

South Yorkshire's Skills Strategy

Contents

Forewords	3–4
Overview	5–7
Our Missions	8–15
Flagship Programmes.....	16–19
Our Partners	20
South Yorkshire’s Plan for Good Growth	21
Local Skills Improvement Plan.....	22
Our Plan of Action	23–31
Roadmap.....	32
Background Reading.....	34

Mayor Oliver Coppard



I want to build a better, not just a bigger economy in South Yorkshire. In this Skills Strategy, we set out the practical steps we will take as a region to get there.

We can see the outline of the South Yorkshire we are building. It will be clean, healthy, resilient and connected. It will produce the goods and services that the world wants in an age of climate transition, shifting supply chains, and new technology revolutions.

We want to be a region that attracts the right employers – not just any employers – and we want to work with them to create jobs for the future for every community of South Yorkshire. But creating jobs is only half the task.

To achieve any of those goals, we need a skills system that delivers for our communities. We need to work with skills providers and employers to make sure people have the skills they need to thrive.

Our skills system should offer every person in South Yorkshire a map to chart their place in that future economy; or a passport to a second chance, when our personal lives or economic change means that we need new skills to get on.

That is why our Skills Strategy has something to offer for everyone in our region. Each and every person needs support to be able to go far in South Yorkshire.

You could be a young person in Doncaster, trying to decide your next steps in training and employment. We want you to be confident that you can get one of the best apprenticeships in the country and improve your core skills, with a job that will be around for decades to come, delivered through our Plan for Growth.

You could be a person born and raised in Barnsley, who has taken time out of a job to raise a child or battle an illness, and now want to get back into work. You could be a builder or a technician in Rotherham, wondering how you can take your existing skills

and make the most of the new opportunities you hear about in retrofitting homes or in advanced industry that will keep you in work for decades. Or you could be a student who has moved to Sheffield for university, wondering how you can thrive in your career in your adopted city.

We are now three years into the experiment of adult education budget devolution. We have shown the difference we can make if we take decisions closer to our communities. Our four local authorities, together with the MCA and partners, are working together to address the challenges our communities face and are aligning our resources to achieve more collectively than we could apart. With this Strategy, we want to go further: reorientating our skills system priorities to work better for South Yorkshire.

Realising the potential of everybody is not just the right thing to do, it's also sound economics. At a time where there are few easy answers to the questions posed by a low-growth economy on how we get our economy growing, tackling the blight of unemployment and underemployment is perhaps the best path we have to renewal.

Better still, if we get it right then we can bring the biggest benefits to those who might otherwise miss out on our future economy altogether. This Strategy is an antidote to the 'trickle down' philosophy of the past. It is inclusive by default, here we set out a plan for giving everyone the tools to help us build a new future for South Yorkshire. We face an uncertain world and an uncertain future. Investing in our skills is the single best way we can respond to that uncertainty and turn it into opportunity and advantage.

Every step along the way, I want you to feel that, in South Yorkshire, we are part of one community, looking after and out for each other.

We will be your champion. You will be our future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'O. Coppard'. The signature is fluid and cursive.

Oliver Coppard
South Yorkshire's Mayor

Cllr Sir Steve Houghton



Few other policy areas have been subject to as damaging a combination of policy churn and budget cuts as the adult skills budget. A budget which is so important to the fabric of communities and to the local economy, but a budget which has fallen by a third in real terms since 2003/4.¹

Too often a first chance is a last chance, and the quality of that first chance varies dramatically from city to city, from town to town, even from street to street. There is a lot to gain if we seize the opportunity – we estimate that supporting 20,000 people with no qualifications up to Level 2 could generate an additional £200m in earnings, and moving a further 20,000 people from Level 3 to Level 4 could generate a further £200m in terms of earnings.²

In South Yorkshire, against a backdrop of uncertainty, we have made significant progress. Skills Bank, a national leader in training co-investment, has now supported nearly 5,000 learners. We have first class apprenticeship providers. We have some of the nation's best colleges; Barnsley College was the first FE college in Yorkshire to achieve outstanding under the new Education Inspection Framework. And we have been leading the way on health and employment support, through Working Win, a national pathfinder which was locally designed and delivered, and shortly through Pathways to Work.

South Yorkshire has become a national policy lab, identifying what works locally so that it can be applied nationally. This Strategy marks the next step along that journey.

This Strategy is a framework for our interventions. It has a clear objective: to support residents to live resilient and productive lives. It will be focused on the learner: too often the learner and their needs are lost in the myriad of partners, providers and programmes. It puts partnership working at its core, ensuring local, regional, and national government, employers, providers, representative bodies and the voluntary and community sector have a collective responsibility to deliver for the region. And it has three clear Missions to deliver our objective:

1. Move those far from the labour market into work or ready for work

2. Raise attainment of core knowledge and skills

3. Increase the supply of a high-skilled workforce

We will co-ordinate and evaluate our interventions to ensure we are getting the maximum value for each pound invested. We will move towards multi-annual budgets for our providers, alongside clear outcomes frameworks. We will streamline our procurement, so the best possible provision is available to our residents. We will build on the skills plans already in place in our constituent authorities, delivering together the region's priorities and sharing best practice.

And we will take forward a series of bold ideas that will drive local and national reform:

- South Yorkshire Young Person's Offer
- South Yorkshire Community Skills Hubs
- Expanding and simplifying Skills Bank
- South Yorkshire Single Skills and Employment Portal
- South Yorkshire Technical Offer
- Good Business Campaign
- Mayoral Awards

We will also campaign for national reforms. Political parties talk of simplification and devolution. We want to see those words become actions by supporting delivery of a single settlement for South Yorkshire and unifying programme funding with the same outcomes.

This Strategy talks a lot about 'we' and 'our'. This refers to the Mayoral Combined Authority and its four constituent local authorities. The Strategy has been developed in partnership, and knits together the transformational work underway by aligning our priorities.

