as an intermediary organisation for the Kickstart scheme. This is good for offering choice, but risks creating confusion for jobseekers and for employers who will be approached by multiple agencies with slightly different messages. In this report we lay out some of the challenges and opportunities in delivering a fair, clear and useful skills

programme at a time of rising unemployment. We think that there is a brilliant foundation to build on in West Sussex, with skills and expertise to draw upon, but without some new ways of working there will be avoidable gaps and wasted resources. We offer some ideas around those new ways.

This report is a set of recommendations, based on the evidence from the data and engagement presented in the first report, as well as subsequent testing of findings and ideas. Whilst commissioned by West Sussex County Council, this document is for multiple stakeholders to use.

Please use this report to inform your COVID recovery planning as a benchmark, a conversation-starter or as a blueprint.

Our hope is that that all interested agencies, all tiers of local authority in West Sussex, business networks and the education and training sector will use this document to help make the case for development or investment.

This document is focused on priority opportunities and identified gaps – it is not intended to replicate other pieces of research, or to duplicate recommendations made in other action plans – although these will be referenced and contextualised when useful.

Purpose of This Report

The intention of any intervention is to both mitigate the risk and negative impact of COVID-19 on the local labour market, and to create new long-term opportunities and innovations that move opportunities for West Sussex residents into a position that is objectively better than it was before the pandemic.

The situation is ever-changing and the landscape is very wide, so we will have missed some things and some suggestions of intervention may need adapting if new data has come to light. But we believe that this is the first time that some of these ideas, at a regional level, have been presented in the same place – drawing insights from across economic development, business, further and higher education and infrastructure investment perspectives.

At the time of writing, England has moved into a third lockdown which will mean that we won't fully know the picture for weeks and months to come.

A moving economic picture

The first report reflected the initial announcements around the Plan for Jobs, but the commitment from government is still being developed in the lead-up to the March 2021 budget.

On 29th September 2020, the UK Government made an announcement of an additional £2.5bn of funding for a 'Lifetime Skills Guarantee' to give adults the chance to take free college courses valued by employers. This is targeted at adults who do not have a L3+ qualification. This funding is expected to start to be in place from April 2021.

Since our last report, in the subsequent November Spending Review, it was indicated that from overall funding commitment there will be an investment of £375 million from the National Skills Fund in 2021/22, which will provide £138 million for the Government's commitment to fund in-demand technical courses for adults, equivalent to A level, and to expand the employer-led boot camp training model (currently only in the north and south west of England, but due to roll-out more widely).²

A £2.9 billion Restart programme will provide intensive and tailored support to over 1 million unemployed people and help them find work, with approximately £0.4 billion of funding in 2021/22.

Announcements in November 2020 also include a new £4bn cross-departmental levelling-up fund for England (that will attract up to £0.8 billion funding for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland).

This will invest in:

- Local infrastructure that has a visible impact on people and their communities and will support economic recovery
- A broad range of high value local projects, up to £20 million, including regenerating eyesores, upgrading town centres and community infrastructure, and local arts and culture

It will be open to all local areas in England and will prioritise bids to drive growth and regeneration in places in need, those facing particular challenges, and areas that have received less government investment in recent years. West Sussex is unlikely to be a high priority area, but there will be strong cases to make, and we expect ideas in this report to form a big part of those cases.

The autumn Spending Review makes up to £600 million available in 2021 22. The government will publish a prospectus for the fund and launch the first round of competitions in early 2021.

²Source: [Spending Review 2020: On-the-Day Briefing](#)

Purpose of This Report

There will be challenges in all areas of delivery – financially, politically and logistically – but there are some significant and tangible short, medium and long-term actions that can be taken in ways that might not have been previously possible.

The government has also announced a National Infrastructure Strategy which sets out plans to transform UK infrastructure in order to level up the country, strengthen the Union and achieve net zero emissions by 2050. With £600 billion of public and private projects already identified to be delivered between 2018-2028³ the new announcement sees spend brought forward - including £27 billion in 2021/22:

- almost £19 billion of transport investment, including £1.7 billion for local roads, Local Full Fibre Networks, and the 5G Diversification and Testbeds and Trials Programmes and much more
- increases in research and development (R&D) with almost £15 billion in 2021-22 including funding for clinical research to support delivery of new drugs, treatments and vaccines
- over £260 million for digital infrastructure programmes, including the Shared Rural Network for 4G coverage, Local Full Fibre Networks, and the 5G Diversification and Testbeds and Trials Programmes and much more

A settlement from the department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy means there will

³ Source: [Projects worth £600 billion in the pipeline as government gets Britain building](#)

⁴ Source: OBR Forecasts, November 2020

also be £50.7 million for business support programmes to improve SME productivity through leadership, management and technology adoption.

Since we completed the first report, the Office for Budget Responsibility has published new forecasts around public spending:⁴

- The UK economy will be around 3% smaller than expected in the March Budget
- Unemployment is expected to rise to a peak of 7.5% – or 2.6m people – in the second quarter of next year. After which it is set to fall every year, reaching 4.4% by the end of 2024
- The government will borrow £394bn this year – 19% of GDP
- Underlying debt is due to hit 97.5% of GDP in 2025-26

The traditional three-year planning cycle has now been reduced to one-year as the Government keeps spending decisions as flexible as possible as it continues recovery from the pandemic. This does create unprecedented challenges for any local authority-driven long-term planning.

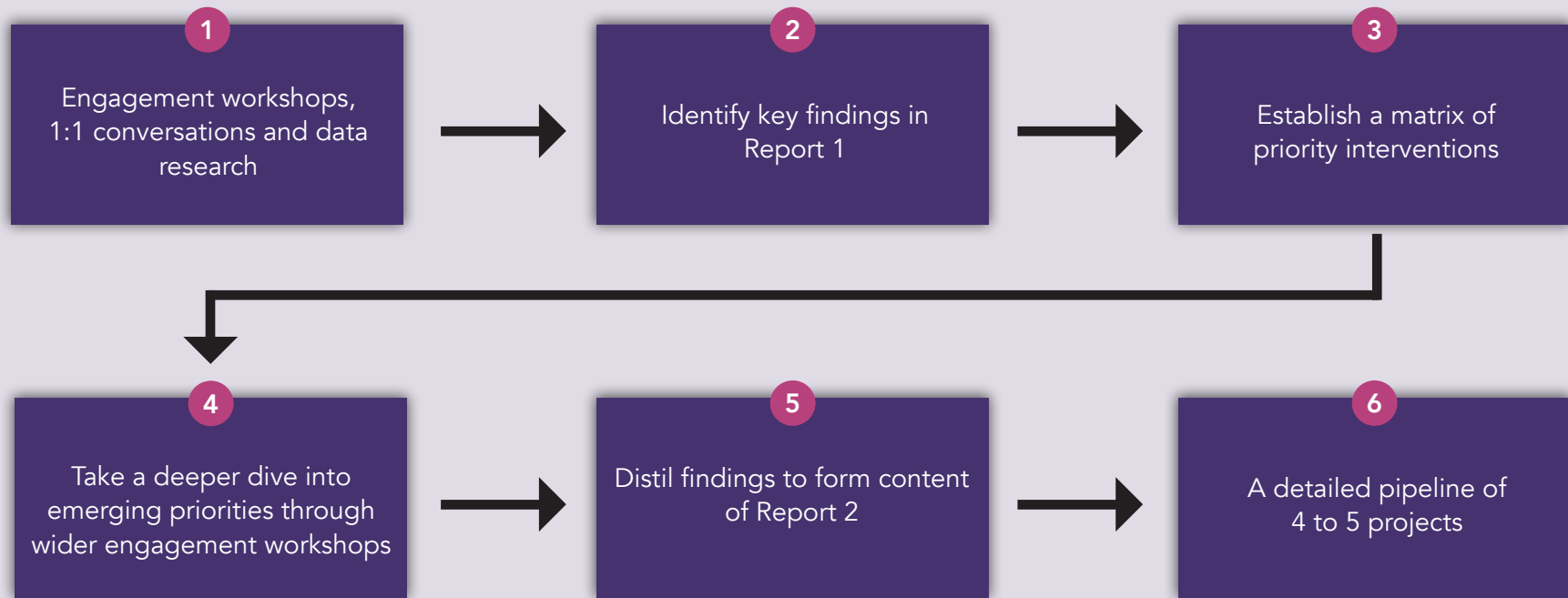
There have not yet been any substantial details announced for the UK's transition from the European Union to replace any of the existing ESIF, ERDF or ESF funding that will conclude in 2023 at the latest. The Spending Review documents state that the 'heads of terms' for the government's planned [UK Shared Prosperity Fund](#) (which is envisaged to replace annual receipts to the UK from the EU) will be published in spring 2021, and that announcement of the amount it will contain will be made in the next Spending Review. A commitment of at least £1.5bn per year has been made, and will prioritise:

- investment in people and skills tailored to local needs, such as work-based training, supplementing and tailoring national programmes (e.g. the Adult Education Budget); and other local support (e.g. for early years)
- investment in communities and place including cultural and sporting facilities, civic, green and rural infrastructure, community-owned assets, neighbourhood and housing improvements, town centre and transport improvements and digital connectivity
- investment for local business including to support innovation, green and tech adoption, tailored to local needs

A white paper on the future ambitions for Further Education and 'Skills For Jobs' was published by the DfE in January 2021 – and is referred to in other sections of this report.

