

Introduction

England's universities and higher education institutions (HEIs) have long responded to national economic and skills policy. Increasingly, they must also respond to *place*.

Over the past decade, successive governments have introduced significant reforms to strengthen technical education and employer engagement, including apprenticeship reform, Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs), Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs)¹ and, more recently, the establishment of Skills England (Department for Education, Department for Work & Pensions and Department for Science, Innovation & Technology, 2025). Alongside these developments, devolution accelerated, with Strategic Authorities assuming greater responsibility for economic development, transport, housing, adult skills and local growth (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2025).

A changing policy landscape

Recent policy developments suggest that devolution is extending beyond adult skills and economic development. In July 2026, the Government announced plans to give mayors greater control over 16-19 skills budgets, locally tailored technical and vocational pathways and employment support. This comes alongside growing concern about the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) and the development of place-based approaches to the Youth Guarantee.

For universities, this broadens the regional skills question. Engagement with Strategic Authorities may increasingly concern both meeting higher-level employer demand and how progression routes connect young people to technical education, apprenticeships and ultimately higher-level skills.

Department for Work & Pensions, (2026, 29 May). Employment lifeline for young people across the country as Government offers 300,000 new work experience and training placements. Retrieved from GOV.UK: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/employment-lifeline-for-young-people-across-the-country-as-government-offers-300000-new-work-experience-and-training-placements>

Viewed individually, none of these developments is entirely new. Collectively, however, they point towards a more fundamental shift in the way England's skills system is expected to operate. National policy increasingly establishes the strategic direction, whilst regional institutions are expected to determine how those ambitions are realised within their local economies.

This changing landscape has important implications for higher education. Universities are no longer expected simply to respond to individual student needs. Increasingly, they are expected to contribute to regional productivity, support innovation, develop local workforce

¹ For a full list of LSIP locations covered and name of strategic authority, see Skills England, [Local Skills Improvement Plans and designated Employer Representative Bodies](#) Updated 10 July 2026.

capability and work alongside employers, public services and regional leaders to address place-specific economic challenges. This necessarily means universities must integrate local civic roles with global engagement, viewing them as complementary rather than competing priorities for long-term sustainability.

Universities are treated differently regarding LSIPs and regional authorities in that they are highly autonomous, independent bodies funded by student loans and regulated by the Office for Students (OfS), where other higher education institutions (HEIs) are state-supported entities heavily dictated by central or devolved government bodies. Specific differences include:

- **Statutory Duties & Accountability**: Higher and further education providers have an important role in the development and implementation of LSIPs. Skills England expects both to contribute intelligence about technical needs up to and including Level 8, although funding, regulatory and institutional frameworks within which universities and colleges operate remain different (Skills England, 2025).
- **Funding Streams**: Devolved and place-based skills funding is predominantly directed towards further education and adult skills provision. The Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF), for example, was designed to enable FE providers to respond to priorities identified through LSIPs, although universities participated as delivery partners in some regional collaborations (Department for Education, 2023).
- **Wider Regional Authority**: Universities interact with regional authorities not just for local workforce skills, but as broad "civic anchors", relying on their research, commercialisation and innovation capabilities.
- **Scope of Provision**: Universities operate across all academic and technical levels up to Level 8, whereas regional skills strategies for colleges generally default towards Levels 2-6 (Skills England, 2025).

This paper draws upon comparative analysis of England's Strategic Authorities, Combined Authorities, Local Growth Plans², LSIPs and current government policy, together with mapping of UVAC members against regional priorities and higher technical provision. Rather than examining policy in isolation, it considers how national reforms are being interpreted and implemented across England's evolving regional landscape.

The analysis suggests that devolution is changing more than governance arrangements; it is changing the context within which higher technical education is planned, delivered and evaluated. Whilst qualifications remain central, universities may increasingly be judged by

² All Local Growth Plans must include "shared priorities", which Strategic Authorities have co-determined with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. See Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, [Agreed shared Local Growth Plan priorities](#), GOV.UK, 8 May 2026.

the contribution they make to regional economic growth, local workforce development and employer collaboration.

For UVAC, this raises an important strategic question. As England's regional economies become increasingly influential in shaping higher-level skills, how should universities position themselves within these emerging systems?

The UK Government’s English Devolution White Paper (Secretary of State for Housing, 2024) proposed creating “in Law the concept of a Strategic Authority” as the overarching category for the new devolution architecture (Sanford, 2025). It identified three levels³:

Foundation Strategic Authority	<i>Non-mayoral Combined Authority (CA), non-mayoral Combined County Authority (CCA) or, in exceptional circumstances, a designated single local authority</i>
Mayoral Strategic Authority	<i>Mayoral Combined Authority (MCA) or Mayoral Combined County Authority (MCCA)</i>
Established Mayoral Strategic Authority	<i>A Mayoral Strategic Authority that has met the Government’s criteria for established status; the Greater London Authority (GLA) is also an EMSA.</i>

The distinction matters because the level determines the depth of devolution and the powers available, rather than simply describing the geography or legal form of the organisation e.g. the Government describes EMSAs as having access to the broadest range of devolved powers, including Integrated Settlements⁴.

That proposal has subsequently become law through the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act 2026 (UK Parliament, 2026). The Act formally defines a new category of local government organisation called a “strategic authority”. The Government’s explanatory notes state explicitly that the category encompasses Combined Authorities, Combined County Authorities, the Greater London Authority and, in some circumstances, individual local authorities.

³ The underlying organisation forms are different for each level of Strategic Authority.
⁴ Integrated Settlements is a consolidated, multi-year funding package from government eligible to mayoral combined authorities, replacing dozens of individual competitive bids with one flexible financial pot. (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2026)

Higher education within regional growth systems

The relationship between higher education and economic development is entering a new phase. Universities are increasingly expected to respond to labour market demand and become active partners in supporting regional productivity, widening participation, reducing economic inactivity and enabling inclusive growth. This represents a significant evolution in institutional purpose.

Historically, universities have looked principally towards national policy. Relationships with the Department for Education (DfE), the OfS, funding bodies and professional regulators have largely defined strategic direction. Those relationships remain fundamental. However, they now sit alongside an expanding network of regional partners whose influence over skills and economic development, including un-ringfenced funding continues to grow (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2026).

Many universities are now engaging routinely with Strategic Authorities along with new bodies such as: Employer Representative Bodies (ERB)⁵ LSIPs, NHS Integrated Care Systems⁶, innovation partnerships, local authorities and employers. Collectively, these organisations are shaping regional investment priorities, workforce strategies and economic growth plans, creating a more complex operating and partnership environment for institutions delivering higher technical education.

National ambitions are increasingly expected to be realised through regional delivery. The Government's Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper reinforces this direction of travel through its emphasis on employer responsiveness, regional flexibility and technical excellence (Department for Education, Department for Work & Pensions and Department for Science, Innovation & Technology, 2025), whilst Skills England has been established to strengthen the alignment between education, employers and economic need.

Increasingly, universities must operate successfully within both national and regional policy environments. Academic quality, educational excellence and regulatory compliance remain essential, but institutions are also being encouraged to demonstrate their contribution to local growth, workforce development and place-based economic priorities.