Sir Steve Houghton
Leader of Barnsley Council, Skills Lead for South Yorkshire MCA

¹Institute of Fiscal Studies, Annual report on education spending in England:2023, 2023

²Internal analysis using Census 2021 and Annual Survey of Earning and Hours (ASHE) 2023 data

Overview

Skills are the foundation of flourishing lives, communities, and economies. We cannot build a bigger and a better economy, more directly linked to the wellbeing of our population and planet, without a functioning skills system. That is why the objective of this Strategy is to support residents to lead resilient and productive lives.

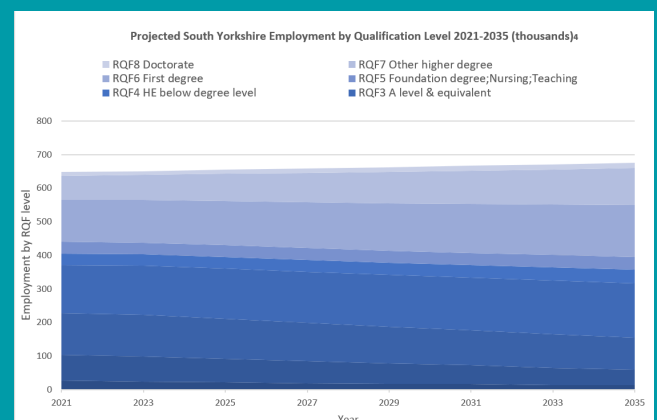
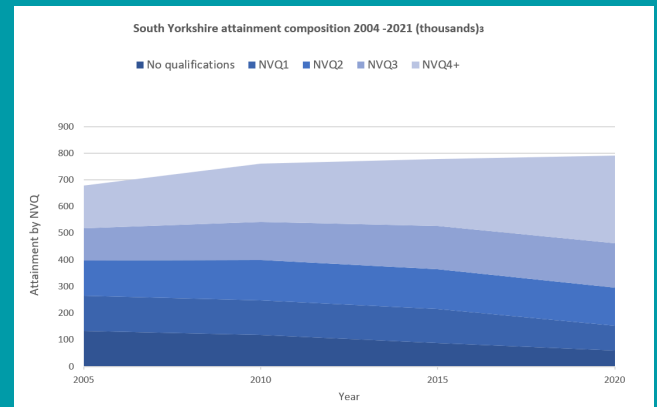
We begin from a place of strength, with strong partnerships between the public, private, voluntary and community sectors, successful institutions, a culture of learning and an upward trajectory in qualifications.

But we must face the challenges. Rates of economic inactivity and low basic skills are too high, and the number of residents with high-level qualifications is too low. Tomorrow's labour market, shaped by revolutions in technology, by structural changes in the economy and by the transition to Net Zero will require a more skilled workforce. Inter- and intra-regional inequalities will persist, without a closing of the gaps in skills levels. Productivity growth, driven by workers with ever increasing know-how, will be needed to service an ageing population.

And we must seize the opportunities that will arise. South Yorkshire is experiencing rapid growth in the tech, health and advanced manufacturing sectors. It has one of the largest clusters in the UK of clean tech businesses, and is a leader of nature-based climate thinking. The Mayor is the first in his position to become chair of an Integrated Care Partnership, and is driving a focus on preventative health, alongside one of the largest clusters of medical device manufacturers. This growth will bring secure, high-paid employment for those with the right skills.

To meet these challenges and face these opportunities, we will focus our activity on three clear Missions:

1. Move those far from the labour market into work or ready for work
2. Raise attainment of core knowledge and skills
3. Increase the supply of a high-skilled workforce



More residents in South Yorkshire have been qualified to a higher level in the last 15 years, but even more will need to be in the next 15 years.

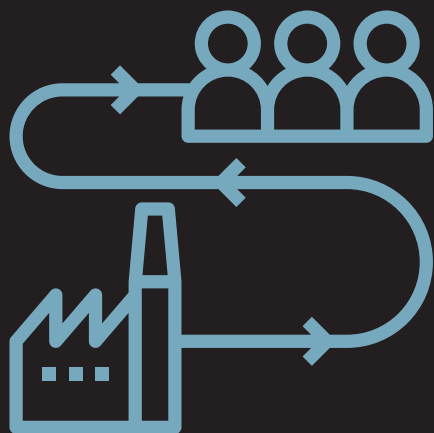
³ SYMCA internal analysis

⁴ Warwick Institute of Employment Research and Cambridge Econometrics, Labour market and skills projections: 2020 to 2035, 2023

Our objective:
To support residents to live resilient and productive lives.

Three clear Missions:

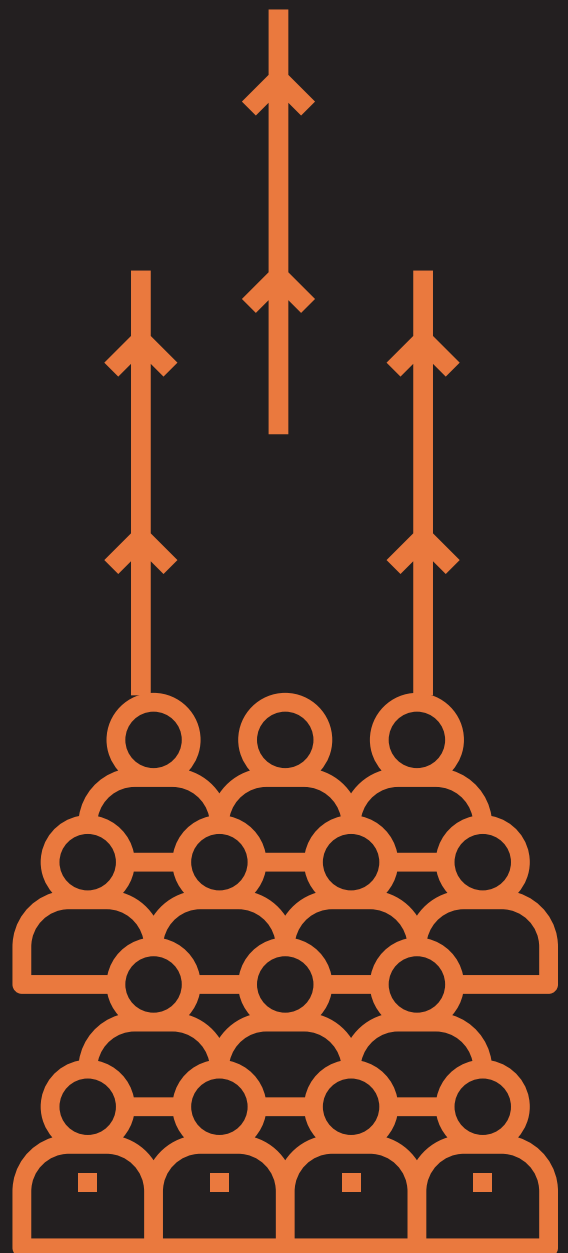
1. Move those far from the labour market into work or ready for work