Engagement and Research

The process of this engagement and research has been set out as in the diagram below:



This report is related to actions number 4 - 5

Having sense-checked the matrix with key economy partners in the county, including Coast To Capital LEP, the district and borough councils, and the area economic partnerships, in West Sussex – we looked at some of the specific opportunities and challenges with over 50 representatives from across business, vocational education and labour market support/employability.

We have taken care to involve a diversity of perspective and thought, and to challenge assumptions. We have sought perspective from stakeholders who have not previously contributed to strategic planning in the county, as well as from key decision-makers and more traditional influencers. We consider the resulting analysis to be robust, and as inclusive as possible of competing needs so that the recommendations reflect the real priorities for West Sussex and not simply the quick wins or most convenient.

Below there are a number of important observations and recurring trends that underpin the recommendations, and through which future decision-making should be considered. When looking at the present situation, the emerging priorities and what the data was telling us about where we are now, the following strengths and weaknesses were identified by the engagement session participants.

Engagement and Research

Regional strengths

West Sussex benefits from previous investment in infrastructure partnerships and a number of pro-active local authorities to whom economic development is taken seriously.

There is strong Further Education provision, and investment has been made in post-16 education facilities in many parts of the county, the expanded Chichester College Group and Greater Brighton Metropolitan College, as well as specialist colleges, sixth forms and independent training provision, have ensured a breadth and depth of learning opportunities – with the CCG provision in Chichester, Crawley, Brinsbury, Worthing and Haywards Heath receiving an Outstanding grade from Ofsted in 2020.

Higher Education is also ambitious in the area, with vocational and industry-focused degree-level learning provided by the universities of Brighton and Chichester, Chichester College Group and Greater Brighton Metropolitan College amongst some others. Whilst this is not as well-resourced as in other parts of the UK, a lot of investment has been made into the design of HNCs and degree apprenticeships that align with the local labour market.

There is a long and successful history of support for people with multiple barriers to employment and learning, supported through, amongst other programmes, Journey to Work and the organisations linked to the Synchronise group. It is those furthest away from the labour market who have received the most interventions in the past. The county's relative and consistent success in supporting high levels of employment, however, does become a weakness during mass unemployment events, such as a recession, and a different infrastructure is needed.

There is active support for small and growing businesses, through enterprise projects, funded business support programmes and grant funding. The District and Borough local authorities all work closely with local businesses to provide support and there are a number of shared workspaces through the county which offer additional information, support and guidance to small and micro businesses. WSCC supports business growth through strategic programmes and the universities and the Coast To Capital Growth Hub offer focused business support programmes including in leadership and peer to peer mentoring.

Adult & Community Learning in West Sussex has made significant developments in the past few years, particularly in terms of what is offered and the opportunities available. There is an opportunity to increase the take up of adult learning in the county and the directorate overseeing this provision have indicated an enthusiasm for developing even more responsive programmes of learning.

In the first report, we highlighted the significance of Gatwick Airport to the West Sussex skills offer - and its related eco-systems and local supply chain networks in Manor Royal Business District, Crawley and across the wider area. Despite the unprecedented and deep-seated impact of the 2020/21 lockdowns and economic contraction on the airport, planning has redoubled to invest in Crawley as a leading base of STEM and high-growth innovation skills, research and employment. The greatest ambition that the county can have is to see the positive impact of that investment reaching every community in West Sussex, with a renewed sense of aspiration and new pathways for meaningful and sustainable 21st century careers.

Engagement and Research

Regional weaknesses

A historical confidence in above-average employment levels means that the county is more exposed during mass unemployment events. It might take longer, and be harder to enable large numbers of people to access DWP support when they are not used to this. The infrastructure to support people who are employable, yet suddenly unemployed is much smaller here than in other regions that have historically had a relatively higher level of unemployment.

A recurring concern throughout our engagement sessions was that many of the newly unemployed – whether from frontline hospitality and retail or the knowledge economy jobs reliant on the tourism sector or aviation– will not find it easy, or without social stigma, to apply for universal credit. If this comes to pass, the levels of economically inactive residents in the county will continue to grow, but without the infrastructure or mechanisms in place to support them into new employment, they risk falling through the net and potentially spending longer than necessary out of work.

West Sussex offers a mixed employment picture, with major business employers clustered around Manor Royal Business District. There are also a number of major public sector employers, including Local Authorities and NHS and a low volume of larger companies throughout

the county. 97% of businesses are small or micro businesses, which does compound some of the difficulty of employment bounceback, as recruitment freezes are likely to be in place for some time as many businesses and sectors recalibrate. Engagement with the small business sector has shown that new recruitment will be largely focused on management and senior financial expertise as firms look to become more resilient with less exposure to risk should events like the COVID-19 pandemic recur.

Each of the spatial public/private partnerships (Costal, Rural and Gatwick Diamond) have highlighted different nuances in the skills challenge, making the case well for local responses around some issues. The coastal economy, for example, is so intrinsically linked to tourism that initiatives to attract UK holidaymakers to the Sussex coast once the majority of residents have been vaccinated should be joined-up with conversations about training opportunities in the hospitality and events sectors. The rural economy needs engineers, marketers and data experts as well as the urban centres, but risks missing out in the county narrative unless specific planning ensures that this isn't the case. The Gatwick Diamond challenges have been highlighted elsewhere in this report, but may remain specific to the area and need to be supported as such.

Engagement and Research

Capacity for collaboration

The influence and reach of West Sussex County Council gives it the capability to leverage resources and infrastructure support more easily than other public bodies in the area. It has a good understanding of its towns, cities and rural regions, the challenges and opportunities for geographies and sectors, access to data through its Insights Team and wide-reaching relationships.

However, large public sector bodies are not necessarily designed to move at speed and much of what is recommended here relies on determined and fast action in the face of inevitable economic decline far into 2021.

Our recommendation is that the Council helps to create the conditions in which other partners can respond at speed, accessing expertise

and scaling up activity that works. Key support mechanisms will be facilitation, co-ordination, resource development, brokerage, access to data and contract management.

The structure of skills support and the relationship with the LEPs across East and West Sussex are somewhat different, however there is an opportunity for some pan-Sussex collaborative thinking on the response to the current economic crisis. A pan Sussex conversation is underway to understand whether there are ways in which the local authorities could work more closely together. There is also the potential to develop joint funding bids and to link with established networks such as the Sussex Chamber Construction Forum and Wired Sussex that might have useful assets less defined by geographical boundaries.



Engagement and Research

Knowledge gaps

What is clear from our engagement and research, is that whilst West Sussex benefits from a range of specialist organisations and individuals working hard to keep skills and employability high on the agenda, there is a limit to how much knowledge is shared.

There are seemingly very few current opportunities for many SME business leaders to meet with strategic decision-makers around the skills agenda on an ongoing basis. Most interventions and initiatives are unknown to potential champions or contributors. The reality is also that most employers do not have the time or capacity to invest headspace into anything that is not business-critical. Structured and flexible spaces for more exchange and co-design need to be created or expanded.

Business leaders told us of ‘initiative fatigue’, and that it was not always clear what local opportunities were available, for whom and where they were coming from. Really useful sector insights published by local authorities or the LEPs are not always being referenced when planning a skills-related intervention or being acknowledged by businesses who assume no such local data exists. A clear barrier to the delivery of some smart, targeted, measurable interventions is the general ‘noise’ around work-based learning, apprenticeships and employer incentives – particularly at the moment as the Plan For Jobs has many facets, with announcements happening at the same time as other COVID-19 related economic stimuli and updates on the public health data as well as new guidance around trading with the EU.

A common ask is for the employment of professionals with a clear brokerage and frontline trouble-shooting role, who can help HR teams to navigate the ‘noise’ and to ensure a shared language around funding, regulation, recruitment and assessment when workforce development incentives or interventions are on offer.