Recent proposals to give mayors greater influence over 16-19 skills, technical and vocational pathways and employment support potentially brings young people's progression more firmly within the regional skills agenda. For universities, this extends the relevance of devolution beyond adult and higher-level skills (Cabinet Office, 2026).

⁵ To find a full list of designated ERBs with links to their LSIP page, see Skills England, [Local Skills Improvement Plans and designated Employer Representative Bodies](#), GOV.UK, 10 July 2026.

⁶ Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) are regional partnerships between the NHS, local authorities and voluntary groups. Across England, 36 ICS that collaborate to join up health and social care, pool financial resources and tackle health inequalities (NHS England, n.d.).

Are regions the solution?

The Government's economic agenda increasingly positions regions as the engines of future growth. Devolution, integrated funding settlements and Local Growth Plans (ten-year economic frameworks required for English MSAs) all point towards a model in which decisions about economic development, investment and workforce planning are taken closer to the places they affect (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2025).

This raises an important question for higher education: if regions are expected to become the principal delivery mechanism for economic growth, what role should universities play within those regional systems?

Much of the debate has focused on governance and funding. Whilst these issues remain important, they overlook a more fundamental consideration. Successful regional economies depend upon the relationships that connect them. Long-term growth requires organisations capable of convening employers, translating labour market intelligence into workforce development, and sustaining collaboration across education, business and the public sector. Universities occupy a distinctive position within this landscape.

Through teaching, research, knowledge exchange and civic engagement, universities already work across multiple sectors and stakeholder groups. Few organisations maintain comparable relationships with employers, schools, colleges, NHS organisations, local government, professional bodies and research partners. This breadth of engagement places universities in a unique position to connect national policy with regional opportunity.

Increasingly, universities should be understood as anchor institutions within regional economies; with an organisation whose long-term presence, economic influence and civic commitment enable it to shape the prosperity of the place in which it is located (University of Birmingham, 2017). For universities, this extends well beyond educating graduates. It includes attracting investment, supporting innovation, strengthening local leadership capability, improving workforce productivity and contributing to long-term regional resilience.

Evidence emerging across England's Combined Authorities suggests many universities are already embracing this broader role. They are supporting innovation districts, collaborating with SMEs, contributing to workforce strategies, working alongside Integrated Care Systems and helping to address regional skills shortages. These activities often receive less attention than teaching and research, yet they are becoming increasingly significant within regional economic and skills policy.

Perhaps the more notable development is that universities are beginning to move beyond collaboration towards system orchestration. Rather than participating in individual partnerships, they are increasingly helping to connect employers, further education, local government, research organisations and policymakers around shared priorities. This role is less visible than delivering qualifications, but it may prove equally important as regional systems continue to mature.

For UVAC members, the challenge is more than just demonstrating that employer engagement exists. Increasingly, institutions will need to evidence how those relationships contribute to wider regional outcomes, whether through productivity, innovation, workforce development or inclusive growth and whether provision is aligned with growth ambitions. As devolution progresses, universities will likely be recognised for the contribution they make to the places they serve as well as the quality of their educational provision.

The changing nature of employer engagement

Employer engagement has become one of the defining themes of post-16 education policy. Across national strategies, Local Growth Plans and LSIPs, employers are consistently positioned as central to identifying workforce need, informing curriculum and improving productivity. The principle is widely accepted. Less attention has been given to how meaningful employer engagement is expected to operate within an increasingly devolved system.

Comparative analysis undertaken for this report found that, whilst employer engagement features prominently across every Combined Authority, the mechanisms through which employers participate differ considerably. Some regions have established employer boards and sector partnerships. Others rely more heavily upon Chambers of Commerce, ERBs or provider networks. In many cases, these arrangements continue to evolve as devolved governance becomes more established.

This presents a more complex landscape for employers than is often acknowledged. Small and medium-sized enterprises, which form most businesses in England (Department for Business & Trade, 2025), frequently have limited capacity to participate in multiple consultations, advisory groups and partnership forums. Larger employers face a different challenge. Organisations operating across several Strategic Authorities increasingly encounter multiple and differing regional priorities, governance arrangements and partnership structures, each seeking employer engagement in different ways.

For universities, these developments reinforce the strategic importance of long-standing employer relationships developed through apprenticeships, professional and employer facing education, research collaboration and knowledge exchange. Such partnerships represent a significant institutional asset.

However, the nature of employer engagement is changing. Universities are no longer expected simply to demonstrate that employers contribute to curriculum design or apprenticeship delivery. Increasingly, institutions are being asked to show how employer partnerships support wider regional priorities, including productivity, innovation, workforce resilience and economic growth.

One implication is particularly significant. Universities and regional authorities frequently describe the same objectives using different policy languages. Higher education naturally frames its contribution around qualifications, curriculum, learner outcomes and research.

Strategic Authorities, by contrast, tend to focus on productivity, investment, sector growth, labour market resilience and inclusive economic development.

This distinction matters because influence increasingly depends upon demonstrating relevance to regional priorities. Across the regional strategies examined for this report, qualifications are rarely presented as the objective. Rather, they are recognised as one mechanism through which broader economic ambitions are achieved. Universities therefore have an opportunity to position higher technical and professional education and skills delivery as essential to meeting training and skills needs up to and including Level 8.

Demand for higher-level skills may be particularly difficult to identify among SMEs, where workforce needs are often emerging, dispersed or expressed in occupational rather than qualification terms. Regional brokerage therefore has potential value in helping employers articulate future capability needs and connecting those needs to appropriate higher-level provision.

Regional diversity creates strategic complexity

One of the clearest findings to emerge from this research is that England's devolved skills landscape is becoming increasingly differentiated. Whilst all Strategic Authorities share the Government's ambition to improve productivity, strengthen employer engagement and develop higher-level skills, they are pursuing these objectives through distinct economic strategies that reflect the characteristics of their local areas. This is creating a more varied operating environment for universities than has existed previously.

The contrast between Greater Manchester and the West of England illustrates this point. Greater Manchester's Growth Plan places considerable emphasis on advanced materials & manufacturing, creative industries, digital/cyber/AI, health innovation & life sciences and low carbon (Greater Manchester Combined Authority, n.d.). By comparison, the West of England's strategy builds upon internationally recognised strengths in aerospace, advanced engineering, creative technologies and the transition to a net zero economy (West of England Mayoral Combined Authority, n.d.). Both regions require highly skilled graduates and apprentices, yet the economic contexts within which universities operate are markedly different.

Similar patterns emerge elsewhere. Liverpool City Region prioritises life sciences, maritime industries and advanced manufacturing (Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, n.d.), whilst the North East is reshaping its economy around offshore energy, advanced manufacturing and digital technologies (North East Mayoral Strategic Authority, n.d.). These differing priorities influence regional investment decisions, employer demand and workforce planning.

These differences matter because most universities do not operate within a single regional economy or localised geography. Institutions increasingly deliver higher technical education across several Strategic Authorities through multiple campuses, apprenticeship partnerships

and employer relationships. A university may therefore find itself working simultaneously with several Authorities, each with different Local Growth Plans, different employer ecosystems and different skills/sector priorities. National employers delivering apprenticeships across England face similar complexity as they respond to multiple regional labour markets rather than a single national skills landscape.

