

Marches Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP)

Progress Report

June 2025





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TERMINOLOGY KEY

2021 Census	National Population Census for England & Wales	LA	Local Authority
BID	Business Improvement District	LSIF	Local Skills Improvement Fund
C&Eco	Careers & Enterprise Company	LSIP	Local Skills Improvement Plan
DfE	Department for Education (UK Government)	Marches	Herefordshire, Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin
DWP	Department for Works & Pensions	MEP	Marches Education Partnership
ERB	Employer Representative Body (Shropshire Chamber)	MLSIP	Marches Local Skills Improvement Plan
FE	Further Education	MSPN	Marches Skills Provider Network
HCA	Hereford College of Arts	NMITE	New Model Institute for Technology and Engineering
HE	Higher Education	NOMIS	Part of the Office for National Statistics
HLNSC	Hereford, Ludlow and North Shropshire College	SAP	Skills Advisory Panel
HTQ	Higher Technical Qualifications	SCG	Shrewsbury Colleges Group
HWGTA	Hereford & Worcester Group Training Association	SLT	Senior Leadership Team
ITP	Independent Training Provider	T level	Technical Levels
ICS	Integrated Care System	UKSPF	UK Shared Prosperity Fund



Purpose of the Report



The purpose of this Marches LSIP Progress Report 2025 is to set out the progress achieved against the [Marches LSIP 2023](#) and the employer driven priorities to highlight achievements and further actions. To showcase the varied collaborations and how these are vital to ensure good skills outcomes, now and in the future.

The lead for the Marches LSIP is the Employer Representative Body (ERB) Shropshire Chamber of Commerce, supported by a Governance Board representing all three sub geographical areas plus public, third and the private sectors. The Marches Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) is one of thirty-eight across England.

The Marches LSIP is first and foremost to put **employers at the heart of the skills agenda**, meeting the objectives set out by the White Paper of 2021 - [Skills for jobs: lifelong learning for opportunity and growth](#).

Written in plain English to support the widest audience.

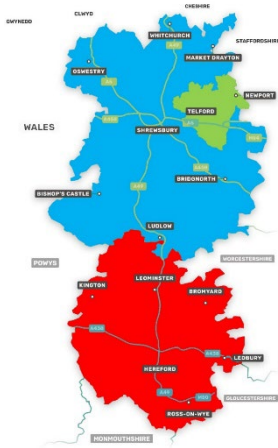


The report, written in plain English, will have different uses for each audience, be they public or private sector. The key audience being employers, as without their understanding, feedback and involvement, progress will not be made. It will also be equally important for training providers and local authorities to help them understand the local skills needs and how to work to address those needs.



Summary of the Marches LSIP

The Marches Local Skills Improvement Plan (Marches LSIP) is an employer focused plan to better match training provision to local employer skills demands through research, engagement, and collaboration.



The Marches Area 3 Unitary Authorities – Total area 5,957,sq.km

Herefordshire: Pop. 189,900 Pop density 87 per sq.km. Key Employment Sectors: Land-Based, Manufacturing, Cultural & Tourism and Defence

Shropshire: Pop. 329,260 Pop density 102 per sq.km. Key Employment Sectors: Land-Based, Health, Education, Retail and Manufacturing

Telford & Wrekin: Pop. 190,419 Pop density 651 per sq.km. Key employment sectors Wholesale, Retail, Motor Trade, Health and Manufacturing

The objectives and aims of the Marches LSIP:

- To ensure that skills needs, shortages, and barriers faced by business are researched and articulated to decision makers, such as training providers and Local Authorities.
- To support training providers and other stakeholders to increase or revise their training offer to meet the articulated needs, whilst managing employer's expectations.
- To support work to increase businesses awareness of the extensive and varied training offer within the Marches and support business to explore alternative routes to finding skills.
- To harbour stronger unions between public sector stakeholders and employers.
- To support work to improve work readiness in those moving into employment or new sectors.

The key challenges within the Marches area:

- Rural nature of the area makes training delivery more complex, needing innovative solutions.
- Language and cultural difference between public and private sector, hindering progress.
- Retention of the younger element of the workforce, especially those going to university, as the Marches has limited university options.
- Skills drain to urban areas due to higher wages, requiring greater back filling of skills.

