

Futureskills Northamptonshire

A collaborative framework for future success



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Executive summary

Northamptonshire stands at a pivotal moment. As global, national, and regional economies shift, our County must respond with agility, ambition and alignment. This new skills strategy represents an innovative tripartite collaboration between Northampton College, Moulton College and the University of Northampton. Together, we are building a unified, future-focused approach to skills development which responds directly to future employer needs, supports individual aspirations and strengthens the local economy.

This strategy will drive a new model of inclusive growth, productivity and social mobility. It integrates the priorities of the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), the West Northamptonshire Economic Growth Strategy, the North Northamptonshire Economic Growth Strategy, the South East Midlands (SEM) Local Industrial Strategy, the wider East Midlands economic growth strategic priorities (including the East Midlands Combined County Authority) and the UK's Modern Industrial Strategy. It also supports the region to deliver these strategies collectively, focussing on boosting productivity, promoting sustainability and driving innovation:

- Locally through inclusive and sustainable growth in Northamptonshire
- Regionally through South East Midlands and East Midlands focus on advanced engineering, logistics, construction, clean energy and the Oxford-Cambridge Arc
- Nationally through investment and sectoral growth.



Vision

To create a connected and agile skills ecosystem in Northamptonshire which:

- **Aligns education and training with real-time labour market intelligence**
- **Equips people of all ages with the skills needed for lifelong success**
- **Powers local innovation, enterprise and sectoral growth**
- **Embeds social mobility, sustainability and digital inclusion at its core.**



Strategic priorities

1. Pathways and progression

Develop a seamless skills ladder for Northamptonshire from Level 1 to Level 7 in priority sectors, particularly increasing youth and adult progression to advanced and higher technical levels (L3-5) and expanding technical and vocational programmes (including V Levels, T Levels, apprenticeships and advanced/higher technical programmes).

Together we will

- Map existing curriculum with the needs of priority sectors across the county and wider region
- Engage a range of key employers and stakeholders to develop a better sense of what a future skills pathway needs to look like
- Build seamless skills ladders in priority sectors across partner providers, creating new programmes to address identified progression gaps as needed
- Develop progression agreements between partners to encourage progression to advanced and higher level study.



2. Skills for priority sectors

Align curriculum, apprenticeships and employer engagement with key sectors identified nationally, regionally and locally by collaborating with local initiatives and appointing sector leads for targeted development. These include:

UK: advanced manufacturing, creative industries, clean energy industries, digital and technologies, financial services, defence, life sciences, professional and business services

Northamptonshire: advanced manufacturing, clean energy industries, construction, defence, education and literacy, digital and technologies, financial services, health, life sciences, professional and business services, social care

Local specialist industries: footwear manufacture, sport, tourism and leisure, heritage skills, food and drink

NHS and other national employers: co-designed and delivered flexible, multi-professional and digital skills training, expanded leadership and lifelong learning opportunities, the introduction of curricula that support new roles and workforce inclusion in line with needs (as per the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan and the UK Modern Industrial Strategy)

Together we will

- Align curriculum development, apprenticeships and employer engagement with these sectors to ensure talent pipelines match local need
- Increase the proportion of young people progressing to Levels 3, 4 and 5 and the number of adults upskilling to these higher technical levels in priority sectors
- Expand technical vocational education programmes, including advanced and higher/degree apprenticeships, in priority sectors.



3. Inclusive skills ecosystem

Deliver a curriculum that strengthens youth justice and removes barriers for people from disadvantaged and vulnerable groups to succeed in vocational training and employment pathways, including ESOL, digital literacy, essential skills, targeted support for SEND, NEETs and care leavers.

Together we will

- Provide essential skills, SEND/ALS and ESOL programmes that create opportunity for students with barriers to progress and succeed and equip employers to benefit from their employment
- Provide excellent access and support for young people NEET and care leavers including through targeted intervention and support, to ensure progression to and success in vocational training pathways
- Ensure students can gain the digital literacy and basic skills they need to engage in beneficial learning.

4. Workforce upskilling

Deliver sector-specific training pathways to upskill employees (potentially, and in part, through the new LLE scheme and Skills Bootcamps), integrate digital and AI skills, and embed entrepreneurship and start-up incubators within educational institutions to directly drive innovation and productivity.

Together we will

- Develop flexible and adaptable upskill pathways in key sectors to increase the skills levels of current employees, driving innovation and productivity
- Upskill workers for the digital revolution by integrating digital technologies and AI into teaching and learning provision
- Embed entrepreneurship and start-up incubation within educational institutions to narrow the gap between research, development and productivity.

5. Pathways to employment

Co-ordinate skills bootcamps and accelerated programmes linked to local job markets, and strengthen employer-provider partnerships to offer apprenticeships, work placements and real-world experience for effective career progression.

Together we will

- Collaborate to deliver skills bootcamps and other rapid upskill programmes and extend apprenticeships to close skills gaps and improve productivity
- Co-design an innovative engagement programme with employers which translates projected future business challenges into a skills demand pipeline to strengthen workforce planning and a more collaborative skills-based approach to curriculum
- Collaborate with employers to ensure young people are prepared for the workplace through curriculum development, live projects, work experience and industry placements.

Enabling/underpinning principles

In order to deliver our vision, we will underpin our approach together through:

- Developing shared centres of excellence, each focussing on our strengths
 - AI and digital skills
 - Sustainable construction
 - Clean energy
 - Advanced manufacturing
 - Advanced logistics
 - Automation and innovation (such as agri-tech etc).
- Using collaboration (between us, with employers, DWP and across the region) as an engine of delivery
- Creating and delivering curriculum of high quality, which is agile to meet the needs of employers and students
 - Short-courses, micro-credentials, modular pathways (including LLE)
 - Flexible delivery, modular, part-time, digital and virtual learning.
- Realising a shared commitment to upskill our current staff and recruiting highly skilled new staff in our institutions
- Tackling ‘wicked problems’ to build our collaboration and prove impact
- Breaking down barriers for students and employers through engagement, outreach, mentoring, community presence, wrap-around support, widening access to digital devices and connectivity etc
- Sharing intelligence more effectively
 - Informing our work through shared skills intelligence and live LMI
 - Seamlessly linking with other partners to share intelligence.
- Promoting innovation and entrepreneurship
 - Building shared innovation spaces to support start-ups, research, knowledge exchange, consultancy and commercial partnerships.
- Committing to delivery and explicit governance
 - Creating a Tripartite Skills Board to oversee implementation and maintain alignment
 - Developing a shared annual impact report and stakeholder forum
 - Leveraging joint investment bids (e.g. Local Growth Fund, UKSPF, OfS, Innovate UK etc).

Outcomes by 2027

- **Increased number of learners progressing between institutions**
- **Increase in employer-designed courses**
- **Increase in adults and workforce participating in education and training**
- **Improved employer satisfaction and graduate employment rates**
- **Recognition as a model for cross-institutional collaboration in skills planning.**

Conclusion

Northamptonshire has a unique opportunity to lead the way in collaborative, responsive skills planning. By working as one system, Northampton College, Moulton College and the University of Northampton can deliver a new kind of education partnership, one that is rooted in place, driven by employers and focused on outcomes that matter.

To join our partnership, please email ovc@northampton.ac.uk – thank you.