Devolution does not remove the need for national coherence. Universities and employers operating across multiple Strategic Authorities will require sufficient consistency in qualifications, standards and funding arrangements to avoid regionalism becoming an additional layer of complexity. The challenge for institutions will therefore be to respond to differentiated regional priorities while retaining the ability to operate across regional boundaries.

An equally significant finding concerns the growing importance of LSIPs. Much discussion has focused on governance and devolved funding, yet conversations with universities suggest that LSIPs are increasingly becoming the practical interface between higher education, employers and regional economic priorities (Skills England, 2026).

This perspective is reinforced by the University of Hull's experience. Reflecting on the university's relationship with the Hull and East Yorkshire Combined Authority, the LSIP is described as *the* critical mechanism through which the university maintains an ongoing dialogue with employers and the wider regional community⁷. Rather than viewing the LSIP as a statutory document, the University regards it as a living framework that helps shape employer relationships, identifies emerging workforce needs and informs the development of higher technical provision.

These observations reflect the wider findings of this research. Effective LSIPs provide more than labour market intelligence. They create a common evidence base around which employers, education providers, local government and other regional partners can align their thinking. For universities, active engagement with the LSIP process therefore offers an opportunity to respond to labour market intelligence and demand and help shape the regional conversation about future workforce capability. It also provides an opportunity for the institution to review its mix and balance of provision.

The 39 new LSIPs published in July 2026 strengthen the place of higher education within regional skills planning. Skills England now explicitly describe LSIPs as bringing together employers, Strategic Authorities, higher education, further education, independent training providers and wider stakeholders to address skills challenges (Skills England, 2026).

The implication is that institutional success may depend less upon responding to individual policy initiatives than upon understanding the wider regional systems within which those initiatives operate. Universities will continue to work within a national policy framework, but

⁷ From a discussion with Director of Apprenticeships, University of Hull [July 2026].

their ability to influence higher technical skills development is likely to depend increasingly upon the quality of their regional partnerships, their understanding of local economic priorities, their capacity to shape provision and to engage constructively with the organisations responsible for shaping them.

Strategic considerations

Whilst the pace and precise shape of devolution will continue to vary between regions, the direction of travel is sufficiently clear for universities to begin strengthening their regional engagement.

For many institutions, this may involve taking a more systematic approach to understanding the economic strategies of the places in which they operate. Local Growth Plans, LSIPs, Strategic Economic Plans and sector investment strategies provide important insight into the challenges facing employers and the capabilities regions are seeking to develop for all ages and at all levels of skill. The evolving Growth and Skills Levy further reinforces this emphasis on progression, with foundation apprenticeships and more flexible training intended to create routes into full apprenticeships and further skills development (Department for Work & Pensions and Department for Education, 2026)

This may also require universities to reconsider how they communicate their offer to external stakeholders. For employers, Combined Authorities and regional policymakers, the value of apprenticeships and higher technical provision is often expressed through outcomes such as improved productivity, business growth, talent retention and innovation. Being able to demonstrate these wider impacts alongside traditional measures of learner achievement will become increasingly important.

Conclusion

One finding from this research stands out above all others: universities remain highly visible. Higher technical and professional qualifications are not.

Regional strategies consistently describe ambitions for productivity, innovation, investment, business growth, clean energy, health, advanced manufacturing and digital transformation. They rarely discuss apprenticeship standards, HTQs or qualification reform in any detail. Qualifications are increasingly viewed as the means through which wider economic ambitions are achieved, rather than the ambition itself.

Universities face a strategic challenge that extends beyond curriculum development or apprenticeship growth. They need to understand how they contribute to the economic identity and long-term ambitions of the places in which they operate.

The institutions most likely to thrive will not necessarily be those offering the broadest portfolio of qualifications, but those best able to demonstrate how their expertise contributes to regional success. Increasingly, competitive advantage may derive as much from institutional intelligence and regional partnerships as from programme portfolios.

The emerging devolved skills landscape suggests that the role of universities should be considered within a wider regional skills ecosystem rather than solely through the lens of qualification delivery. Higher education institutions can contribute to higher-level technical, managerial and professional skills, as well as employer engagement, regional relevance intelligence, innovation and convening capacity. This will become increasingly important as Strategic Authorities assume greater responsibility for regional economic and skills priorities.

The effectiveness of regional skills planning will depend on the availability of labour market data and the capacity to interpret that intelligence then translate it into provision. Universities have a potential role in this regional intelligence structure through their employer relationships, apprenticeship activity, graduate outcomes, research and innovation partnerships and wider engagement with local economies.

For UVAC, this presents an opportunity to strengthen the national conversation about the relationship between higher education and regional economic development. As devolution continues to evolve, universities will require evidence, intelligence and opportunities to engage. Helping members navigate that increasingly complex landscape is likely to become as important as supporting the development of higher technical education itself.

Suggested recommendations

1. Position higher technical education within regional economic priorities

Universities should assess their higher-level technical, managerial and professional provision against the economic and workforce priorities identified through Local Growth Plans, LSIPs and other regional strategies, rather than considering provision solely through national policy or institutional demand.

2. Develop stronger regional intelligence capability

Universities should strengthen their capacity to collect, interpret and share employer and labour market intelligence at regional and sector level, recognising that conventional labour market data may not fully capture emerging demand for higher-level skills.

3. Treat employer engagement as a strategic relationship

Employer engagement should extend beyond apprenticeship recruitment and curriculum input to encompass workforce planning, future skills requirements, innovation and regional economic development.

4. Engage with regional systems early

Universities should seek meaningful engagement with Strategic Authorities, ERBs and LSIPs while regional priorities are being developed, rather than responding only once funding or commissioning decision have been made.

5. Consider progression across the skills system

Institutions should consider how their higher technical provision connects with vocational and technical pathways at other levels, creating progression routes into higher-level occupations instead of treating programmes as discrete offers.

6. Retain a national perspective

Universities operating across multiple regions should develop the capacity to respond to differentiated regional priorities while recognising the importance of national consistency for learners and employers operating across geographical boundaries.

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Appendix

Higher Education and Regional Skills Priorities

14 July 2025

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The role of employer partnerships, universities and regional skills networks in shaping the demand for and the delivery of higher-level technical qualifications, beyond apprenticeships alone.5

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Overview

The evolving landscape of regional skills provision in England presents an opportunity for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to play a pivotal role in addressing economic disparities and workforce demands. With the devolution of skills funding and increasing significance of vocational pathways, universities are uniquely positioned to drive regional development through targeted higher-level skills provision (Levels 4-7).

This report explores how HEIs can align more effectively with combined and regional authorities to shape and deliver regional skills strategies.

Changing Funding Models and Impact on HLS Provision at Both National and Regional Levels

Combined Authorities (CA) and Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) are shaping demand for HLS technical, managerial and professional qualifications nationally and by region/CA/LSIP. Since the introduction of devolution deals, CAs have gained control over AEB and now influence broader skills funding and provision.

Universities and FE/HE providers across the UK are actively expanding Degree Apprenticeships, Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) and short courses to address employer needs. However, coordination with regional growth strategies and sectoral clusters varies in depth and quality. Many are co-commissioning Level 3+ provision with a focus on local economic needs (e.g. digital, life sciences, green industries).

Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) and Employer Representative Bodies (ERBs)

LSIPs are required to identify what skills employers need now and in the future. These are led by employer representative bodies, usually Chambers of Commerce. The current LSIPs are being extended, and there are plans for a second iteration for the national rollout of LSIPs from October 2025. You can find the full list at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/designated-employer-representative-bodies/notice-of-designated-employer-representative-bodies> ⁸

They create a baseline for reshaping provision in FE and HE, especially in the Level 3-5 space. LSIPs give local and regional stakeholders power to challenge or support the expansion of particular qualifications, affecting funding and student demand.

This means that if a sector isn't identified in the LSIP, funding and focus may shift away from it, even at higher levels.

Place-Based Industrial and Economic Strategies

CAs align their skills strategies with their local economic and industrial priorities. Mayoral Combined Authorities (e.g. Greater Manchester, West Midlands, South Yorkshire...) now oversee adults skills funding, with increasing influence over Level 4+ delivery. The Greater London Authority is among the most developed in skills autonomy, linking funding to priority growth sectors.

These priorities drive demand for highly specialised Level 4-7 skills, influencing what local colleges and universities are expected to deliver.

⁸ UK.gov, Local skills improvement plans and designated employer representative bodies, Updated 30 June 2025, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/designated-employer-representative-bodies/notice-of-designated-employer-representative-bodies>, accessed 30 June 2025.

Impact on Funding

HEI engagement in vocational skills is shaped significantly by the DfE, OfS and ESFA policies. The reallocation of ASF to Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) shifts power locally but often lacks cohesion with HE funding.

The Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE), introduction of higher technical qualifications (HTQ) and reform of funding and quality metrics are being filtered through regional lenses via LSIPs and CAs. Combined Authorities are positioning themselves as brokers between national ambitions and local realities.

HE providers are being incentivised to co-develop short, high-impact courses. Universities must navigate multiple funding channels to ensure sustainability and influence e.g. apprenticeships, modular learning pilots, ASF contracts. Regional differences in funding strategies require bespoke institutional responses. Curriculums should be shaped toward regional growth sectors and toward modular, flexible technical qualifications.

CAs are shaping demand and access to technical/professional education. Degree Apprenticeships and HTQs must be aligned with regional economic goals to attract support and funding.

All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) Skills, Careers and Employment

The APPG is devoted to raising the profile and status of skills, careers and employment policy in the UK. It brings together Parliament, employers, and the skills sector to develop effective skills policy as a central means of personal and economic development for the 21st Century.

This is run by [Policy Connect](#) and is funded by: ACCA, Career Development institute, High Value Manufacturing Catapult, Institute of the Motor Industry, NOCN, South Thames College, University of Derby, Youth Futures Foundation.

The Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC)

There are 44 Careers Hubs across England which work with schools, colleges and employers, local authorities, devolved authorities and the voluntary sector to support the delivery of careers programmes. The Government approach to careers guidance for young people is based on the delivery of the [Gatsby Benchmarks](#).

Whilst the Gatsby Benchmark framework is a requirement for schools and colleges (learners aged 18 or up to 25 for those with an education, health and care plan (EHCP)), [Benchmark 7](#) (Encounters with further and higher education) says: all students should understand the full range of learning opportunities that are available to them, including technical and academic routes.

Engaging with [The Careers & Enterprise Company \(CEC\)](#) could be beneficial as it connects businesses with schools and colleges to improve careers education and prepare young people for the workforce. By partnering with the CEC, UVAC can influence local skills development and build relationships with education providers in key regions. This could support long-term workforce planning, enhance brand visibility and create opportunities to align with regional skills strategies—especially in sectors like digital and financial services, where employer engagement is crucial for closing skills gaps and ensuring a strong future workforce. (I have many connections throughout The CEC and its Careers Hubs. I also worked as a consultant for The CEC during 2018.)

How UVAC can most effectively engage with regional government structures and decision-makers in the evolving post-16 education landscape, particularly through skills agendas.

Engagement must be local and regional, not just national. Universities need to position themselves within LSIPs and CA frameworks as strategic providers of HLS (especially modular and employer-linked provision).

UVAC should track and influence:

- LSIP refresh cycles
- CA skills strategies and innovation plans
- Local industrial strategy updates
- Cross-CA collaboration opportunities (e.g. net zero sector clusters)

Skills Networks & Spaces for Influence

Regional networks such as London Higher, Access to HE, Yorkshire Universities, Midlands Innovation and North East Universities Association are key conveners of skills discussions.

UVAC should facilitate representation on Combined Authority advisory boards and sector skills panels to position vocational HE as essential to local growth strategies.

Enhancing UVAC's Visibility within Regional Skills Networks

- Participate in LSIPs through employer-provider networks
- Engage in consultation events hosted by MCAs
- Partner with employer groups and chambers of commerce to co-commission provision
- Influence emerging delivery frameworks via employer forums and regional innovation boards

Roles and influence within universities, including the shift in job titles (e.g. from Directors of Apprenticeships to Directors of Civic Engagement) reflects a broader reorientation in English government priorities. What does this signify for UVAC's stakeholder engagement strategy?

Central Government is shifting priorities towards place-based policy, local economic impact and civic responsibility. This change has meaningful implications for how universities should engage with local government policy, both strategically and operationally.

What job title changes signal

From	To	What it indicates
Director of Apprenticeships	Director of Civic Engagement / Place-Based Partnerships	A move from narrow delivery/accountability roles to broader place-based institutional missions
Head of Work-Based Learning Employer Engagement Manager	Head of Regional Skills/Partnerships Local Growth & Skills Partnerships Manager	Emphasis on economic development, LSIPs and local authority engagement A shift from transactional to strategic and systemic partnerships

Engagement is becoming more place-based and strategic. Universities are being asked to align with regional economic priorities, working alongside Combined Authorities, Chambers of Commerce and LEPs (or their successors). There is a rise of Civic University Agreements which shows a university's

commitment to their localities and overlaps with skills, employment and health policy. There are now over 40 vice-chancellors who have committed their universities to develop this kind of agreement⁹.

Skills, economic development, lifelong learning and innovation are becoming interconnected agendas. This requires cross-institutional collaboration between academic leadership, civic engagement teams, apprenticeship leads and innovation offices.

Universities are expected to become anchor institutions in local growth ecosystems, not just education providers.

Recommendations

1. Identify and engage with new job roles within universities that lead on civic, regional and place-based strategies.
2. Position UVAC as a thought leader on how HE can deliver skills in alignment with regional sector priorities.
3. Emphasise how apprenticeships and HTQs are not just workforce tools, but part of civic development in alignment with each regions' sector/industry priorities.
4. Work with sector leading organisations involved in place, innovation and public service to shape policy narratives.

The role of employer partnerships, universities and regional skills networks in shaping the demand for and the delivery of higher-level technical qualifications, beyond apprenticeships alone.

Devolution is having an impact on all organisations in the skills and qualifications sectors. Whilst all regional authorities have an obligation to follow national skills priorities, they can give greater emphasis to the sectors that are key to their region.

Before looking regionally, I have listed national organisations that are relevant to UVAC because of their policy and operational work with skills, apprenticeships and careers provision.