Marches LSIP Stage 1 Report (the Priorities) August 2023: [Click here to view](#)

Marches LSIP Update Report 2024: [Click here to view](#)

Marches LSIP All Reports: [Click here to view](#)



Strategic and economic context update



Though there have been changes in the Marches since the Marches LSIP Report of 2023 and Update Report of 2024, there have not been any dramatic changes that would heavily influence the direction of, or negatively affect, the work of the Marches LSIP. In the main, much of what has changed only goes to further enhance the work and direction of the Marches LSIP. With increased training volume in sectors already covered being the main need going forward, the Marches LSIP is well placed to support this.

Though our employer base has not radically changed, despite some closures, we do see significant new investment in the Marches region of late. German owned Müller, famed for their dairy products, are further investing and expanding their already sizeable multi-sited operations in Shropshire. UK avionics specialists Techtest Ltd, part of the HR Smith Group, expanding for a third time in Herefordshire, with a new 31,000 sq. ft high tech advance manufacturing centre in Hereford. Swiss precision manufacturer Bruderer has moved its entire UK operations to Telford from outside the Marches, highlighting the Marches area as a manufacturing centre of excellence. In Telford 400 highly skilled jobs are to be created at a new UK site for Rheinmetall, a global leader in defence technology and manufacturing, adding to our already strong defence manufacturing sub-sector.



Skills England has identified 10 priority sectors. These new employer investments and expansions feed directly into several of those priorities, including Advanced Manufacturing, Digital and Technology, Clean Energy Industries, Construction and Defence. Sectors the Marches LSIP is already embedded in and training providers across the Marches are very well attuned to.

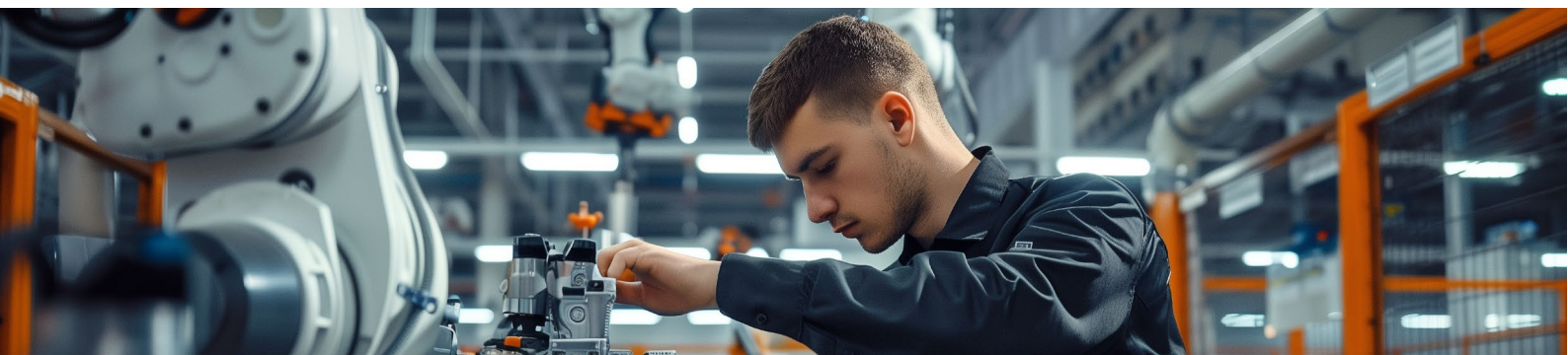
As well as many other expansions and investments, we also have seen a healthy influx of large house building projects and multiple new retail outlets from major brands such as Lidl. Again, construction is a Skills England priority sector and a core sector for the Marches LSIP.





The Local Skills Improvement Fund investment has already provided additional training in some of these sectors, such as manufacturing robotics and green construction skills. Outside of that a good example of progress is Telford & Wrekin Council's new Quad building in Telford, part of the wider Station Quarter development. A centralised and easily accessed hub, vital to allow more to access training from a wider geography. This has allowed two major Marches training providers, Harper Adams University and Telford College, to have a town centre presence, to collaborate and offer courses in key topics such as digital technology, Artificial Intelligence (AI), robotics, engineering and business management. This all helps to increase skills, upskill existing employees, offer better skills retention, and encourages further business investment or expansion. Showing that understanding the local skills needs is crucial. The Marches LSIP ongoing research captures those skills needs and works with a range of stakeholders to ensure skills match local needs and training is increased or adjusted to meet need where practical.

Built By You was an initiative launched by national housebuilder Lovell Partnerships alongside Telford College and Telford & Wrekin Council. It offered unemployed residents the opportunity to access the construction industry and find meaningful careers, all beneficial to our employers hungry for new entrants. Though all our colleges and many private providers already train those going into construction, the pace of building locally is driving a need to increase training capacity.