2. Raise attainment of core knowledge and skills



3. Increase the supply of a high-skilled workforce



Built on:

Strengths

- Excellent partnerships between the public, private, voluntary and community sectors delivering transformational programmes such as Working Win.
- A strong mix of anchor FE colleges and independent providers.



- World-leading research facilities, universities, University Technical Colleges, Training Centres and an Institute of Technology producing in-demand technical and high-level skills.
- Wide-reaching careers services, through our region-wide Careers and Apprenticeship Hubs.
- Excellent employer engagement in skills development and training initiatives, such as our AMRC training centre.
- Sectoral strengths in manufacturing, clean energy, tech and strong foundations in education, construction, health, and transport.

With clear challenges:

- Almost a quarter of working age adults are inactive. Of those who are inactive, 38% are inactive due to either temporary or long-term sickness.⁵
- 16% of our working age residents have no formal qualifications, 43% of the working age population have qualifications at Level 2 and below; only 51% are qualified to Level 3 and above, compared to a national average of 57%.⁶
- There are geographic disparities of skills attainment and support between our communities. In the most deprived area in South Yorkshire, 28% of people had a Level 3 or above qualification, this compares to 79% of people in the least deprived area.⁷
- More of our young people are not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) than the national average and persistent absenteeism in schools is rising rapidly.
- Our ethnic minority groups experience higher rates of unemployment.

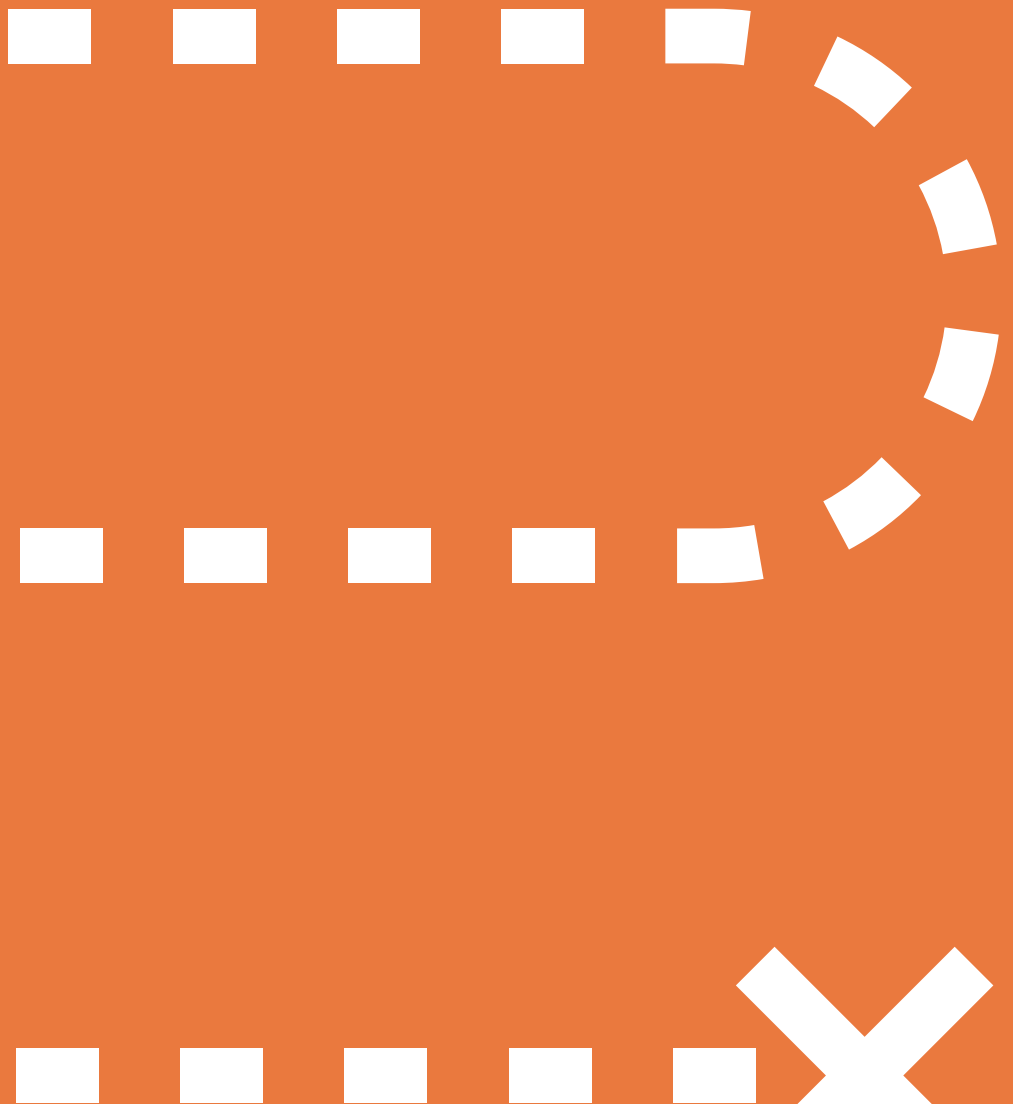


- Intermediate and technical skills, such as apprenticeships, have been falling.