Department for Education (DfE)

The Department for Education (DfE) has taken the decision to discontinue the ASK programme from 1st August 2025, which means that the in-person school and college-based activity will no longer be funded.

Plans are underway to integrate new technologies into the education system, supporting teachers and enhancing student learning experiences. In November 2024, the DfE hosted an early supplier engagement event to present their current objectives.

It has been running Apprenticeship Early Connect pilot programmes in three areas of the country: Lancashire, the North East and Greater London. They have used their network of stakeholders to encourage the development of new apprenticeship opportunities, and to increase awareness of them amongst 18-year-olds. To date the findings have been encouraging and show an increase of apprenticeship starts by 6.1%.

Skills England

The [Get Britain Working White Paper](#), published in November 2024, outlines comprehensive reforms to address economic inactivity and enhance employment opportunities across the UK. A key

⁹ Civic University Network, 23 July 2024, Civic Universities Agreements. Available at: <https://civicuniversitynetwork.co.uk/civic-agreements/>.

component of this strategy is the transformation of the existing Apprenticeship Levy into a more flexible Growth and Skills Levy, designed to fund a broader range of training programmes beyond traditional apprenticeships. This reform aligns with the establishment of Skills England, which provides strategic oversight of the post-16 skills system.

The first report from Skills England shows that employer investment has been declining at time where “almost 1 in 10, or over 2.5 million roles are in critical demand, with more than 90% being in roles that require training or education.”¹⁰

For qualification providers, this shift presents both opportunities and challenges: while it broadens potential service offerings, it also necessitates adaptation to meet diverse employer needs regionally. The anticipated impact includes a more agile workforce development landscape that is better aligned with industry demands. The aim is to increase collaboration between employers and training providers to swiftly address emerging skills gaps.

UVAC needs to be agile too and recognise the different regional priorities. See the full list of regional priorities by Combined Authority below.

Sector Skills Organisations

Sector skills organisations are making a comeback, and it is essential to develop a relationship, join or sponsor the ones that represent key national priorities, along with those that are key for specific regions.

The Growth and Skills Levy focuses on developing workforce capabilities in eight key sectors, as well as in Health and Social Care, and Construction. These priority sectors include advanced manufacturing, creative industries, clean energy, digital and technologies, business and professional services, life sciences, financial services, and defence. The levy aims to address skills gaps and promote growth within these areas. Building relationships with the sector bodies for these sectors where there are skills gaps identified is an important approach to be seen as a thought leader promoting HLS to employer members. UVAC can recommend that its HE members also join and support the organisations that represent their strengths.

¹⁰ GOV.UK, 24 September 2024, Prime Minister overhauls apprenticeships to support opportunity. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-overhauls-apprenticeships-to-support-opportunity>

Combined Authorities

At the time of this report, there are ten established combined authorities in England, nine having directly elected mayors. There are currently 38 [Local Skills Improvement Plans \(LSIPs\)](#) in England, each developed by a designated Employer Representative Body (ERB). These plans are designed to align with post-16 technical education with the specific skills needs of local employers and economies, as outlined in the [Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022](#).

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA)

Cornwall & Isles of Scilly

East Midlands Combined County Authority (EMCCA)

Greater London Authority (GLA)

Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA)

Hull and East Yorkshire Combined Authority (HEYCA)

Liverpool City Region Combined Authority

Norfolk & Suffolk¹¹

North East Combined Authority

South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA)

Tees Valley Combined Authority

West of England Combined Authority (WECA)

West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA)

West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA)

York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority

LSIPs

The plans are specifically focused on improving technical skills training for employers and aligns with the broader Adult Skills Commissioning Strategy. LSIP contracts run from September 2022 to October 2025. You can find the full list at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/designated-employer-representative-bodies/notice-of-designated-employer-representative-bodies>

¹¹ Norfolk and Suffolk local authorities have expressed an interest in establishing a Mayoral Combined County Authority and are in a period of consultation. The first election of a Mayor will be in 2026.

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA)

The CPCA emphasises developing skills in advanced manufacturing, agri-tech and life sciences to support local industries. Collaborations with educational institutions aim to align curricula with employer needs, ensuring a pipeline of talent for these sectors. While not a primary focus, CPCA supports skills development in financial services to cater to local business requirements.

They are prioritising higher technical skills, employer-responsive training and progression pathways to higher-level apprenticeships. The CPCA is actively prioritising HTQs as part of its drive to boost productivity and social mobility.

It is made up of seven local authorities (referred to as Constituent Councils) and the Business Board (Local Enterprise Partnership):

- [Cambridge City Council](#)
- [Cambridgeshire County Council](#)
- [East Cambridgeshire District Council](#)
- [Fenland District Council](#)
- [Huntingdonshire District Council](#)
- [Peterborough City Council](#)
- [South Cambridgeshire District Council](#)

CPCA-Led Programmes

[Innovate and Cultivate Fund](#): Supports projects (sometimes led by universities) to pilot new HTQs responding to employer needs, e.g. in advanced logistics and net-zero technologies.

ARU Peterborough Curriculum Advisory Groups: CPCA sits on these groups alongside employers to co-design HTQ curricula – an example of direct joint working. [ARU Business Advisory Board](#)

Regional Skills Summits: CPCA organises events bringing together universities, FE colleges, and employers to promote and plan HTQs as part of local progression pathways.

Key Organisations & Contacts

[Mayor's Office](#)

The Mayor of Cambridge and Peterborough sets strategic priorities across all areas, including skills and economic growth. The Mayor's personal engagement or support can significantly raise the profile of higher technical education and secure backing for pilot projects.

Paul Bristow, Mayor of CPCA

mayor@cambridgeshirepeterborough-ca.gov.uk

[Skills Committee / Employment & Skills Board \(ESB\)](#)

This board directly oversees the region's skills strategy and shapes decisions on adult education, apprenticeships, technical education and workforce development. Members typically include senior leaders from colleges, universities, employers and local government.

Gillian Beasley, Chair of the CPCA Skills Committee (she's also Chief Executive of Peterborough City Council & Cambridgeshire County Council).

gillian.beasley@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

Ben Clarke, Head of Skills at CPCA (or current Skills Policy Lead).

ben.clarke@cambridgeshirepeterborough-ca.gov.uk

Key contact for Adult Skills Fund, LSIP delivery, and skills strategy.

Business Board (Local Enterprise Partnership – LEP)

The Business Board is CPCA's LEP and has a significant say in aligning skills provision with local economic priorities. They influence capital investment in skills facilities and employer engagement in apprenticeships.

Engaging with the LEP is crucial for aligning UVAC's advocacy with employer needs.

CPCA Higher Education & Skills Team

The CPCA has a dedicated internal team responsible for the ASF and Higher Skills Strategy. This team leads the operational implementation of funding and partnerships with providers and employers. Direct discussions with this team can help UVAC contribute to curriculum development, degree apprenticeship promotion and T-Level progression strategies.

The Business Board's skills sub-groups are key for employer-responsive priorities.

Al Kingsley, Chair of the CPCA Business Board.

businessboard@cambridgeshirepeterborough-ca.gov.uk

Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP)

The CPCA's LSIP is delivered by the Cambridgeshire Chambers of Commerce. The LSIP identifies higher technical skills at Level 4 & 5 as essential to addressing the region's skills gaps, especially in advanced manufacturing, digital, construction, health and green industries.