The understanding that digital, especially AI, will play a keen role in every sector will be crucial going forward. Already, we see AI training on offer across the Marches and working together this must increase. Something that the Marches LSIP must focus on going forward on top of the established 25 Marches LSIP priorities. Leadership and Management skills will also need to include good knowledge of AI, to allow managers to be effective. Leadership and Management upskilling training was highlighted in the Marches LSIP, this was well responded to especially through Local



Authorities UK Shared Prosperity Fund allocations, in particular. Weaving AI training into this more deeply will be crucial, as managers will need to understand the AI skills that the younger members of their workforce possess, as they will have had more exposure and opportunity to learn the uses and limitations of AI, unlike some older staff, risking a knowledge divide.

Skills England also identifies the Creative Sector as priority sector. For Herefordshire this is a key sector, with a new Creative Manifesto being written, one of the only specialist arts colleges in the country based in the county town, offering training at all levels from school leaver to post graduate. Herefordshire is also world famous for the Hay Festival and many other creative aspects. Creative Industries is a key economic driver for Herefordshire. The benefits of this spreads across the Marches, as the students move into many sectors, having the skills employers state as much needed, creativity, self-motivation and resilience. Herefordshire Council has also recently opened a Youth Employment Hub, in line with getting more entrants into work, but also preparing them for the workplace to enhance the chances of successful employment. This matches the needs articulated in the Marches LSIP.



Hereford Cyber Centre



Telford Station Quarter



Shrewsbury Business Park

Since the update in 2024, we have seen two of our major colleges receive Good or Outstanding Ofsted inspections, new collaborations between training providers and a range of new facilities, courses and equipment come into use. This has expanded the range and types of training being offered, most especially in high employment sectors. Also, meeting a Marches LSIP priority was the local training providers creating short, flexible, bespoke or modular courses to upskill existing staff. At a time of skills shortages and rising overheads it makes it hard for employers to release staff, so this was warmly welcomed with strong take up both for funded and non-funded courses.

What has been achieved so far

Though there have been many achievements since the publication of the Marches LSIP, one of the greatest achievements must be the outcomes and ongoing benefits which have emanated from the Marches Local Skills Improvement Fund. Working with the Marches LSIP the [Marches Education Partnership](#) (MEP) received significant Local Skills Improvement funding (LSIF). The partnership is a collaboration of three further education colleges and three private training providers. Uniting this funding with their existing facilities, equipment and other funding pots has made it possible to go far beyond the initial expectations. The collective knowledge and strong industry contacts have also greatly enhanced the overall offer. The new equipment and facilities are already benefitting a very wide number of students studying at many different levels, not just those on Marches Education Partnership courses. The focus was on two key high volume employment sectors highlighted in the Marches LSIP Report 2023 - Manufacturing & Engineering and Green Construction Skills. The employer feedback is testament to the success of the initial project and the richness of the possibilities it has unleashed.



"We have a big need for this course. The robot and cell is exactly what we need to develop a large number of our staff". Jimi Lenton, Magna CCUK – Training Provider In-Comm Training

"Thank you for putting this course together. We have all found it very useful. It's been years since I've had to take on that much information in one day." Gareth Hughes, Lead Service Engineer at Medequus - Training Provider Shrewsbury Colleges Group. (This company got actively involved in the design of the course as well as embarking on the course)

A Snapshot of the Marches LSIF Projects Progress – as at April 2025

- 14 new teaching facilities created including the Low Carbon Technology Training Centre.
- 66 new courses already available, with further to follow.
- 460 students have already attended MEP courses, with a further 138 starting shortly.
- 1481 students on varying courses are predicted to have accessed new facilities and equipment by the end of the academic year. Including apprentices and fulltime learners.
- 150 Employers have released staff for Marches Education Partnership courses.