⁵ ONS Annual Population Survey, October 2022–September 2023

⁶ Census 2021

⁷ Census, 2021 and Index of Multiple Deprivation, 2019. Looks at total 16+ population. Level of deprivation defined using Index of Multiple Deprivation and Local Layer Super Output Areas (LSOA).



Our Missions

We need to support our skills system to deliver our objective for South Yorkshire residents.

That is why we have identified three Missions which will structure skills activity and discussions across the region.

Mission

1

Move those far from the labour market into work or ready for work

239,000 working age residents in South Yorkshire are either unemployed or inactive. Of these, 44,000 are inactive but want a job; around 81,100 are inactive because of temporary or long-term sickness, a rate of more than 1 in 3 locally compared to 1 in 4 nationally.⁸

Economic inactivity has a significant cost on individuals and on society. Those who experience it often have multiple complex needs, are facing numerous barriers and feel a sense of isolation and hopelessness. The system that is supposed to support them is too often piecemeal, fragmented and fails to co-ordinate the significant, multi-agency investment of time and resources that is needed to take them on the journey from where they are to where they want to be.

In South Yorkshire, economic inactivity is heavily concentrated both geographically (see map) and amongst certain groups. Those with long-term health conditions, ethnic minorities, and young people with Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) are all significantly more likely to be economically inactive.

The pipeline of those who are at risk of becoming economically inactive is growing. The Covid pandemic has increased pressures on mental health support and absentee rates in schools are rising: the rate of severe absenteeism in schools was twice as high in 2022/23 as it was in 2017/18.⁹ Within the labour market we also see certain groups consistently underrepresented in work, such as ethnic minorities. We must ensure our employment support offer and services are inclusive and engaging to all.

Addressing inactivity, unemployment and underemployment provides not only an avenue to increase regional prosperity, but also an avenue to build personal confidence, pride and sense of purpose.

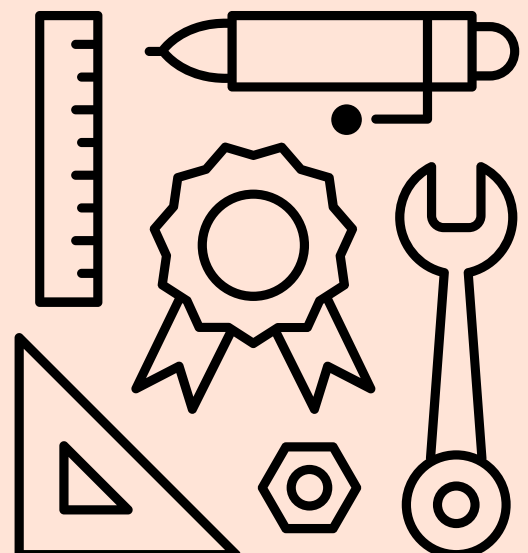
Based on our successful implementation of programmes such as Working Win, Changing Futures in Sheffield, wider Adult Community Learning and UKSPF, we know that effective delivery for this Mission involves provision which: i) takes learners where they are and addresses individual barriers ('learner-centred'), ii) is targeted and delivered by high quality, empowered service providers ('authorised high quality delivery') iii) is easily accessible to the learner and provides an inviting setting to facilitate engagement ('accessible and community based'), and, iv) co-ordinates the numerous agencies and programmes operating around them ('co-ordinated').

Key facts:

Across South Yorkshire the level of NEET 16–17-year-olds is consistently higher than the national average. In 2022, 6.8% of 16–17-year-olds were recorded as NEET, compared to 4.7% in England.¹⁰

For students with SEND, the NEET rate is higher - 13% of Sheffield's 16-17-year-olds are classified as SEND compared to 8.6% across England.¹¹

South Yorkshire's ethnic minority employment rate is 55.7% compared to 60.6% in Greater Manchester, 64.8% in West Yorkshire and 69.3% across the UK.¹²



⁸ONS Annual Population Survey, Oct 22-Sept 23

⁹KADA Research, p. 26

¹⁰KADA Research, p. 75.

¹¹Ibid

¹²ONS Annual Population Survey, Jan-Dec 2022

Our activity on this Mission will be guided by the following principles:

- Learner-centred
- Authorised and high-quality delivery
- Accessible and community-based
- Co-ordinated

We will prioritise:

- **Closer working relationships** between local authorities, service providers, voluntary and community groups by exploring opportunities such as co-location and convening.
- Engaging those far from the labour market with a **simple service that is focused on progression** for the individual and prioritises action around transition points, particularly preventing residents from falling out of work, and preventing them falling into economic inactivity.
- Reducing economic inactivity through developing a **co-ordinated employment support offer that navigates** the complex service environment on behalf of the user to help them remain in, return to, or enter employment.
- Developing a targeted and co-ordinated offer for our young people through the **Youth Taskforce**.

We will know we are making a difference when:

- We see a reduction in our inactivity rate and a corresponding increase in long-term employment or full-time further education.
- This includes a reduction in inactivity in communities and groups that have historically seen a larger proportion of the population long-term inactive. For example, ethnic minorities, care leavers and young people with SEND.
- A reduction in young people (16-25) who are NEET and corresponding increase in long-term employment or full-time further education.