Quick wins vs long-term planning

The activity suggested within each of the thematic areas in the priority matrix (see page 36) are developed from the data reviewed in the first report and from the extensive 1:1 and group engagements since then. We have focused on the gaps in provision created or exacerbated by COVID-19, and veered away from making recommendations about existing and well-established provision. The existing delivery networks and providers, across the county, are already demonstrating exemplary work in many areas. We’re considering where value and capacity can be added at speed.

It is important, in each of the matrix areas, to consider quick wins and more longer-term developmental change through intervention. For example, within weeks there could be a well-designed toolkit of resources, enabling SMEs to fully understand the work-based learning and employment initiatives open to them – designed with one voice and representing provision and guidance from across all networks, colleges, training providers and charities. A longer-term approach to the same challenge is suggested in the potential to create a West Sussex Skills Action Network; continually driven by the needs of business, contributing and feeding into the Coast to Capital Skills Advisory Panel and overseeing designated impartial Talent & Skills Connectors to help businesses make sense of the options available to them.

Funding new ideas

We will look in more detail at funding and leveraging external resources in the next report. It is more useful to draw on existing levers and access to resources for early stage interventions first, upon which match-funding proposals can be later submitted to regional and national authorities.

Landscape of Existing Provision

It cannot be overstated how important it is not to duplicate or diminish existing skills and employability support programmes. What can be continued in / adapted to the pandemic should be. But it was recognised through the engagement and listening phase that much of the effective practice is hidden outside of specific communications circles – and that there is not enough mapping of where, when and how people can get the support they need.

We cannot map all existing provision here, but several examples of effective projects rooted in West Sussex were recurring in engagement conversations. We have considered which of those are already helping to meet the needs of the priority target groups and intervention thematic.

Furthest away from the labour market

The provision sponsored and delivered by the DWP in West Sussex covers large areas of the county, and is undoubtedly critical for the welfare claimants and long-term jobseekers who access it, as well as people looking to access entry-level work opportunities.

DWP partnering with the District and Borough authorities have an ambition to strengthen and build Youth Hubs, and there are now eight open or in development across West Sussex. Resources are finite, but suggestions that these could be real focal points for careers education, advice and guidance; and effective routes for engaging different communities in better understanding careers options available are encouraging. More support and partnership work is needed for the

potential of this to be realised, as well as consideration for all-age hubs in areas of high working-age unemployment.

West Sussex continues to benefit from a range of ESF funded provision – some until 2023. These range from initiatives aimed at supporting armed services children into further education and work to support for NEET young people, Community Grants with which disadvantaged or excluded unemployed and inactive people can buy into skills training packages and business support and business grant programmes. The breadth of the provision, and the gaps it might leave behind when EU funding is replaced, are being mapped by the Sussex Council of Training Providers for 2021.



Landscape of Existing Provision

Work-based learning

There is not always agreement about whether apprenticeships will be the best route out of rising unemployment, but take-up in West Sussex has been consistently high, or stable, in particular sectors. Public services, construction and advanced engineering don't seem to have been significantly affected – but vacancies in industries that usually recruit high numbers of apprentices, such as hospitality and business administration have seen a near full collapse. Nationally, starts did fall dramatically at the start of the pandemic, as outlined in the first report, but there has been some recovery.

The Coastal West Sussex Partnership/Hatch Regeneris report, published in May⁵, draws attention to the levy transfer capacity of local authorities and big businesses, to help offset the training costs to small businesses.

The Coastal West Sussex Partnership/Hatch Regeneris report, published in May⁶, draws attention to the levy transfer capacity of local authorities and big businesses, to help offset the training costs to small businesses. A spokesperson for the Partnership, said:

“*With many young people employed in the worst affected sectors, the challenge now is for local employers, organisations and education providers to work together to create better prospects for young people, which in turn will create better outcomes for business. The Apprenticeship Levy is one answer to that challenge.*”

West Sussex County Council already has a successful Apprenticeship Levy transfer programme, with up to £500k of apprenticeship levy transferred each year to SMEs in identified sectors including STEM and tech businesses as well as the care sector. There is no doubt however

that where businesses are in a position to take on more apprentices, they should – and this should be done as publicly as possible, as the best advocates by far for a robust apprenticeship eco-system are businesses talking to other businesses. The biggest barrier to apprenticeship growth is lack of confidence and understanding, with dogged perceptions that apprenticeships will always be linked to low skills.

Many larger businesses in West Sussex, particularly in professional services, manufacturing and construction, are renewing their commitments to hiring apprentices and trainees (eg. accountants MHA Carpenter Box recruited a record number of young people into its Worthing and Gatwick in-house training academy in October 2020).

However, a new report on the youth labour market from CIPD asked a representative sample of 1,000 employers what their plans are for recruiting 16-24 year olds. 25% saying they are freezing recruitment of trainees in that age group⁷.

The eventual full roll-out and development of the Kickstart programme will naturally ensure that many young people can access six months of paid employment. Support, however, will be needed for businesses at that six-month mark so that the temporary jobs can become longer term jobs - potentially as apprenticeships. There is an opportunity to bust myths about apprenticeships and to address some of the bureaucratic pain-points of employers, with targeted and effective guidance on making that change as seamless as possible.

^{5 & 6} Source: [COVID-19 Impact Assessment Coastal West Sussex](#)

⁷ Source: [Quarter of employers have no plans to hire young people in 2021, research finds](#)

Landscape of Existing Provision

STE(A)M awareness and opportunity

In 2019, a £418,000 grant was awarded to the Coastal West Sussex Partnership by the West Sussex Strategic Investment Fund for an ambitious schools engagement project focused on aspiration in science, technology, engineering, the arts and maths, due to be rolled out across the county. The work paused due to COVID-19 and there is potential for it to be repurposed. The case for STEAM aspiration engagement has already been made well in West Sussex.

The STE(A)M skills needs are greater than that which might be met through a school inspiration project. Expanding software and games design companies; high tech manufacturing and green growth infrastructure projects are all citing major skills gaps when recruiting for more senior roles. A critical shortage of local well-qualified personnel risks holding a number of pre-scale businesses back. It disincentivises businesses from moving into the area whilst feeding into narratives that West Sussex lacks ambition beyond the Gatwick Diamond.

All sectors are undertaking digital transformation processes of varying degree, many of which have been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the manifold increases of remote communication and ecommerce. Put simply, the county needs highly skilled programmes and software engineers; complex problem-solvers, designers and technology entrepreneurs to help the businesses with growth potential to be more competitive.

At the heart of the Coast To Capital LEP skills plan are proposals for an Institute of Technology, a Decarbonisation Academy and an Innovation Centre in Crawley. Networks such as the Manor Royal BID, METALL and Sussex STEM have led or backed technology and engineering skills events, aimed at young people in the county. There is more that can be done to engage adult age groups in hands-on STEM and STEAM career opportunities – with particular spotlights on the science, engineering and technology pathways into diverse local careers such as police forensics, pharmacology, off/onshore renewable energy, automotive, AgriTech and many more.

The LEP investment strategy indicates a clear direction of travel, and has a focus around which to bring people. With the backing of influential science, engineering and manufacturing companies in West Sussex, this could be much bigger and focused on levelling-up the county in the mould of the [Camden STEAM Commission](#) in north London which has enabled giants such as Google, Facebook and The Crick Institute to co-design skills projects with local communities. Or the all-age [Essex 2020](#) programme which has had a strong careers focus in partnership with the police forensics recruiters, universities, space science and telecoms etc. Schools programmes are vital, but so is embedding awareness and opportunity around future skills needs at home, in the community and in existing workplaces.



What Remain the Biggest Challenges?

Engagement conversations have been with a mix of voices and a diversity of perspectives around the priority matrix. These challenges reflect considerations that the conversations brought up are often circumstantial and sometimes contradictory to the data. Structured conversations have taken place with representatives from big corporates, growing businesses and small independents; with local authority economic development teams and learning and skills specialists; with the LEP and the coastal, rural and Gatwick Diamond economic area partnerships; the job centres

and local voluntary sector; with business improvement districts, chambers of commerce, colleges, universities, adult & community learning commissioners and independent training providers.

The highlighted challenge areas below are aggregated from these conversations, and summarise the clearest current hurdles faced in West Sussex when both tackling unemployment and building ambition for a high-growth, high-skill, high-welfare economy.

Undervaluing transferable skills

In the short-term, people who have lost their job will need to find employment in the growth sectors, where there are opportunities. The success of this is reliant on a shared confidence about the needs of the West Sussex labour market, and the support for people transferring from one headspace to another. However, there is a disconnect between businesses saying that they are looking for transferable skills and character, yet the language used in both recruitment and training offers can be fixated on prior technical knowledge and operational tasks of a job.