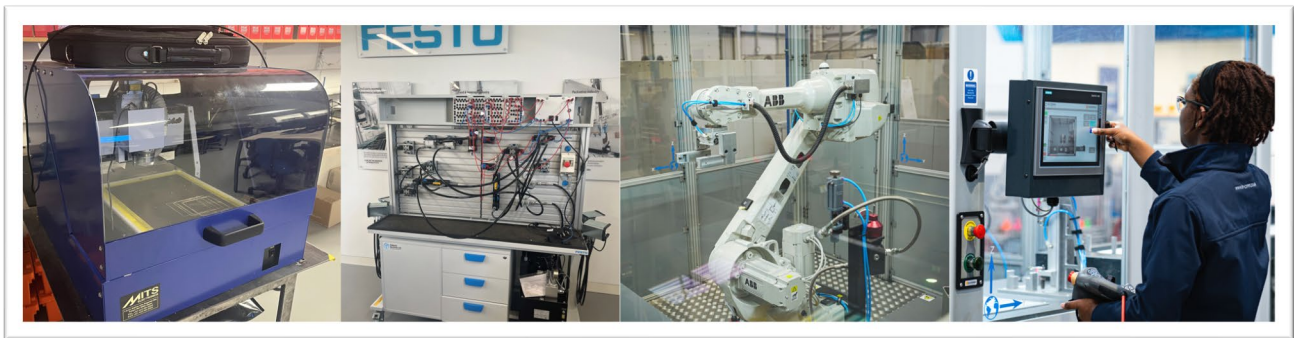


Developing Manufacturing & Engineering Skills

Manufacturing and engineering are key employment sectors for all sub regions of the Marches. The manufacture of food and drink products is vital to the region with large scale production companies such as Heineken, ABP and Avara based in the Marches. Likewise automotive and aerospace, defence, metals, polymers and many more, all of whom need access to staff trained to meet their needs. The Marches LSIP report 2023 highlighted the broad need to upskill staff to ensure current staff skills keep pace with the growing use of automation and other new technologies. The Marches Education Partnership courses worked to meet this requirement.

Marches Education Partnership Project 1: Developing manufacturing and engineering skills to expedite the automation of the manufacturing sector including food and drink production.

The Marches Education Partnership courses include Mechanics for Maintenance Technicians, Fault Diagnosis, Robotics, Automation, Production Engineering, PLCs, Electronics & Electrical Systems, Welding, Fabrication, Hydraulics, Pneumatics and Fluid Dynamics. The courses cover levels from introductory to advanced. Many are short courses, to ensure staff are away from the work place for the least time, but obtaining the specific skill required, meeting the priorities of the Marches LSIP. These skills also meet with regional and national skills needs.



“The LSIF project has made a significant difference to the skills provision HWGTA are able to offer. The LSIF has facilitated a new Automation Workshop and populated it with the latest Siemens PLC and UR Cobot equipment, enabling us to deliver training on the latest technologies to meet the skills needs of local employers.”

Nigel Morgan, Chief Executive HWGTA

Read Annex B for more information

Marches Education Partnership website - [Manufacturing and Engineering Courses](#)

The courses would apply to, but not limited to, SOC Codes 3119, 2127, 21220, 2122, 1121, 5223, 3113

Developing Construction Green Skills including Retrofit

Across the Marches, construction comes in many forms, from heritage to standard modern construction, factory constructed modular to steel fabrication, all requiring skills. With the Government's drive on new house building and the incorporation of green technologies in those builds, the need to upskill or train new entrants in environmental (green) technologies is more vital and urgent than ever. Already, across the Marches, numerous national and local house building projects are underway, with Telford one of the fastest growing towns in England. Government targets for building new homes per year are Herefordshire 1,363, Shropshire 1,994, Telford & Wrekin 857. As this is a nationwide uptick of house building, we will need to ensure we skill enough to meet local need and counteract any loss of workers to urban areas. The Marches Education Partnership is working to address the shortage with the 2nd of the two LSIF projects.



Marches Education Partnership Project 2: Construction including environmental technologies.

The Marches Education Partnership courses include Building Information Modelling (BIM), Workshop Management, Digital, Plumbing & Domestic Heating, Micro Renewable & Water Conservation, Insulation & Building Treatments, Alternative Energy, Retrofit, Supervisory, Offsite Construction. Again, a mix of short and full-time courses across the Marches. Employers have, and are still providing, advice and guidance to the Marches Education Partnership team to ensure that the training is suited to their fast-paced needs.

"With support from LSIF [Local Skills Improvement Fund], the college has further enhanced its facilities and training offer at its dedicated Low Carbon Technology Training Centre at Holme Lacy College and has been able to expand its green construction skills offer at Level 3 and above. This has, and will continue to, help meet the skills needs and green ambitions of local employers and businesses".