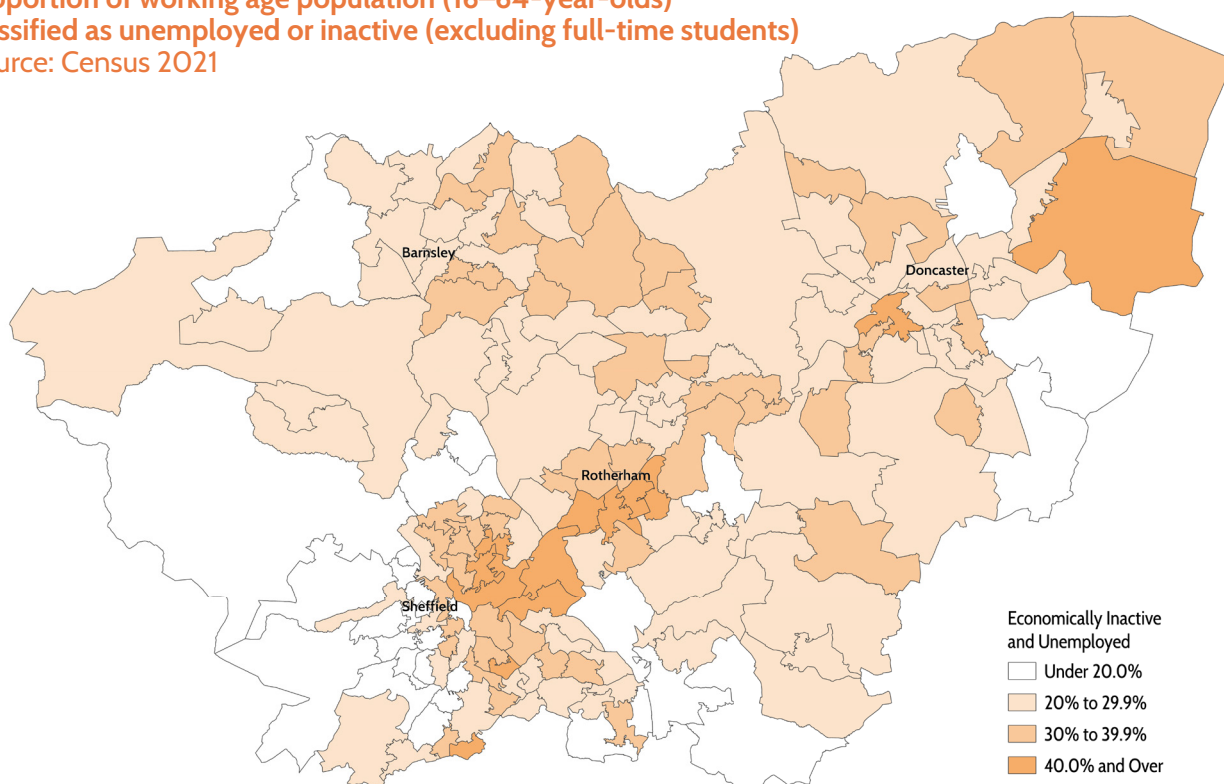
Pathways to Work Commission

Barnsley residents are 17% more likely to be economically inactive than the national average. The inactivity rate for the working age population in South Yorkshire currently stands at 24.1%. To pave the way for innovative solutions to the barriers that people face to work SYMCA and Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council have partnered on the Pathways to Work Commission.

The Commission will publish their final report in summer 2024. Recommendations from this report will directly support our Missions and we will commit to delivering its proposals for the region.

Proportion of working age population (16-64-year-olds) classified as unemployed or inactive (excluding full-time students)

Source: Census 2021



Mission

2

raise attainment of core knowledge and skills

Over 232,000 working age residents only have a Level 1 qualification or below, equivalent to 29% of the population aged 16-64. 137,000 have no qualifications.¹³

Language, literacy, numeracy, and digital skills are central to personal development and progression. While the precise structure of the future economy is impossible to predict, we know that these core skills have an enduring importance not only in providing residents with confidence and a foundation for success, but also in providing resilience to the local economy as and when employment patterns shift.

Too many South Yorkshire residents leave formal education with low core knowledge and skills, and too many of those that don't manage to achieve GCSE English and maths in school don't achieve it thereafter. In 2021/22, 75% of 19-year-olds in England achieved Level 2 on English and maths. Attainment was lower than the national average in all four of South Yorkshire's Local Authorities. In Rotherham, only 68% of residents achieved Level 2 in English and maths.¹⁴ Low attainment is geographically concentrated in certain communities across our region (see map).

Changes to the labour market will make this Mission more important over time. An ageing population, a shift towards Net Zero and the increasing application of automation and artificial intelligence will change the employment landscape. It is predicted that jobs for those with low-medium skills will fall over time: the Unit of Future Skills estimates that job postings for those with skills at Level 2 and below will fall from 215,000 today to 155,000 by 2035. Jobs for those with higher level skills will see a corresponding rise.¹⁵

As a region, we will also seek to shift the structure of our economy through our Plan for Growth by stimulating demand for high-skilled jobs so that more our residents gain secure, high-paid jobs. All of this means we need to raise the standard of language, literacy, numeracy and other basic skills amongst young people and adults. This includes supporting groups who are less likely to engage with the skills system.

We know that to deliver this Mission, provision must be: i) accessible to the learner and fit around their busy lives, too often structured around low-paid precarious work ('flexible and adaptable'), ii) offer a joined-up programme that meets the learners' needs and ambitions, not just a long-list of rigid modules ('joined up'), and iii) focused on taking the learner somewhere new, either new or better work or further learning ('employment and progression focused').

Our actions against Mission 1 and 2 should therefore be complimentary, with Mission 1 focusing on bringing target groups closer to further education and employment and Mission 2 progressing learners through the skills system.

Key facts:

In 2021, 16% of South Yorkshire's working age population had no qualifications, compared to 12% nationally.¹⁶

Only one third of learners who did not achieve a Level 2 English and maths at 16 had done so by 19 years old.¹⁷

13% of jobs in Doncaster are at a high risk (over 70%) of automation, as are 9.3% in Barnsley, 7.6% in Rotherham – all higher than the national average (7%).¹⁸

¹³Census 2021. Note: This figure excludes the "Other" qualifications category

¹⁴DfE Level 2 and 3 attainment age 16 to 25 2021/22

¹⁵Department for Education, Labour market and skills projections: 2020 to 2035, 2023

¹⁶Census 2021

¹⁷KADA Research, p. 43 – based on DfE Level 2 and 3 attainment age 16 to 25 2021/22

¹⁸KADA Research, p. i. – based on ONS 2019 data on which occupations are at the highest risk of being automated

Our activity on this Mission will be guided by the following principles:

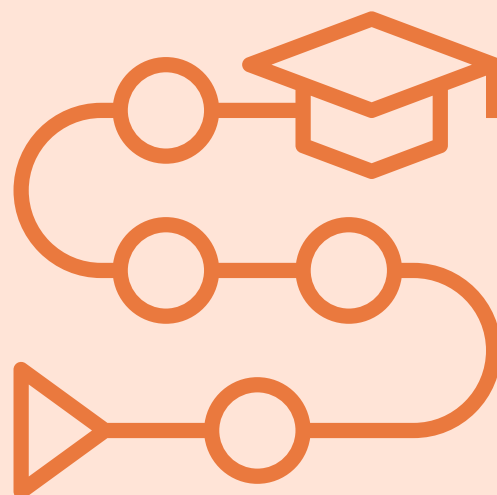
- Flexible and adaptable
- Joined up
- Employment and progression focused

We will prioritise:

- Improving learner outcomes, with a specific focus on **in-work progression** through training and education opportunities.
- **Reducing low attainment and targeting spend in areas of need**, including specific communities, employment sectors and subject areas.
- **Working with employers** to engage in greater education and training in the workplace.
- **Increasing the engagement with legal entitlements**, digital and full qualifications.

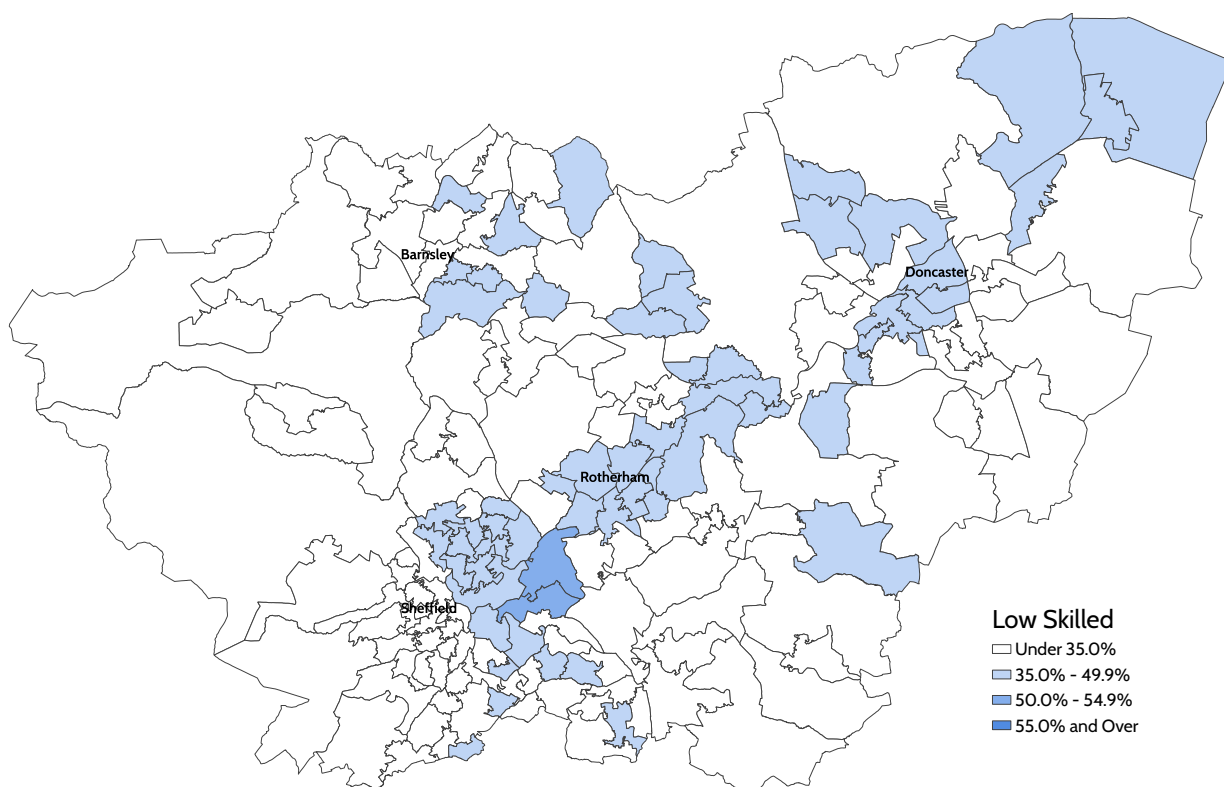
We will know we are making a difference when:

- We see an increase in proportion of population with up to and including Level 2.
- This includes an increase in groups that have been historically less likely to access these qualifications and skills (learners with SEND, ethnic minorities, care leavers, learners from disadvantaged backgrounds).



Proportion of population (16–64-year-olds) with up to a Level 1 qualification only (excluding apprenticeships)

Source: Census 2021



Mission

3

increase the supply of a high-skilled workforce

179,000 working age residents have a Level 3 qualification. 260,000 have Level 4 or above.¹⁹

Our third Mission will ensure that businesses seeking to start, scale or relocate to South Yorkshire will have the pipeline of talent they need. A highly-skilled workforce attracts investment and supply chains, which in turn drive region-wide prosperity.

Like the UK, South Yorkshire still experiences too large a 'missing middle' in its skills profile between university degrees and core skills. Providing these intermediate skills and reducing skills mismatches could offer a significant boost to regional productivity.²⁰ The region has a rich history of technical education and a growing number of high-quality apprenticeships. The South Yorkshire Institute of Technology and our University Technical Colleges are examples of how institutions are driving up access to high-quality technical education.

Yet there is more to do. Apprenticeship starts have fallen since 2018/19, and the number of achievements is still less than half that of starts.

There are also geographies of South Yorkshire where too few people progress into degree level or higher. For those who attend university, too few return to South Yorkshire upon graduating. For those who come to South Yorkshire to study, too few remain, despite a strong willingness to stay.

Through improving the supply of high-skill talent in the region - alongside driving employment growth (see our Plan for Good Growth) - we will create a virtuous cycle of businesses choosing South Yorkshire as the best place to start and grow and for residents to have access to good jobs that will allow them to prosper.