There are two significant challenges related to this:

a) recruitment jargon

As one employer said: 'Operations Engineer', 'Service Engineer' and 'Mechanical Engineer' can all describe very different job roles or exactly the same thing – and this will vary between businesses.

Another suggested there is often a fixation on listing highly technical tasks, without any attempt to 'sell the sizzle' – highly appropriate candidates will be locked-out of applying at the first stage, because the advert says nothing about progression, training or enrichment.

There are opportunities for job descriptions and recruitment processes to better speak to a wider demographic and more diverse experience-base. Training, advice and toolkits – with evidence to show what works well – can be made available to West Sussex businesses, profiling the latest local intelligence on supply and demand.

Funding for skills training does not always follow the need and transferable skills are often considered secondary. A rolling use of labour market information data might better help to make the case for alignment.

b) there are simply not enough jobs

The uncomfortable truth is that there are periods of over-demand, not met by supply. Much of the county's economic strength is coming from highly specialised, highly automated industries for many of whom the reduction in staff headcount is considered a strategic success. If most businesses are not struggling to fill vacancies – and both the data and the engagement dialogues suggest that right now, outside of health, care and seasonal horticulture, that is the case – then the competition is very fierce for jobseekers.

The jobseekers who will best succeed are those who can demonstrate both relevant technical skills, but also adaptability, excellent communication, resilience and optimism.

What Remain the Biggest Challenges?

Demand / supply

Drilling down slightly further into the gap between who is hiring and who is looking, our interviews have raised a number of recurring mis-alignments in West Sussex that need to be addressed in the medium-to-long term:

- Oversupply of graduates for high growth sectors, but not necessarily best-fit
- Oversupply of non-graduates in vulnerable hospitality and retail sectors
- Current vulnerable sectors will bounce back, but not if all talent is drained out this year
- Undersupply of labour in high headcount public and private providers of core services
- Undersupply of high skilled specialists in high growth sectors

Long-term vision vs projects and interventions

There are different skills boards, strategy groups and forums operating within the county wholly or partially where they cover a wider geography. For example, The Coastal West Sussex Skills and Enterprise Group represents the voice of businesses and skills partners across the coastal region and has been successful in winning funding for initiatives and encouraging partnership working. Skills development and economic growth are strategically linked to place and narrative, but conversations are not joined up as well as they can be.

With the level of investment planned for Crawley, there is potential for a substantial transformation over the next few years. However, at the moment, clear plans to maximise the impact for the rest of the county over next decade are under-developed. The investment ambition will need to be matched with commitment of businesses, educators and local government to amplify the opportunity and realise its full potential through recovery and beyond.

Part of the systemic change needed is in the recognition that skills and workforce development are as critical to business success as sales and marketing. A lack of training for early stage businesses in developing a workforce can be addressed in the design of new business support programmes as they emerge. The C2C Growth Hub, universities, chambers of commerce and the developing Business & Intellectual Property Centre facilities in libraries all have a key role to play.

A tangible pan-county Skills Action Network with an investment and delivery remit to boost employment and higher level skills in West Sussex, could be the locus that brings all existing strands of thinking together. In forming such a group, it would be important to recognise the variety of groups that already exist and work well across the county, and not to duplicate or undermine the position of these groups.

What Remain the Biggest Challenges?

Engagement of new jobseekers

Perceived stigma around universal credit will mean that many people are not picked-up in the system; and the volume, speed and depth of need is putting an unprecedented strain on the support infrastructure.

There is no existing, intelligent one-stop-shop tool that guides jobseekers through a series of questions from which it can match them to training, live job vacancies or appropriate 1:1 careers guidance. National technology developers are using investment from endowment grant-giving bodies, such as Nesta and UFI VocTech to fast-track platforms like this. A West Sussex consortium could commission a localised version of this technology in a relatively short space of time, without having to create something from scratch.

A blend of face-to-face and accurate digital job/training opportunity brokerage is needed in order to meet demand. Specific is support

needed for over-50s as well as demographic groups in impacted areas such as Crawley and Arun who could be at high risk of dropping out of the labour market completely.

A centralised tool, that signposts out to the most appropriate partner, can also mitigate against language, accessibility and interpretation barriers.

For specific areas of learning need, such as in digital skills, there are no standardised definitions of what this actually means for a user looking to improve their own knowledge levels (ie people don't know what they don't know, so have trouble searching for the right thing). Colleges have told us that this is resulting in low – or even no -take-up of existing provision. There is no clear, real-time map of learning provision across the county, accessible to all.



What Will Have the Biggest Impact?

It is at this point that we can start to narrow the wide-ranging conversation about immediate and long-term needs into the matrix of priorities – which, in turn helps to identify a smaller number of high impact interventions. Cross-cutting projects that draw on existing energy and

resources will be best-placed to pick up some new impetus, alongside some new approaches to strategy and the way organisations work together.

A local and regional response

In the first report, we compared the national to regional and local statistics on the labour market, sector resilience, availability of jobs and opportunities for different demographics.

Underpinning all critical findings is the reality that the lived experience in West Sussex is not equal. A cross-county plan needs local action, with – for example - targeted support to get the growing numbers of self-employed in Crawley and Adur access to key enterprise training and skills development; specialist careers coaching for the over 50s in Chichester; a campaign to promote transferable skills as an asset with different coastal and rural communities – and other interventions with a clear focus.

Satellite hubs for engagement will drive the skills recovery, utilising FE and HE campuses, but also the new DWP Youth Hubs, libraries, community spaces and business networks. The COVID-19 testing and vaccination programmes, whilst complex, are creating new blueprints for how a central problem can be solved with local nuance and responsive expertise.

The Department for Education's white paper on 'Skills for Jobs' and Further Education, published in January 2021, emphasises the focus on bringing more small businesses into the apprenticeship marketplace. Changes to the levy transfer will now enable larger employers to pledge specific amounts of their funds for transfer to smaller businesses – with a new matching service so that small employers can find levy funds easily.

Perhaps most striking is the intended roll out of Local Skills Improvement Plans and a more regional, action-led approach to skills delivery, if not fully devolving funding in the way that has been requested by some. A new Strategic Development Fund will be piloted in a number of areas of the country. In initial Trailblazer local areas, colleges will be able to apply for funding to support identified priorities as they work with chambers and other business representative organisations to develop Local Skills Improvement Plans. In other areas, colleges will need to demonstrate that they have worked with representative employer organisations and received endorsement for their bids.

Through our engagement sessions we have noted that a recurring barrier to mass apprenticeship investment by employers in sectors such as construction, the creative sector and tech, is the inflexibility of contracting and training that does not recognise project-based working patterns. Eventually a Skills Action Network, with employers from across all major West Sussex growth sectors, including those with more erratic or seasonal workflows, could explore solutions such as the establishment of an Apprentice Training Association, or similar agency model. These companies employ apprentices directly on behalf of other businesses, taking away a lot of that risk. A scheme such as [TrAC](#), which doesn't cover West Sussex, could be a good model for smaller construction, engineering and logistics firms.

What Will Have the Biggest Impact?

A local and regional response (continued)

There is also an opportunity for this group to position West Sussex as an early adopter as the DfE rolls-out new flexibilities. The following passages from the January white paper are of particular significance, echoing what we have been told:

“ We are increasing our focus on sectors with existing and emerging skills needs, guided by the Government’s national skills priorities. We are already engaging with the construction, manufacturing, public, health and social care, digital and creative sectors to understand and tackle the specific barriers these sectors face in making full use of apprenticeships.

“ We have heard from the construction and creative sectors that one of the barriers is the varied and flexible employment patterns that mean an apprentice and their employer are unable to commit to the minimum 12-month apprenticeship duration. We want to support apprentices and employers to make use of apprenticeships in sectors where short-term, project-based employment is the norm, and we will seek to develop our online apprenticeship service to make it easier for this to happen⁸.

See matrix of priority interventions on page 36:

Supporting wider unemployed | 18-24 year olds

- Youth hubs, libraries and voluntary sector spaces to be given tools to support applications and access to training, kickstart and apprenticeships

STEM & digital | 18-24 year olds

- Public STEM skills awareness campaigns – highlighting real-time opportunities in West Sussex, mapped to pathways and progressions

STEM & digital | 24 + year olds

- Use the proposed Institute of Technology and Decarbonisation Academy planning to prepare satellite STEM engagement hubs around the county

Start-ups & SMEs | 24 + year olds

- Targeted enterprise and business start-up skills in rural and coastal communities, linking entrepreneurs to wider regional growth support

Growth sectors | 18-24 year olds

- Establish local apprentice employment agencies/associations to boost numbers and flexibility in project-based sectors

Start-ups & SMEs | Current workforce

- Lobby for investment in new College Business Centres that bridge industry intelligence with learning outcomes

⁸ Source: [Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth](#)

What Will Have the Biggest Impact?