Jon Gill, Vice Principal, Herefordshire Ludlow and North Shropshire College

Read Annex B for more information

Marches Education Partnership website - [Construction Green Skills including Retrofit](#)

The courses would apply to, but not limited to, SOC Codes 3114, 2129, 1122, 3119, 5223, 2129, 5142, 5319, 31190, 5330, 5319.



Other Marches Local Skills Plan (LSIP) related activities, working to meet the 25 priorities.

The use of UK Shared Prosperity Fund funding across the area has been key to delivering courses in subjects that businesses had stated were important areas of need. With the changes in ways of working, staff expectations and soft skills, businesses stated that a vital area that needed improving was leadership and management, to help those leading at whatever level, to be able to deal with the challenges of modern work practices. Others for example include AI, basic digital skills, communication online, cyber security and many more.



UK Shared Prosperity Fund funding, through Shropshire Council enabled the Shropshire Skills Hub to provide vocational training and qualifications to 409 local individuals to aid their career progression. In addition 161 local businesses were supported to upskill their staff. Many of these qualifications related to the functional work skills and enhanced IT skills, driven by the collective voice of the employers during the Marches LSIP research.

A local training provider portal has been created and launched via Shropshire Chamber's website, specifically for businesses. In the Marches LSIP Research it became clear that the local training offer was not always understood by employers. The portal aids the journey to the right training provision. This is coupled with a range of other business support tools, to ensure that more businesses are made aware of the skills finder portal. Promotion of this asset is being rolled out at events to ensure it reaches a wide business audience. Clear, concise and in employer speak.

Local Apprenticeships and Training Providers

Across the Marches there are a wide range of locally based providers offering training or apprenticeships to employers, their staff, as well as students of all ages and those returning to work, covering the range from school leavers to post graduates.

[CLICK ON](#) the maps below to find providers in your selected area.



As part of the Marches LSIP, businesses are being encouraged to 'Give Something Back', be it careers advice, working with further education students and more. This works alongside employers giving their time and knowledge, through the Skills Advisory Panels. These sectors skills panels support the training providers to create the right courses and invest in the right equipment. There has been an increase in interactions, supported by the Marches LSIP, and this is playing out, not only with public training providers, but also with private providers. The Marches LSIP is involved in highlighting the value and opportunity this brings to all parties and signposting employers to the right partners to ensure training providers have valued relationships

Health and Social Care. The need for health care staff is great in our area and is a Marches LSIP Priority, as well as a Skills England priority. One recent special initiative was Telford College and Integrated Care System (ICS), Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin giving care leavers the opportunity to progress into Health & Social Care, using the new state of the art nursing facilities at the college. The college has also entered a partnership with Keele University to bring nursing degrees back into our region. The recent significant investment in the facilities enabled this to happen.



All providers are working with the Marches LSIP to understand better the barriers in language between employers and training providers. Updates to websites, as well as other activities, have taken place to enhance the employer section, using clear language and concise formats.

[Shrewsbury Colleges Group](#) website is a good example of this.

Telford College's recent Emerge programme, in which the Marches LSIP was involved during its development, is a pastoral programme aimed at supporting students to be work ready, addressing soft skills such as confidence and self-reliance, again a Marches LSIP priority.

Hereford College of Arts, in conjunction with the Marches LSIP, is working with differing sectors to expand the career options they offer to their students, as well as highlight the qualities their students possess to a wider range of employers.

Dulson Training are working with the Department of Works and Pensions and the Job Centres, the Marches LSIP and local colleges to support both the unemployed and military veterans, including those with disabilities into the logistics sector, which has proven very successful and helps reduce a shortage of lorry drivers, which is a national not just local issue.

The Annex documents will provide further information and examples on how the Marches LSIP 25 priorities have driven many stakeholder activities. They will also showcase the value of collaboration between employers and educators, and how this benefits all parties.

What still needs to be achieved

As explained in the Strategic and Economic Context Update, there are no great changes in our region and the 25 priorities are still very much key to the needs of our employers and the workforce. The priorities will take time to embed so the work continues. We will continue to monitor employer's needs, the local economy and any changes to the makeup of employment and sectors locally, be they reducing or increasing, to ensure that stakeholders have current information to allow them to make the right impact on local skills needs.