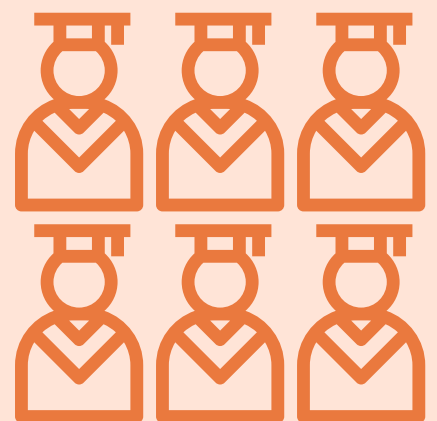
This is a multifaceted Mission, with provision varying based on individual and employer need. At its core, we will make sure our activity will focus on providing the skills the labour market needs today and in the future. We must progress residents with Level 2 and above into higher rates of attainment whilst ensuring this is complemented by investment in our business base to grow and develop high-level occupations. Further information on how we will invest in business and jobs can be found in our Plan for Good Growth.

Key facts:

51% of the working age population in South Yorkshire are qualified to Level 3 and above compared to 57% of adults in England.²¹

Only 30% of working age adults are educated to Level 4 or above. This is lower than Greater Manchester, Liverpool City Region, and West Yorkshire.²²

If 10% of the population in South Yorkshire with Level 3 earned wages equivalent to those at Level 4 or above in South Yorkshire, total earnings could increase by an average of £200m.²³



¹⁹Census 2021

²⁰Industrial Strategy Council, UK Skills Mismatch in 2030, 2019

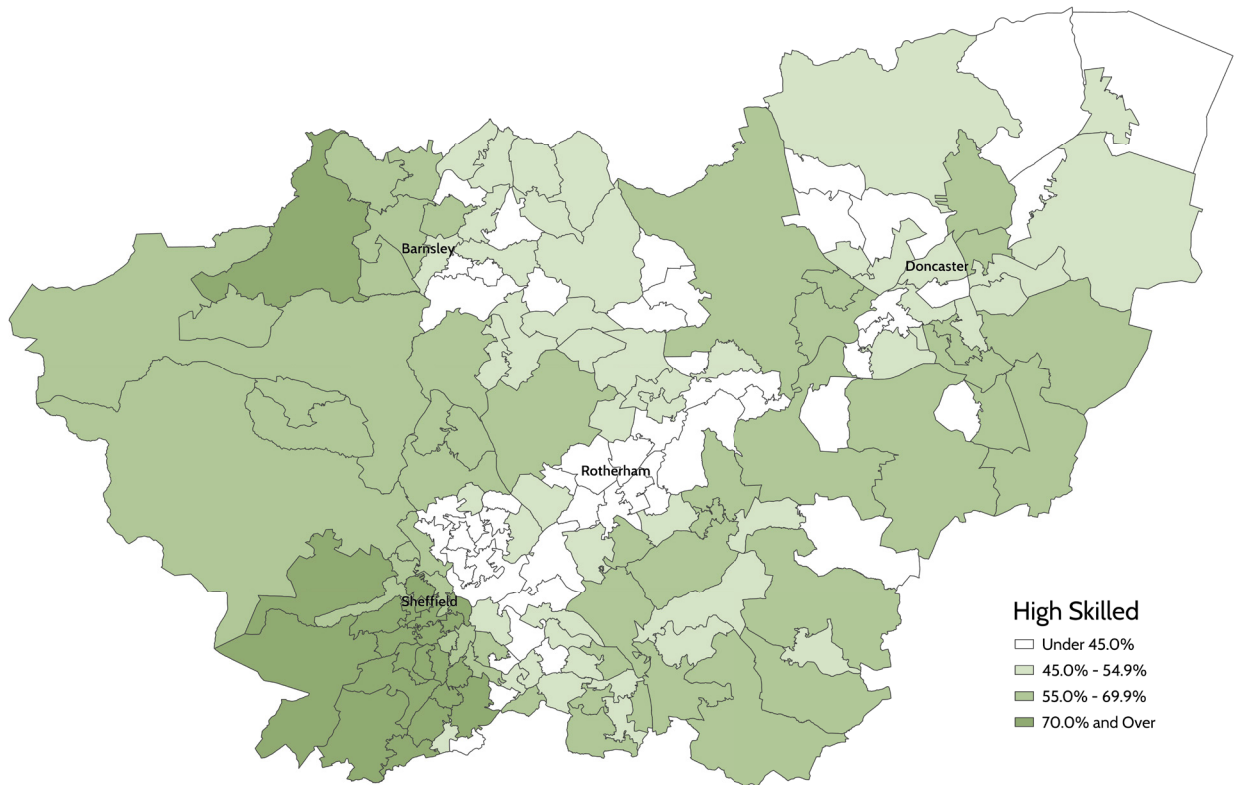
²¹Census 2021

²²Metro Dynamics, South Yorkshire Plan for Growth: Economic Analysis, 2024, p. 39

²³Internal analysis using Census 2021 and Annual Survey of Earning and Hours (ASHE) 2023 data

Proportion of the population (16-64 year olds) with Level 3 and above qualifications (excluding apprenticeships)

Source: Census 2021



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Our activity on this Mission will be guided by the following principles:

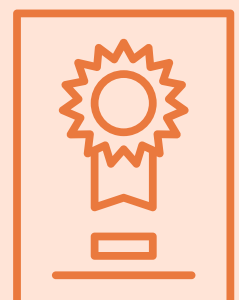
- Focus on labour market need today and in the future.