Balancing support for growth sectors and stalled sectors/self-employed

For the next 18 months, there is an emergency focus on matching the newly unemployed into available work. All the data shows us that the opportunities will mainly be in the construction sector, with supermarkets or out-of-town retailers, some manufacturing, some logistics, technology and in health & care. West Sussex horticulture and viticulture may also be well advantaged by being outside of the EU single market if global demand for English wine, for example, continues to grow.

Councils, the LEP and employer networks could campaign together with one clear identity to bust myths and to promote sustainable careers in these sectors with available work. Employers tell us there is a risk of over-supply if this is not joined-up, but this could be overcome through a sharing of intelligence and a real-time labour market information dashboard, with decision-makers all taught how to use it.

The stalled sectors - principally hospitality, leisure, tourism, culture, heritage, independent retail and events – will potentially see a skills drain as people have to replace employment quickly, in other sectors. It needs to be acknowledged that many of these sectors rely on a self-employed workforce, or gig economy workers, who have not received the same level of financial support that limited companies have been able to claim. But smart partnerships and a campaign focus on transferable skills can ensure that local messaging recognises that this is not permanent and that there is confidence in West Sussex's impacted industries. By widening the focus on transferable skills, and encouraging people to do what is right for now without undermining their years' of prior technical experience and training, there will be broader buy-in to campaign messages. There is an opportunity to be on the front-foot, with councils and training providers working in partnership with Experience West Sussex, cultural education

partnerships and a range of other partners, to present the expected landscape in 18 months, when restrictions start to ease and tourism hits record highs.

Community Asset projects have already proved their worth in lockdown. A pilot project between Health Education England and a number of voluntary sector organisations – for example Rest Less (who work with thousands of economically active over-50s) and armed force veterans charities, have seen carefully co-designed careers information on growth sectors spread through membership communities and peer groups. This has been insight-led, as the trusted charities are able to collect in-depth information on their members' employment situation – leading to tailored resources about careers support available. This work can be duplicated into different sectors, and is low cost to deliver quickly.

The government, in the January white paper, have also signaled a new push for learning hubs driven by business intelligence and innovations that more closely link learning to economic growth. In 2021, the DfE will be appointing an initial tranche of 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

What Will Have the Biggest Impact?

Balancing support for growth sectors and stalled sectors (continued)

There is an opportunity here to identify some key sectors to back in other key locations around the county, that complement the focus on manufacturing and the Gatwick eco-system in Crawley. Business centres

on viticulture, coastal travel and tourism, horticulture and automotive could be possible avenues to explore, bridging the gap between fast-paced industry adaptation and high-quality vocational training.

See matrix of priority interventions on page 36:

Growth sectors | 18-24 year olds

- Targeted campaigns linked to myth-busting, awareness raising and aspiration-building in health & care, construction, rural business, logistics and STEM

Growth sectors | 18-24 year olds

- Community Asset engagement programmes; enabling sectors with high levels of vacancies to co-design recruitment drives with large community or volunteering networks

Upskilling & reskilling | 18-24 year olds

- The stalled sectors to engage with current students on 'bounceback skills', mapping current training to future careers as restrictions ease

STEM & digital | 24 + year olds

- Use the proposed Institute of Technology and Decarbonisation Academy planning to prepare satellite STEM engagement hubs around the county

Upskilling & reskilling | 24 + year olds

- Specific campaign on transferable skills – promoting care (empathy and customer-focus), coding (analytics and information literacy), communication (presentation and teaching) as relevant skillsets for almost any sector

Supporting wider unemployed | Current workforce

- Real-time labour market dashboard for West Sussex, showing rolling data on hot and cold spots for jobs, vacancy key words and unemployment figures

What Will Have the Biggest Impact?

A turbo-charged offer for SMEs and micro-businesses

There is more funded support for small businesses at the moment than there has been in recent years, as many ERDF-funded and business network-led projects respond to the crisis and focus on helping businesses with pivoting, adapting, surviving and thriving.

An SME in West Sussex can currently access free support from the ERDF Chichester University Business Hothouse programme, Coast To Capital Growth Hub and recovery funding, training and mentoring schemes from chambers of commerce – including the Brighton Chamber Reset. Restart programme with the Business & IP Centre; the BRITE innovation programme from Plus X and University of Brighton; the WSCC Recover and Rise programme, Sussex Innovation Centre and many more.

The emphasis in these programmes is on recovery and sustainability through business re-modeling, accessing grants and pivoting products and services. By linking these interventions more closely to the West Sussex skills agenda and to training offers where current funding agreements allow - creating more support for entrepreneurs around workforce development with a specific toolkit – there will be less of a disconnect between growth and skills. More SMEs will connect their own recovery with the opportunities and incentives provided through apprenticeships and the Kickstart scheme.

A complementary companion to these programmes, could be a free consultancy offer to support recruitment, particularly focused on framing job opportunities without jargon and widening the pool of prospective applicants.

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced many small businesses to accelerate their digital plans, moving sales, engagement and communications online – but for many this has been a steep uphill climb with limited capacity or internal skills, jeopardising the business survival.

The neighbouring South East LEP are investing £750,000 specifically in digital transformation support and grants for small business, with an emphasis on upskilling around online sales, digital communications and data security. In West Sussex, the District and Borough authorities have agreed to work together to kick-start digital upskilling activities, with funding awarded for a range of digital programmes. Initiatives include Digital Champions to work with SME's supporting them in their digital journey, upskilling for the Local Authority workforce to better understand the challenges of digital innovation and targeted digital support for the tourism industry. This is a positive start and programmes to help SMEs to capitalise on the current digital disruption, and to invest time in training at the same time as investing in infrastructure could be further developed.

What Will Have the Biggest Impact?

A turbo-charged offer for SMEs and micro-businesses (continued)

A cross-sector rapid business skills programme for West Sussex could offer specific training in moving a business in to digital sustainability, using automation and the fundamentals of analytics. Part of the

wrap-around support could involve buddying the least digital-ready businesses with local ICT service providers, ecommerce specialists and digital marketers.

See matrix of priority interventions on page 36:

STEM & digital | 24 + year olds

- Use the proposed Institute of Technology and Decarbonisation Academy planning to prepare satellite STEM engagement hubs around the county

Upskilling & reskilling | 18-24 year olds

- High quality digital short courses and micro-credentials (eg digital badges) to fit local need

Start-ups & SMEs | 18-24 year olds

- Skills development toolkit (on opportunities and benefit of local training, apprenticeships and levy transfer, kickstart and funded internships) available via all business support programmes

Start-ups & SMEs | 18-24 year olds

- Targeted training for entrepreneurs in making most of green economy and digital infrastructure skills as part of growth plan

Start-ups & SMEs | 18-24 year olds

- Recruitment bootcamps – free support to companies to make recruitment campaigns and job description language more inclusive and appealing

Start-ups & SMEs | 24 + year olds

- Targeted enterprise and business start-up skills in rural and coastal communities, linking entrepreneurs to wider regional growth support

STEM & digital | Current workforce

- A cross-sector rapid business skills and digital buddying programme for West Sussex SMEs

What Will Have the Biggest Impact?

The Gatwick Effect

This is a big opportunity for the County Council and others to work more strategically with partners around new initiatives in Crawley and Manor Royal Business District.

As well as a vision for creating satellite STEM hubs to maximise the impact of the new Institute of Technology (if successful), the scale of the challenge in Crawley means that immediate resources should be made available to partnerships working on skills and jobs recovery. Whether or not funding is secured for the Institute of Technology, a programme of hubs to support tech innovation across the county would be a good outcome of the proposal, and could feed into the College Business Centres and Local Skills Improvement Plans.

The data is clear that the most devastating impact will be on young people and the previously long-term employed now suddenly out of work. From careers-focused Youth Hub surgeries to lobbying around how Adult Education Budget funding might be used to support bite-sized accreditations, there are some quick-action initiatives for cross-sector partnerships to have in focus first.

The impact of COVID-19 on Gatwick Airport is severe, and many analysts believe the damage will be felt for a long time, especially in the supply-chain and service communities that have grown up in Crawley and Horsham as a direct result of airport-related economy. Conversely, once international travel resumes there is expected to be a sharp bounceback in demand for the dependent eco-system, perhaps with more vigour than before, even if it might take four to five years to see full flight volumes again.