Victoria Lennox, Chief Executive, Cambridgeshire Chambers of Commerce

Victoria.lennox@cambsccl.co.uk

Local Authority Education Leads ([Cambridge County Council](#) & [Peterborough City Council](#))

Although the overarching strategy sits with CPCA, local authorities have key officers responsible for post-16 transition, NEET reduction and progression pathways. Collaborating at this level can open doors to local schools and colleges, ensuring parity of esteem for vocational and technical routes.

Jonathan Lewis, Service Director for Education (covers post-16 strategy across both councils)
Cambridgeshire County Council & Peterborough City Council

jonathan.lewis@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

Other Key Contacts

Cllr Lucy Nethsingha, Leader of Cambridgeshire County Council & the CPCA Lead Member for Skills

Andrea Wood MBE, Assistant Director for Skills and Employment, CPCA

Howard Cordingley, Skills and Business Relationships Manager, CPCA

Nicola March, Senior Skills and Business Relationship Manager, CPCA

Steve Walker, Operations Manager, Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Careers Hub

Greater London Authority (GLA) | Mayor of London | London Assembly

The GLA focuses on enhancing digital skills, supporting apprenticeships and addressing unemployment among young people. Initiatives include partnerships with tech companies to provide training and efforts to increase apprenticeship opportunities across various sectors.

The GLA collaborates with industry partners to offer digital skills training programs, aiming to equip residents with competencies required in the evolving job market. As a global financial hub, London focuses on maintaining its competitive edge by investing in skills development pertinent to the financial services industry.

Digital and Tech sectors are major growth areas identified by the GLA, but there is a notable lack of diversity in the workforce. The GLA recognises that “the sector is still heavily perceived as white male-dominated and that there is a general lack of awareness of the types of work and roles available among those not in the sector.” It highlighted a study which found 68% of UK businesses find it challenging to hire the digital workers needed.

“The Hub’s objective is to connect Londoners with training that directly translates to quality jobs in the digital sector. It also aims to link them with major employers committed to diversifying their recruitment processes, offering work placements, interview opportunities, and pathways to rewarding careers.”

Key contacts

Skills for Londoners - Members of the Board of interest

Nicola Hay MBE, Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP)

Gerry McDonald, Association of Colleges (AoC)

Richard Clifton, Employment Related Services Association (ERSA)

Sue Terpilowski, Federation of Small Businesses

Key organisations

South London Partnership – Polly Perechino, Head of Economy, Skills and Employment

City of London Digital Skills Hub [Digital Skills Bootcamps]

London Careers Hubs | The Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC)

Michelle Sporle, Strategic Careers Hub Lead – London Central Careers Hub

Tracey Eve, Strategic Careers Hub Lead – London East Careers Hub

Roshan Bilimoria, Strategic Careers Hub – Lead London South Careers Hub

Aarti Jaswal, Strategic Careers Hub – Lead London West Careers Hub

Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA)

“The city-region already has the fastest growing economy in the UK and has attracted more foreign direct investment than any other UK region.”¹²

Greater Manchester has many growth sectors including digital and technology and financial services. Councils across the city-region work with the private sector to attract, retain and develop talent through a new GM Academy. GMCA offers fully funded courses, such as 10-week digital marketing training, to assist individuals seeking employment, career changes, or progression.

Launched by Mayor Andy Burnham, the Greater Manchester Baccalaureate (MBacc) offers technical pathways equivalent to the EBacc, funneling into HTQs and degree apprenticeships at age 18. It covers sectors like digitech, health & care, engineering/manufacturing, green economy, etc building clear progression routes from schools to HEIs offering HTQs.

LSIP – GM Chamber LSIP

HLS priorities emerging: Digital, logistics, retrofit & clean technology

Key contacts

Paula Ackers, Industry Skills Intelligence Officer

Liz Bacon, Senior Programme Manager – Education Skills and Work

Joe Crolla, Acting Principal Skills Manager

Morgan Frost, Programme Manager – Inclusive Employment

Angela Harrington, Head of Work & Skills

Kevin Scholey, Strategic Policy and Partnership Manager – Technical Education

Claire Walker, Partnership & Quality Lead

Nic Witton-Dowd, Assistant Director Education, Skills and Work

Luke Harrison, HTQ lead for automation, data science & business analytics, University of Salford

Key organisations

[Greater Manchester Learning Provider Network \(GMLPN\)](#) – Julie Lappin

[Cheshire & Warrington Provider Network](#) – Julie Shawcross

[GMCA's Work and Skills Strategy](#) aims to integrate education, skills, and work systems to help residents succeed and businesses thrive. Priorities include preparing young people for future life and work, creating networks of specialist technical education, and accelerating the uptake of quality apprenticeships. – portfolio lead by Cllr Eammon O'Brien and Mayor Burnham

[GMCA's Skills for Growth](#) program addresses employer-identified skills gaps, including those in the financial services sector, to enhance productivity and economic growth.

¹² Greater Manchester Combined Authority, 23 January 2025, <https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/news/greater-manchester-sets-out-trailblazing-plan-to-kickstart-a-new-decade-of-growth/>

Recommendations

- Collaborate with Salford to promote HTQ best practices
- Engage with the GMCA STEM team to ensure HTQ slots into digital and engineering workforce development teams

Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA)

LCRCA is explicitly aligning higher technical development with its innovation, skills and adult learning strategies. Universities (especially University of Liverpool) are key partners, particularly in sectors like sustainability, nuclear and digital innovation. FE universities like Hugh Bird are directly delivering HTQs and benefiting from collaborative development.

From March 2025, LCRCA formally gained the power to design and fund Level 3 technical qualifications, which is a stepping stone for local control over Level 4+ HTQs in the future.

LCRCA has been responsible for the devolved ASF since 2018, investing in adult learning in partnership with FE colleges, local authorities and training providers. In March 2025, LCRCA committed £68 million towards adult training, including funding for Level 3-5 courses designed in consultation with employers.

It is made up of six constituent councils:

- Liverpool City Council
- Wirral Council
- Sefton Council
- Knowsley Council
- St Helens Borough Council
- Halton Borough Council

HTQ focused Initiatives

[Liverpool City Region Test & Learn](#)– uses flexibility in the ASF to trial modular and short course technical pathways (e.g. engineering), enabling progression from basic training to HTQ level capability. LCRCA has piloted flexible, modular adult upskilling in engineering, CAD/CAM, welding and other technical areas demonstrating experimentation with HTQ-style unit delivery.

[Be More](#)– a flagship LCRCA digital platform helps individuals and employers navigate technical and higher technical education routes.

Key Organisations & Contacts

[Skills & Apprenticeships](#) Team

Steve Rotheram, Metro Mayor (lead of skills and technical education)

Katherine Fairclough, Chief Executive, LCRCA

Pro-VC for Research & Impact, University of Liverpool (engagement lead on R&D and innovation cluster)

Recommendations

- Support credentials and kitemarks of LCRCA-funded HE providers in LCRCA's devolved AEB/technical qualification oversight.
- Highlight HE role in Skills Capital Fund applications ensuring HE-led technical delivery.
- Showcase UVAC's evidence from HTQ flexible learning module pilots to inform LCRCA's Test & Learn expansion.