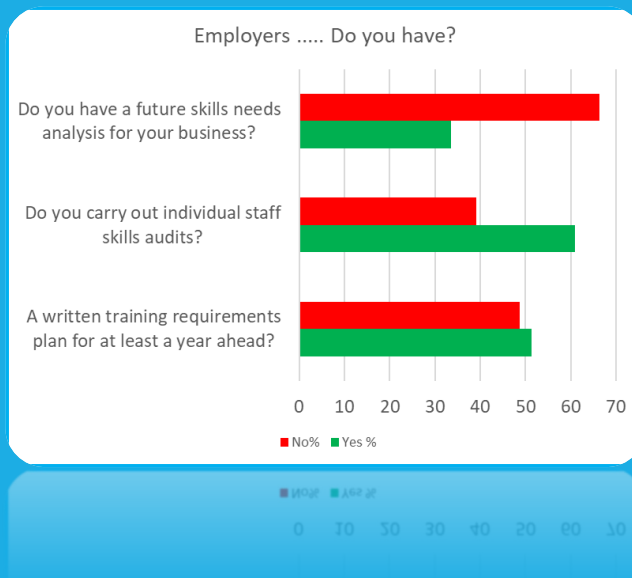
The Marches LSIP is working with the training providers to help them to better articulate their offer to businesses. Businesses who are often only engaging at short notice with specific requests. Already, improvements can be seen, but the goal is to ensure all employing businesses become aware of the training providers presence, just how diverse the offer is and how to make contact that is quick and productive. The Marches LSIP team will continue to provide intelligence and advice on how to improve communications. A multi stakeholder approach is needed to ensure that as many voices as possible are highlighting the opportunities to employers in clear simple language. The Marches LSIP will continue to market the available provision options using business focused language. The Governments drive to simplify the education system will help this greatly.

One clear example is that of the three major further education colleges who are all working hard to address the language barriers. This is proven through a rise in the number of employers offering T level placements in 2024/5, as employers now understand the qualifications and placements requirements far better than they did in 2023/2024, due to revised messaging and using fellow businesses as examples to show off the benefits. Also, it helped employers better understand how placements might grow their own skills pipeline through making students aware of the employer and the employer being able trial students.

T-LEVELS



Understanding that the vast number of employers do not have future skills needs plans and that many use a 'just in time' approach to sourcing training is important. Though this poses difficulties for providers, who must plan months in advance, having this understanding helps them to continue to find innovative ways to be flexible, approachable, responsive, and supportive through growing their industry relationships, offering a wider range of course styles, managing expectations and appropriate messaging. Support by Local Authority business engagement teams who can highlight the value and reasons for forward planning.



“When looking for training we would go by word-of-mouth or industry body recommendations, only then contact the provider to check that they are right for the business and deliver the right course to meet the needs of the staff.” *Professional Services Company – Medium Size*

All our training providers are working to find ways to embed more employability skills into the student's training. Base skills such as professional communication abilities, as simple as having the knowledge or understanding to pick up a telephone and make a business call, draft a professional email or use Excel effectively. The ongoing Marches LSIP research will continue to monitor employers views about new recruits, this will measure progress, this is not a quick fix, but a longer-term embedded solution. Improving these skills will help to ensure those wishing to enter the work place are more productive and employable.

Working with the Local Authorities on their Get Britain Working plans will help inform the sectors and training that will best suit the cohorts. The Marches LSIP team are involved in this planning process, which covers the entirety of the Marches, the measure will come, once the projects starts, by how many move into work and how many remain in work.

The new Local Skills Improvement Fund initiated courses already saw 150 employers send staff on those courses, reflecting the value of exact matching to employer's needs, through collaboration.

AI is driving rapid change and now equipping students entering the world of work with new skills. Upskilling management to comprehend the value, or not, of AI in their workplace, will be crucial for effectively managing staff who are more conversant with AI, a tool now integrated into many software applications. Therefore, this must be an addition to the LSIP priorities going forward.

Annex A – Priorities & Actions (Roadmap)



Additional Annexes

These annexes highlight the work by providers and other stakeholders to enhance training to meet industry needs, as well as providing first hand employer experience of working directly with providers and the benefits that brings.

Annex B The Marches Skills Partnership (MEP)

-  Manufacturing & Engineering
-  Green Construction Skills

Annex C Education Across the Marches

Annex D Local Authorities – A Brief Overview

Annex E Case Study: Specialist Training Collaboration

Annex F Case Study: An Employer Building a Strong Skills Pipeline

Annex G Case Study: Using Robust Induction to Increase Retention in Social Care

Marches LSIP Stage 1 Report (the Priorities) August 2023: [Click here to view](#)

Marches LSIP Update Report 2024: [Click here to view](#)

Marches LSIP All Reports: [Click here to view](#)



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