The short-term need is to highlight vacancies, training and pastoral support for the mass unemployed, recognising the particular challenge of such high demand in a concentrated area. A purpose built, or adapted tech platform, designed to provide a critical starting-point for dense populations out of work could be part of the answer.

Investment from Nesta has accelerated a number of technology-driven tools to support jobs brokerage and personalised matching, with back-end development meaning it can be adapted for specific locations, community needs and growth sectors.

Sortyourfuture.com, for example, has been selected to participate in two Challenge Prizes run by NESTA and funded by DfE and DWP. These prizes are focused on organisations delivering solutions with the potential to impact the National Retraining Scheme cohort (those whose roles are most at risk from automation and other economic changes) and young people whose employment prospects have been adversely impacted by COVID-19.

What has been created is a one-stop-shop for career advice and support tailored to individual users' needs 16-35. Combining a self-directed technology driven approach with personal 1:1 support delivered remotely at the point of need. The new technology enables connections between jobseekers and employers, live job and course listings, resources and access around career transition support, skills gap analysis mapped to training opportunities and labour market information with role comparisons (current supply/demand, average salary, risk of automation etc).

What Will Have the Biggest Impact?

The Gatwick Effect (continued)

This software is being developed at speed with public and private investment. A partnership with a lead authority or network in the Gatwick Diamond area could result in a fully customised Gatwick version drawing down local data on a very customer-focused platform, that is then drawn out more widely to other hotspots.

The medium-to-long-term skills opportunities, driven by the airport, is for more and bigger knowledge exchanges and collaborative vocational training design. The airport has recently shared its real-time flight data with tech entrepreneurs and data scientists in order to unlock potential new innovations and apps – could this be replicated with skills? Drawing more on the airport's assets once recovery is fully established, a new

approach to collaborative course design for adult learners could see deeper partnerships between the airport technical teams and the GBMET aerospace training centre in Shoreham, for example.

Stansted Airport College in north Essex is a purpose-built STEM skills and apprenticeships centre developed by Harlow College to sit at the end of the Stansted runway. Can models like this be used as inspiration to create a virtual Gatwick upskill and reskill centre across the county – covering everything from environmental weather monitoring to groundskeeping, flight crew to food and drink retail, security to data – delivered in partnership with FE and HE providers?

See matrix of priority interventions on page 36:

STEM & digital | 24 + year olds

- Use the proposed Institute of Technology and Decarbonisation Academy planning to prepare satellite STEM engagement hubs around the county

Upskilling & reskilling | Current workforce

- Support for larger employers around an all-age workforce, with resources for upskilling and reskilling the over 50s

Upskilling & reskilling | 18-24 year olds

- Virtual training and knowledge exchange programme for adults and older workers, focused on Gatwick Airport's assets

Wider unemployed | 18-24 year olds

- Localised online brokerage tools that match skillsets and interests to live training and job vacancies

What Will Have the Biggest Impact?

Focusing on age

The age profile of new universal credit claimants is broadly similar across the county though Crawley has the highest proportion of 25-49 year olds and Chichester the highest over 50+. The highest % increase in claimants in all districts and boroughs are amongst the 16-24 year olds.

Particular concern is growing around the large number of prospective apprentices and undergraduates that may now not have a course/job offer, and will find it very difficult to find employment without any prior experience. There is no available data on how many this affects, but interventions that ensure this cohort do not miss out on opportunities or skills in the long-term are worth considering as a matter of priority.

A briefing series from The [Sutton Trust](#) from July 29th, concludes that the economic impacts of the COVID-19 crises will have “considerable and lasting consequences for social mobility” with a widening of existing inequalities and the increase in the number of children growing up in poverty. The evidence has demonstrated the most affected group will be disadvantaged students at every stage of their life - early years, schools, apprenticeships, access to university and into the world of work.

As a response to this, Youth Employment UK launched their ‘[Good Youth Employment Charter](#)’, Youth Friendly Employer digital badge and #1000Opportunities campaign in September 2020. The aim is to get the rate of NEET young people back to pre-pandemic levels by October 2021, which relies on UK employers creating 1,000 additional employment, training or education opportunities per day for 16-24 year olds. The concern is that without intervention, there will be 1.1m more NEET young people by the end of 2021.

A swift intervention could be established to offer transition support and impartial careers guidance to young people completing a six month Kickstart placement without having secured follow-on employment. Existing resources could be built-upon, with a pool of experienced work mentors and career professionals working 1:1 with anyone who is work-ready, but hasn’t found a long-term vacancy.

West Sussex has a range of expert organisations and intervention teams, supporting NEET young people – but if the worst-case scenario is realised, then more capacity will be needed and a Good Youth Employment Charter, backed by 1:1 coaching and brokerage into stepping-stone work placements and micro-credentials mapped to career aims. Specific support for young people has been discussed in other sections in this report.

A flexible maths, English and digital literacy functional skills offer would be ideal for any newly unemployed 18-24 year old or mature worker who does not hold a level 2 qualification. Year-round programmes, at different times of day, that can be completed as an intensive block or split over several weeks would be very valuable as part of a wider learning offer.

There is also a case to resume original plans for an all-age workforce programme that enables businesses to be more inclusive in their development planning, but also adding specific resources to support West Sussex residents aged over 50s. This would become a dual approach to support, focused on the individuals who are being made redundant or needing to work flexibly - as well as the businesses who might be in a position to offer more comprehensive incentives and training packages that retain or attract a more mature workforce.

What Will Have the Biggest Impact?

Focusing on age (continued)

The startling data, presented in our first report, indicates that workers over the age of 50 (especially women), are facing higher-than-usual levels of redundancy, with claims for universal credit doubling in that demographic. West Sussex districts such as Mid Sussex and Chichester have seen the highest drop in employment for the over 50s since April 2020.

A comprehensive package of training, marketing tools and incentives for high growth employers and business sectors was in development but cancelled because of the pandemic, with some KPIs around all age working and the numbers of over 50s recruited and retrained.

The preliminary work on this could be picked-up again as part of the recovery.

Specific guides on how to switch from careers in hospitality, retail and aviation into care, online retail, logistics could be distributed through community asset organisations and the DWP to those who have been recently made unemployed – produced in partnership with local networks such as [Flexibility Matters](#) and [Aging 2.0](#). The University of Sussex is also launching an Ageing Well programme, focused on digital lives and will be using its research to help businesses and third sector organisations make better decisions on support for the over 50s.



What Will Have the Biggest Impact?

Focusing on age (continued)

See matrix of priority interventions on page 36:

Upskilling & reskilling | 24 + year olds

- New responsive AEB-funded 21st century skills programme focused on demographics most adversely affected by job-losses – working mothers, over 50s, BAME and communities in Arun, Chichester and Crawley

Supporting wider unemployed | 18-24 year olds

- Youth hubs, libraries and voluntary sector spaces to be given tools to support applications and access to training, kickstart and apprenticeships

Supporting wider unemployed | 24 + year olds

- Careers coaching and training support for over-50s

Growth sectors | 24 + year olds

- Regular knowledge exchange forum to join-up DWP-funded guidance and support with sector representatives

Supporting wider unemployed | 24 + year olds

- Targeted resources and careers coaching for demographics most adversely affected by job-losses – working mothers, BAME and communities in Arun, Chichester and Crawley

Growth sectors | Current workforce

- Talent & Skills Connectors – employed to broker and connect businesses with impartial, simplified skills and workforce development offers

Upskilling & reskilling | Current workforce

- Transition support for young people finishing Kickstart scheme to access apprenticeships or further full-time learning

Supporting wider unemployed | Current workforce

- Campaign for businesses to join the Good Youth Employment Charter, guaranteeing a minimum level of support, training and security – and fairness in recruiting

Supporting wider unemployed | 24 + year olds

- Flexible maths, English and digital literacy functional skills programme, with multiple delivery options and formats

What Will Have the Biggest Impact?

Targeting support in the right places

One of the main functions of a Skills Action Network, as we see it, is to design and measure the way in which targeting interventions is reducing economic exclusion and promoting social mobility. The 'Lifetime Skills Guarantee' from April is aimed at giving adults the chance to take free college courses valued by employers, but in-line with other intervention priorities if this is to be an inclusive offer it needs to be developed across a number of organisations and communicated with one voice.

Other knowledge exchange forums can look exclusively at inclusive recovery, drawing on expertise from academia, community organisations and public health.