North East Combined Authority

The North of Tyne and North East Combined Authorities merged in May 2024 to create a new Mayoral Structure. Kim McGuinness is its first Mayor. The constituent areas are: Newcastle, Northumberland, North Tyneside, South Tyneside and Gateshead.

LSIP – North East LEP & LSIP

HLS priorities emerging: Offshore wind, hydrogen, automotive

The Education, Inclusion & Skills Advisory Board (EISAB) is chaired by Cllr Tracey Dixon (South Tyneside) and includes leaders from local government, FE, HE, businesses, DfE, DWP and VCSE.

NELSIP is led by the North East Automotive Alliance (NEAA) and Chamber of Commerce and is focusing on technical training in the five priority areas: Advanced Manufacturing, construction, digital, health & life sciences, transport & logistics.

According to their Progress Report (June 2025) reports 600+ Level 3+ starts, 42 new technical courses and major initiatives e.g. immersive digital hubs and MADE North East's £14.7m advanced manufacturing programme.

Key organisations & contacts

Kim McGuinness, Mayor kim.mcguinness@northeast-ca.gov.uk

Dr Henry Kippin, Chief Executive henry.kippin@northeast-ca.gov.uk

Charlotte Carpenter, Director of Skills, Inclusion & Public Service Reform
charlotte.carpenter@northeast-ca.gov.uk

Cllr Tracey Dixon, Chair, EIS Advisory Board southTyneside@gov.uk

Jayne Dooley, DfE Head of North East & Cumbria FE

Prof Mark Shucksmith, Newcastle University & rural policy researcher

Paul Butler, CEO, NEAA & NELSIP lead

Mark David, Skills Project Manager, NEAA

North East Ambition – apprenticeReady [part of the North East Combined Authority

North East Ambition supports schools and colleges to provide the best possible career guidance for children and young people in the region.

Part of the Early Connect pilot programme, this pilot is being delivered in partnership between the Department for Education (DfE) and UCAS. Its aim is to support more young people onto apprenticeships and make it easier for employers to find apprentices.

Upcoming Events

NELSIP Workshops/Employer Clinics – ongoing. Scheduled by NEAA starting Summer 2025.

<https://nelsip.com/events/>

Recommendation

Work with NEAA (Paul Butler & Mark David) to contribute to HE perspectives into NELSIP delivery, especially for Levels 4/5 HTQs.

[South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority \(SYMCA\)](#)

Formerly Sheffield City Region, it has gone through a strategic rebrand as South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority in September 2021.

Made of four local authorities: Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield, SYMCA focuses on upskilling residents in sectors like advanced manufacturing, digital industries, and healthcare. Programs aim to reduce unemployment and support career progression by aligning training with local economic demands.

They have some serious challenges, including the fact the almost a quarter of working age adults are economically inactive and more of their young people are not in employment, education or training (NEET) than the national average. In addition, their ethnic minority groups experience higher rates of unemployment than the national average, compounded by intermediate and technical skills, such as apprenticeships. SYMCA invests in falling levels of digital skills programs to reduce unemployment and support career progression, aligning training with industry needs.

LSIP – SY Chamber LSIP

Delivered by Doncaster Chamber of Commerce on behalf of the three SY Chambers.

Has trailblazer heritage as one of the eight original Trailblazer LSIPs in 2022 until 2026.

HLS priorities emerging: Advanced materials, health, rail and engineering. Digital skills is a central priority with an emphasis on prompt-engineering, data analytics and digital literacy.

Key contacts

Oliver Coppard, Mayor

Katherine Hammond, Chief Executive

Kieran Loftus, Strategic Careers Hub Lead

Lauren Oldfield, Operational Careers Hub Lead

Dan Fell, Chief Executive, Doncaster Chamber of Commerce (leads LSIP employer-led skill planning)

Key organisations

[South Yorkshire Provider Network](#)

SYMCA (People, Skills & Employability) – devolved AEB, skills Bank, digital & inclusion strategies

SY Apprenticeship & Careers Hub Teams – provide coordination, outreach, careers advice

Recommendations

1. Collaborate with Chambers to shape LSIP delivery, emphasising HTQs and HE's role in digital literacy and advanced skills.
2. Engage SYMCA Skills & Employability leadership to align UVAC's technical qualifications initiatives with Skills Bank and digital mission.
3. Participate in employer-led Skills Clinics to evidence UVAC's national viewpoint as regionally relevant.

Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA)

Tees Valley Combined Authority covers five authorities: Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland and Stockton-on-Tees. Led by Mayor Ben Houchen since 2017, TVCA oversees transport, economic regeneration (e.g. Teesside Freeport), skills and technical education.

TVCA leverages devolved AEB and skills capital to shape technical education in areas like green energy, manufacturing and digital. A recent £2.5 million DfE-funded investment is being used to support HTQs across colleges for green, digital, construction and engineering fields.

LSIP – TV Chamber LSIP

HLS priorities emerging: Green energy, chemical industries, construction

The North East England Chamber of Commerce is the DfE designated Employer body for the Tees Valley LSIP.

Key organisations & contacts

TVCA – skills & Technical Education Team

Ben Houchen, Mayor mayor@teesvalley-ca.gov.uk

Julie Gilhespie, Chief Executive

Rachel Anderson, North East Chamber of Commerce (involved in LSIP)

North East England Chamber of Commerce

[Skills for Growth Programme](#) – A joint initiative with TVCA and Teesside University Business School that supports SME upskilling and sector-based training informed by market intelligence and HTQ-aligned delivery

[Education & Skills Board](#) – TVCA's Board integrates FE, HE, employers and civic leaders to ensure local AEB funds support coordinated skills delivery.

Upcoming Events

Tees Valley Careers Hubs Conference 5th December 2025

Recommendations

1. Engage [TVCA Skills and Technical Education](#) leads to support modular L4/5 pathways, T-Levels and [AEB](#) design.
2. Connect with Chamber-led LSIP to represent university voices in employer-driven planning.
3. Collaborate with Teesside University and [MPI](#) upskilling hubs like NZIIC and Skills for Growth.
4. Participate at [Teesworks](#) flagship events.

West of England Combined Authority (WECA)

WECA comprises Bristol, Bath & North East Somerset and South Gloucestershire. Its core responsibilities include strategic planning, transport and skills, including devolved AEB.

LSIP – Business West LSIP

HLS priorities emerging: Creative industries, aerospace, low carbon

Led by Business West Chamber of Commerce, the West of England & North Somerset LSIP is in its 2024-25 phase. In 2023, the West of England Institute of Technology (WEIoT) secured £3m via LSIF, coordinating colleges and providers to embed employer-led skills in their priority sectors: digital, health & social care, green construction and creative industries.

LSIP

University of the West of England (UWE Bristol) is a key partner. It participates in a Civic University Agreement with City of Bristol College, University of Bath Spa and local authorities focusing on education, skills, employability, apprenticeships and lifelong learning.

City of Bristol College constructed a £9m Advanced Construction Centre via WECA partnership and Skills Capital investment. It Chairs eight sector boards to map LSIP priorities and foster employer engagement through FE and HE partnerships.