New business support programmes in East Sussex are focused squarely on female and BAME-led businesses – increasing their confidence in digital transformation, workforce development and marketing. Sussex networks such as The Thrive Effect and Mumpreneurs are creating resources for working mothers, and would be effective partners as part of a wider West Sussex programme of inclusive skills development and professional development.

We will need to focus some support specifically for women:

- It may be harder for some workers, disproportionately women, to work from home due to problems with childcare and schooling of children
- Women work in larger numbers in lower paid roles in hard hit areas such as retail and hospitality
- Flexible working, and flexible delivery of training is particularly important in supporting women in developing their careers and live work balance

We will need to focus some support specifically for under-represented ethnic groups:

- Local provision is crucial, understanding local needs and communities and the fact that in some areas of the county, deprivation has continued for generations and is proving a hard nut to crack
- For many BAME jobseekers, the importance of community leaders and delivery of support services in community venues and information shared via community assets was highlighted



What Will Have the Biggest Impact?

Targeting support in the right places (continued)

Employed Talent & Skills Connectors could be impartial brokers, working closely with businesses and training providers to widen access to opportunities, demystify funding, create shared languages so that jobseekers are not put-off by jargon or codes. A key part of this role could be around social mobility, and mapping areas of need with areas of opportunity – liaising with public service officers around barrier such as transport, childcare or digital access.

Where training providers have responded to market demand, and developed new programmes, these also need support to be put in front of the right people. The nursing degree and degree apprenticeship programme at the universities of Brighton and Chichester, for example, have been developed with the sector to meet local skills gaps, but are not yet fully subscribed.

The Community Assets project from Health Education England has already tested effective models of working with community organisations that support BAME communities and young people as well as those who work with hundreds of over 50s to promote careers in health & care (with insights on what language does/doesn't work). This model can be translated into any growth sector, with the focus on engaging people who access certain community membership groups but not others.

During engagement, it was made clear that the Adult Education Budget (AEB) and adult & community learning provision has scope to be more responsive and could be an initial area to be examined by a Skills Action Network, mapping the provision as the funding will allow to the specific needs in high employment sectors.

See matrix of priority interventions on page 36:

STEM & digital | 18-24 year olds

- Public STEM skills awareness campaigns – highlighting real-time opportunities in West Sussex, mapped to pathways and progressions

Growth sectors | 24 + year olds

- Regular knowledge exchange forum to join-up DWP-funded guidance and support with sector representatives

STEM & digital | 18-24 year olds

- Open access, specific and targeted digital skills training around different levels of need – delivered online and in the community

Upskilling & reskilling | 18-24 year olds

- High quality digital short courses and micro-credentials (eg digital badges) to fit local need

What Will Have the Biggest Impact?

The Green Economy

In November 2020, the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy announced a Green Jobs Taskforce, responsible for creating 2 million new jobs by 2030 as part of the wider Plan For Jobs package. The UK Taskforce will be co-chaired by Chichester MP and skills minister Gillian Keegan.

The full details are still yet to be released, but it is clear that the early phase will be to create a comprehensive audit of infrastructure investment and planned decarbonisation programmes over the next nine years – mapping specific jobs and numbers of jobs to each.

This is an immediate project that can be delivered at a local level, allocating target numbers of long-term, high-skilled and entry level jobs to different parts of the county with an initial assessment of likely training needs, likely employers and any potential barriers or exclusions.

With the Rampion offshore windfarm extension in consultation, planned rewilding and conservation projects, and Thakeham Homes' pledge for completely carbon neutral housebuilding by 2025 as just a few examples, the green jobs concept has to be mapped out into some tangible and forecasted, so that some success metrics can be established.

Proposed investment into a Decarbonisation Academy by the Coast To Capital LEP will help to accelerate thinking and the planning will benefit from a detailed green jobs forecast.

See matrix of priority interventions on page 36:

Growth sectors | Current workforce

- Audit of planned and likely green growth projects over next nine years, mapped to employment options and training needs

STEM & digital | 24 + year olds

- Use the proposed Institute of Technology and Decarbonisation Academy planning to prepare satellite STEM engagement hubs around the county



What Will Have the Biggest Impact?

High level STEM skills

As well as large high impact interventions, focused on sectors, places and delivery formats, there is a need for a smaller number of extremely targeted skills development initiatives that work with a handful of individuals over a 2-3 year period.

Despite investment in state-of-the-art facilities at the University of Chichester's Bognor Campus and by FE colleges across the county, and growing high tech, high growth business clusters, West Sussex's ability to attract the cream of talent is limited and is an inhibitor to sustainable growth.

A training partnership between FE and HE, with backing from business and strategic authorities, could create a number of valuable STEM bursaries that are awarded to individuals who choose to stay in West Sussex rather than out-commute to London or leave for further afield.

Different cash awards could be targeted at 8-10 individuals per year who meet strict criteria around innovation, knowledge exchange, commitment to learning in different fields of practice from programming to electrical engineering. There would need to be net benefit to local industry, as well as some commitment to working with schools and colleges as part of the Enterprise Adviser programme or a similar work inspiration role. A minimum number of awards each year could also be ringfenced for people with protected characteristics, enabling and encouraging candidates from all backgrounds and lived experiences to apply for a bursary.



What Will Have the Biggest Impact?

High level STEM skills (continued)

As part of the public STEM skills campaign, a podcast and video series could spotlight on a message such as 'ordinary people doing extraordinary things' in West Sussex, particularly highlighting people with protected characteristics who are making waves in high level, high growth sectors.



See matrix of priority interventions on page 36:

STEM & digital | 24 + year olds

- High level STEM skills bursaries

STEM & digital | 24 + year olds

- Use the proposed Institute of Technology and Decarbonisation Academy planning to prepare satellite STEM engagement hubs around the county

STEM & digital | 18-24 year olds

- Public STEM skills awareness campaigns – highlighting real-time opportunities in West Sussex, mapped to pathways and progressions

Growth sectors | Current workforce

- Talent & Skills Connectors – employed to broker and connect businesses with impartial, simplified skills and workforce development offers

What Will Have the Biggest Impact?

Additional thoughts on upskilling and reskilling, in line with what is needed

The pandemic has accelerated the conversation around supporting the development of transferable skillsets over, and alongside, technical skills – especially when people are needing to convert the language of practical knowledge in one sector into another, or from one way of doing things to another.

Programmes would be very helpful to support underpinning transferable character skills in the context of employment and enterprise, where local authorities working closely with education and business partners.

Sector-led campaigns would see employers and training providers speaking with one voice, making clear the expectations and opportunities, busting myths and laying out the pathways from wherever people are now to their dream career.

Scaling-up short-term, high profile inspiration campaigns (eg [Proud To Care](#)) to promote opportunities in sectors with unfilled vacancies – with additional pre-employment support, bootcamps, jobs-matching and recruitment surgeries provided by a network of CEIAG and employability support services.

A six-month collaborative print, digital and social media campaign, demonstrating a joined-up approach with user experience at the core. This employer-led communications campaign could use multiple channels to make clear the opportunities in construction, logistics and health & social care – centred around a one-stop process of support that takes people from redundancy to retention.

A tight, simple and focused set of messages would be underpinned by existing support from DWP, careers advice agencies, community organisations, colleges/training providers and local authorities – but all with extra capacity.

Local media such as Latest TV – which has regular viewing figures of c.118,000 per month from citizens between Brighton and Chichester – and BBC Radio Sussex could have a bigger role in developing a communications plan, extending reach and targeting newly unemployed.

Funding to employ short-term campaign advocates could be sought, appointing people with credibility as industry professionals and good communicators, to deliver key messages across local media.

Digital and ICT upskilling is needed across the county, with an effort that tracks people from point of entry into long term employment. A co-ordinated West Sussex offer could publish clear menus of training options, linking key digital skills to opportunities in employment and enterprise, recognising that different people need different levels of help and training at different points in their career life-cycle.

As set out in the first report, and echoed again in our recent engagement sessions, many employers are looking to upskill and reskill new and existing staff quickly, using bite-sized and short intensive courses, as the business adapts. Micro-credentials are mini-qualifications or units that demonstrate skills, knowledge, and/or experience in a given subject area or capability.

What Will Have the Biggest Impact?

Additional thoughts on upskilling and reskilling, in line with what is needed (continued)

Building on the early success of digital badges and the Brighton Cities of Learning pilot and programmes offered by [FutureLearn](#), [Google Garage](#) and [Coursera](#) – there is a rise in efficacy and credibility for people who want to re-train or develop (often digital) skillsets for new employment. There is also a need for people in work, to develop new resiliences and adaptations given how far many workplaces have had to change.

Colleges and training providers are also providing an increasing number of short courses as part of a retraining and upskilling offer. Micro-credentials, short courses and digital accreditations are especially useful when helping job-seekers to articulate their experience and character as well as any formal qualifications. From our engagement sessions, correlated with labour market data since April, we are suggesting that character skills be grouped into three broad areas:

- **caring** (empathy, people skills, customer experience; well-being)
- **coding** (problem-solving, technical development, innovation)
- **communicating** (teaching, presenting, story-telling, marketing)

By these terms, we do not mean caring skills are just for jobs in social care or that coding means developing software. These are non-technical skillsets, driven by experience, aptitude and attitude, that cross the key careers pathways where there is biggest need - and apply to every sector.

Digital badges are the most widely-used micro-credentials that symbolise learning achievements at any level - knowledge, skills, certificates, diplomas, certifications or licenses. Each badge contains a set of metadata defined by the issuer about the skills being recognised, and the accomplishments achieved.

The [Cities of Learning](#) programme pilot in Brighton is already underway, with a digital infrastructure and commissioned research underpinning evidence of need. This project, run by Future Creators, is centred around the awarding of digital badges (against a 'skills spine') that recognise individual experience, character and effort as validated by local trusted employers and public services.

Micro-credentials can be issued by, and co-designed with, West Sussex businesses, education providers, employment support organisations and local authorities. Colleges and specialist digital skills training providers have assessment expertise, as well as space and qualified instructors, but will benefit from investment and scale.

West Sussex is not currently included within a Digital Skills Partnership, but the county council could work closely with the LEP to lobby for inclusion in the next round. A medium-term ambition for an inclusive, large-scale training programme could utilise a hybrid of online and community spaces in order to support citizens to ensure their understanding and competencies are working at a minimum level.

Local training providers and expert organisations are already seeing some success – from the [Citizens Online](#) inclusion programmes for SMEs and individuals to the [Creative Process Digital accelerator](#) offering funded industry-led L2 Digital Skills for Work qualifications in Sussex, and [Wired Sussex's virtual skills summit](#) in May 2020 focusing on digital leadership, diversity and professional development.

The Government's '[Skills Toolkit](#)' is also proving to be popular as an online micro-credential site, with free, short courses available from Google and Future Learn, amongst others.

The Matrix of Priorities

We have distilled the breadth and depth of the ideas developed through research and engagement into 34 headline priority interventions. These focus on the biggest identified gaps and the greatest expected impact as the primary considerations. Finite capacity and resources mean that it is unlikely for each headline to become a full intervention, project or plan - but a pipeline of evidence-based ideas is a valuable starting point for any partnership or delivery organisation in West Sussex considering where to direct energy over the coming months.

TARGET AUDIENCE	Growth sectors	STEM & digital	Upskilling & reskilling	Start-ups & SMEs	Wider unemployed
18-24 year olds	<p>Targeted campaigns linked to myth-busting, awareness raising and aspiration-building in health & care, construction, rural business, logistics and STEM</p> <p>----</p> <p>Clear, one-stop access point with information on apprenticeships and levy transfer, kickstart and funded internships</p> <p>----</p> <p>Establish local apprentice employment agencies/associations to boost numbers and flexibility in project-based sectors</p>	<p>Open access, specific and targeted digital skills training around different levels of need – delivered online and in the community</p> <p>----</p> <p>Public STEM skills awareness campaigns – highlighting real-time opportunities in West Sussex, mapped to pathways and progressions</p>	<p>High quality digital short courses and micro-credentials (eg digital badges) to fit local need</p> <p>----</p> <p>The stalled sectors to engage with current students on 'bounceback skills', mapping current training to future careers as restrictions ease</p> <p>----</p> <p>Virtual training and knowledge exchange programme, focused on Gatwick Airport's assets</p>	<p>Skills development toolkit (on opportunities and benefit of local training, apprenticeships and levy transfer, kickstart and funded internships) available via all business support programmes</p>	<p>Youth hubs, libraries and voluntary sector spaces to be given tools to support applications and access to training, kickstart and apprenticeships</p> <p>----</p> <p>Localised online brokerage tools that match skillsets and interests to live training and job vacancies</p> <p>----</p> <p>Campaign for businesses to join the Good Youth Employment Charter, guaranteeing a minimum level of support, training and security – and fairness in recruiting</p>
24 +	<p>Regular knowledge exchange forum to join-up DWP-funded guidance and support with sector representatives</p> <p>----</p> <p>Community Asset engagement programmes; enabling sectors with high levels of vacancies to co-design recruitment drives with large community or volunteering networks</p>	<p>Targeted advanced STEM training and incentives for high level workforce; retaining out-commuters and attracting new talent into the county</p> <p>----</p> <p>Use Institute of Technology and Decarbonisation Academy planning to prepare satellite STEM engagement hubs around the county</p> <p>----</p> <p>High level STEM skills bursaries</p>	<p>Specific campaign on transferable skills – promoting care (empathy and customer-focus), coding (analytics and information literacy), communication (presentation and teaching) as relevant skillsets for almost any sector</p> <p>----</p> <p>New responsive AEB-funded 21st century skills programme focused on demographics most adversely affected by job-losses – working mothers, over 50s, BAME and communities in Arun, Chichester and Crawley</p>	<p>Targeted training for entrepreneurs in making most of green economy and digital infrastructure skills as part of growth plan</p> <p>----</p> <p>Recruitment bootcamps – free support to companies to make recruitment campaigns and job description language more inclusive and appealing</p> <p>----</p> <p>Targeted enterprise and business start-up skills in rural and coastal communities, linking entrepreneurs to wider regional growth support</p>	<p>Careers coaching and training support for over-50s</p> <p>----</p> <p>Targeted resources and careers coaching for demographics most adversely affected by job-losses – working mothers, over 50s, BAME and communities in Arun, Chichester and Crawley</p> <p>----</p> <p>Flexible maths, English and digital literacy functional skills programme, with multiple delivery options and formats</p>
Current workforce	<p>Talent & Skills Connectors – employed to broker and connect businesses with impartial, simplified skills and workforce development offers</p> <p>----</p> <p>Audit of planned and likely green growth projects over next nine years, mapped to employment options and training needs</p>	<p>FE and adult education providers to pool resources around digital upskilling for the existing workforce, as part of an umbrella West Sussex Digital initiative</p> <p>----</p> <p>A cross-sector rapid business skills and digital buddying programme for West Sussex SMEs</p>	<p>Support for larger employers around an all-age workforce, with resources for upskilling and reskilling the over 50s</p> <p>----</p> <p>Transition support for young people finishing Kickstart scheme to access apprenticeships or further full-time learning</p>	<p>Core skills and training offer for micro-entrepreneurs in building and retaining workforce</p> <p>----</p> <p>Lobby for investment in new College Business Centres that bridge industry intelligence with learning outcomes</p>	<p>Real-time labour market dashboard for West Sussex, showing rolling data on hot and cold spots for jobs, vacancy key words and unemployment figures</p>

Skills Action Network

One of the consistent conversation themes throughout the engagement sessions and workshops has been the need to bring together the vast amount of collective knowledge and expertise across different business and skills-focused organisations and networks in West Sussex, as well as the ability to leverage resource and to think like entrepreneurs when troubleshooting issues and challenges.

There already exist a number of skills and employment groups across the county and covering the county geography. These include the Coastal West Sussex Skills and Enterprise Group, the Crawley Skills Taskforce, the Coast to Capital LEP Skills Advisory Panel, District and Borough Authority groups, business sector groups, and further and higher education groups.

Stakeholders in engagement sessions for this research, held in both summer and winter 2020, told us that a business-led delivery mechanism

on skills interventions was missing and that as a county we therefore risk missing out on opportunities to co-design and to work in collaboration. It was also believed that the lack of such a group meant that organisations across the county were, at times, hindered in delivering projects at speed or where a longer and more in-depth design process was required.

Report 3 will develop a series of options for addressing these perceived gaps. It will consider what is already working well and where there might be opportunities to pull together a network or group in a different way to add value. It will investigate examples from other areas and will look to complement existing activity as well as exploring ways to work with existing groups.



Next Steps

The third report will take a number of ideas from the matrix further, exploring the viability and design considerations, as well as timeframes and expected impact. We will look at the West Sussex Skills Action Network proposal in more depth, as a vehicle for planning and monitoring on-the-ground interventions, as well as to continue engagement with the individuals and organisations who will be key to what comes next.

Some cross-county funding has already been identified that could be used in the short-term to establish or extend some meaningful delivery, so recommendations will be made to that end as well as insights into other potential sources of investment.