Key contacts & organisations

Helen Godwin, Metro Mayor (since May 2025)

Stephen Peacock, Chief Executive

Naomi Logan, Head of Employment & Skills, WECA – People & Skills Team

Business West (Chamber) – LSIP Employer Rep Body

Claire Arbery, Director – WEIoT

University of the West of England) Pathway Programme funded through WECA
Tracy John, Director of Research and Innovation (Project Lead)

Business West – serves as the ERB for the regional LSIP, with annual progress published in June 2024 and June 2025.

Recommendations

1. Partner with WEIoT to participate in employer-lead curriculum design and share national insight.
2. Connect with UWE's Skills Pathway to co-develop SME-focused modular training initiatives.
3. Monitor North Somerset integration for fresh HTQ programme opportunities in the expanded region.

West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA)

WMCA is made up of 18 local councils. It's Employment and Skills Strategy 2024-2027 aims to develop an integrated employment and skills ecosystem to stimulate economic growth and deliver better outcomes for residents and businesses. Key actions include preparing young people for future life and work, creating regional networks of specialist technical education, and accelerating the uptake of quality apprenticeships.

HLS Priorities emerging: Advanced manufacturing, net zero and digital health.

The West Midlands Innovation Accelerator, supported by WMCA, includes HE led projects in health tech, biochar clean-tech and AI/digital sectors. A Digital Skills Consortium, launched October 2024 by WMCA and industry partners, engages universities and IoTs in delivering coding, cybersecurity and AI programmes.

LSIP – WM Chamber LSIP

LSIP led by regional Chambers includes three priority skills (digital green and leadership/management) across sectors like engineering, manufacturing, construction, logistics and health.

WCA secured £10.3m LSIF funding to deliver digital, green, EV, sustainable construction and creative/gaming qualifications. Many are delivered via IoTs and universities.

The employer-led process has been co-developed with the three regional Chambers: Greater Birmingham, Coventry & Warwickshire and the Black Country.

Key contacts

Mayor – Richard Parker

Chief Executive- Laura Shoaf

Vikki Haines, Strategic Hub Lead – WMCA Careers Hub

Angela Moore, Senior Delivery Manager

Joanne O'Sullivan, Skills Delivery Officer

Isobel Taylor, Assistant Delivery Manager

Emily Stubbs, GBCC Senior Policy & Projects Manager

[Dr Fiona Aldridge was the Head of Insight – employment, skills health and communities until September 2024)

Key organisations

WMCA Careers Hub

WMCA People & Skills Team

WM Growth Company for Investment Zone

Skills West Midlands + Warwickshire (Skills WMW) – LSIP delivery partner

Recommendations

- Boost visibility via careers hubs.
- Recommend UVAC's role in quality assurance, employer engagement strategies and/or curriculum mapping for WMCA funded HTQ and LSIF projects.

- Engage with the West Midlands Combined Universities (WMCU) with an offer to coordinate research or case studies showing HTQ graduate outcomes and progression routes.

West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA)

WYCA includes Leeds, Bradford, Wakefield, Kirklees, and Calderdale. It aims to enhance skills in key sectors, including health and social care, engineering and advanced manufacturing, financial and professional services, low carbon, digital and technology, creative industries, education, construction, and transport and logistics.

There is a concerted effort to increase the supply of skills in key sectors such as cybersecurity, data analytics, advanced manufacturing, engineering, construction, and the green economy, which are vital for regional growth.

The [West Yorkshire Digital Skills Plan](#) seeks to create an inclusive society and thriving economy by enhancing digital skills across the region. This plan supports residents seeking to pursue careers in the tech sector.

Key contacts

Tracy Brabin, Mayor

Francis Burkinshaw, Lead Policy Officer – Business & Skills Ecosystem

Michelle Burton, Head of Service, Employment & Skills

Anika Gilbert, Policy Officer, Employment & Skills

Mike Hawking, Chief of Staff to the Mayor

Helen Hawxwell, Policy & Partnership Lead – Adult Skills

Phillip Syers, Inclusive Economy Manager – Adult Skills

Key organisations

Northern Skills Network & Yorkshire Learning Providers – Alex Miles

North East Learning Providers – Sue Outhwaite

South Yorkshire Provider Network – Jayne Vose

Digital Skills Partnership West Yorkshire

Recommendations

1. Connect with the West Yorkshire Consortium of Colleges to embed Level 4 HTQs and degree apprenticeships into their planning.
2. Propose UVAC supported workshops linking HTQs with Anchor Institutions in Growth Clusters.
3. Partner in LSIP implementation via Skills Connect portal, ensuring HTQs are prominently featured in employer-facing skills listings.
4. Propose HTQs in advanced digital areas (AI, data analysis, cyber) through universities like University Centre Leeds supporting the [Digital Skills Plan](#).

National Organisations

There are clearly many more, but here are some that you may wish to actively pursue.

There are also sector skills bodies for each sector which I can provide specific information in future reports.

Policy Connect, Education and Skills

There are no events currently on their schedule, but it is worth registering to keep informed of upcoming events. Recently they held one for the Skills Commission and the Social Mobility Commission with the APPG on Skills, Careers and Employment.

<https://www.policyconnect.org.uk/education-and-skills/events>

All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Skills, Careers & Employment – Central to technical education and post-16 reform. The APPG frequently holds roundtables and policy briefings on apprenticeships, T-Levels and local skills planning via Policy Connect.

<https://www.policyconnect.org.uk/apgse>

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmallparty/241120/skills-careers-and-employment.htm>

APPG on Further Education and Lifelong Learning – Championing FE colleges, adult learning and the integration of vocational and technical education.

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmallparty/240124/further-education-and-lifelong-learning.htm>

APPG on Apprenticeships – Promoting high-quality apprenticeships, including higher and degree <https://www.appgapprenticeships.uk/>

APPG University Group <https://universityappg.co.uk/>

Skills Commission – Currently pursuing research inquiry on NEETS

<https://www.policyconnect.org.uk/sc>

WorldSkills UK – Champions skills excellence; major platform for technical education awareness

<https://www.worldskillsuk.org/>

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APPENDIX A: Regional Authorities Sector Priorities Matrix 2025

	Advanced Manufacturing	Construction	Creative & Cultural	Digital	Energy & Clean Power	Engineering	Financial Services	Food & Agriculture	Health & Care	Life Sciences	Transport & Infrastructure	Visitor Economy	Other
Combined Authority													
Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cornwall & Isles of Scilly ¹													
East Midlands Combined County Authority (EMCCA)			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
East Essex County Council ²	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Greater London Authority (GLA)		✓				✓							
Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hull and East Yorkshire Combined Authority (HEYCA)	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Liverpool City Region Combined Authority	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Norfolk & Suffolk ³	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
North East Combined Authority	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Defence, security & space	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tees Valley Combined Authority	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	Defence	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
West of England Combined Authority (WECA)			✓	✓									
West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA)	✓		✓	✓				✓					
West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority			✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

¹Made of Cornwall Council and Council of the Isles of Scilly

²Essex County Council (ECC) is reviewing proposals to form a Mayoral Combined County Authority with the first election for a Mayor taking place in May 2026.

³The local authorities have expressed an interest in establishing a Mayoral Combined County Authority. The first election of a Mayor will be in 2026.