We will prioritise:

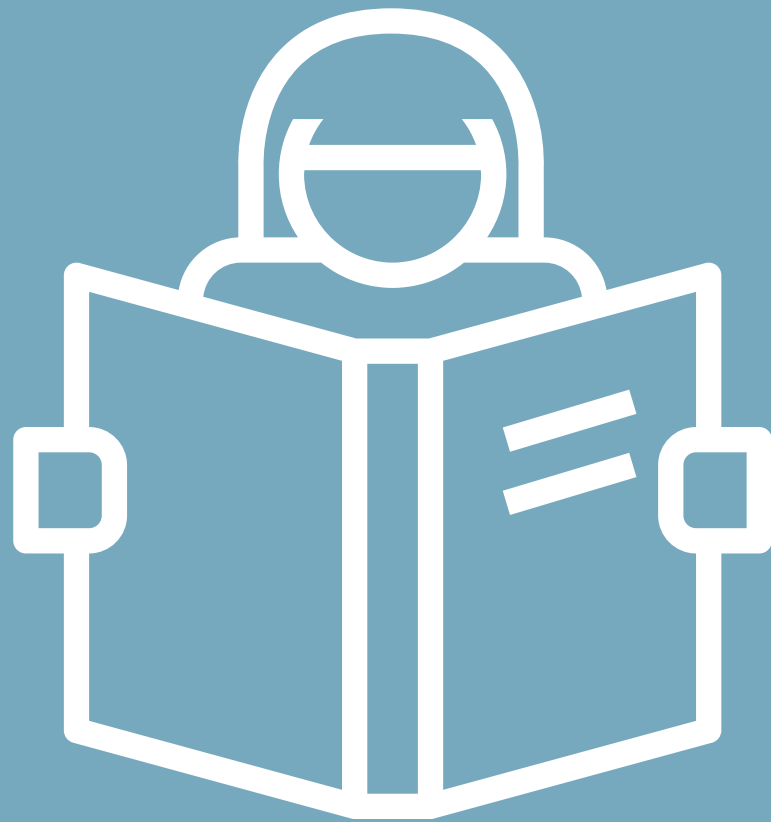
- Encouraging our **employers to invest in upskilling or reskilling their employees**, supported by programmes such as Skills Bank.
- **Enhancing our offer at Level 3**, ensuring that it is aligned to regional need and making provision more accessible to residents.
- **Meeting acute needs to fill skills shortages** whilst also investing in provision that develops high growth sectors, such as the green economy, health and wellbeing, and tech.
- Developing our **technical education offer** flagship programme.

We will know we are making a difference when:

- Increase in proportion of the population with Level 3 and above qualifications, particularly in areas relevant to the South Yorkshire's economy. This includes shifting population with Level 2 up to Level 3 and those with Level 3 progressing onwards.
- This includes an increase in groups that have been historically less likely to attain these qualifications and skills (for example, learners with SEND, ethnic minorities, care leavers, learners from communities with higher levels of deprivation).
- An increase in the proportion of higher-level occupations within South Yorkshire and an increase in median earnings.



Flagship Programmes



Flagship programmes



We will work with our partners to deliver seven new programmes of work aligned to our Missions' after work:

South Yorkshire Young Person's Offer

Habits formed in youth will stick for adulthood. Those who do not pass literacy and numeracy qualifications by the age of 25 struggle to achieve them thereafter; those who become NEET increase their risk of economic inactivity and lower future earnings; alternatively, young people and adults who engage in enrichment activities outside of education and work are more likely to report higher confidence and wellbeing.

Since the pandemic, we have seen a significant increase in persistent absenteeism and increasing numbers of young people reporting struggles with poor mental health. As part of this Skills Strategy, we will establish a Taskforce which will design and develop an offer for young people in South Yorkshire.

The Taskforce will build on ongoing work in delivering programmes such as the UKSPF in South Yorkshire to design the core elements of a youth skills programme, including defining a core target group. It will draw on insights from the Pathways to Work Commission and the Raising Participation Age Group. This programme will support young people to take the next step in developing the skills needed for work and life.

South Yorkshire Community Skills Hubs

Inactivity and low attainment are closely correlated and geographically concentrated in pockets of South Yorkshire. Residents in these places often experience multiple, complex needs. We know from programmes such as Working Win that community-based, person-centred, and co-ordinated support is required for individuals to progress. The next generation of programmes to address economic inactivity need to bring together skills, health and employment support. This co-ordination of resources is complex, particularly in the current funding environment, and often relies on high quality 'coaches' that work with individuals in need.

That is why we want to deliver 'Community Skills Hubs' which will seek to bring together skills, health and employment support, building on the lessons from Working Win and integrating disparate government funding streams. In practice, this will require close partnership working with Job Centre Plus, health services, providers, and community groups. These hubs may differ in form: we will work with the grain of existing services, based on existing community assets, to deliver a higher quality co-ordinated service.

These Community Skills Hubs will also form part of our campaign to bring employment support into a single devolved pot to deliver the next generation of programmes targeted at reducing economic inactivity.





Expanding and simplifying Skills Bank

Effective skills systems are partnerships between the public and the private sector. That is why we created Skills Bank, a public/private co-investment fund to address under-provision of workplace training in South Yorkshire. Since its launch in 2016 we have supported nearly 5,000 learners on courses from leadership to coding, with businesses co-investing in training alongside the MCA.

We know there is more we can do to improve this programme which is why over the next four years we will expand and simplify Skills Bank, with an aim to double annual provision by 2025. That means increasing both the rate of public sector and private sector investment in training in the region. We will particularly look at how Skills Bank investment can support our growth agenda (see Plan for Good Growth section).

South Yorkshire Single Skills and Employment Portal

Too often, the barrier to skills is lack of information and guidance. We have Careers Hubs and careers services across the region which are supporting all age groups to understand the training and support available to them. There is more we can do, both for individuals and businesses, which is why we will develop a single portal for skills and employment opportunities in South Yorkshire. This will build on our Careers Hubs and Apprenticeship Hub and be a site with a single point of guidance both for residents and employers. As part of our work to increase uptake in attainment and engagement, we will continue to run effective and targeted marketing for skills.



South Yorkshire Technical Offer

Opportunity in South Yorkshire can appear ceilinged with skills supply and demand skewed towards lower wage and lower skill work. Routes to gain qualifications and skills outside of traditional academic routes can appear complex and inaccessible. We want to make South Yorkshire a leader in the provision of and engagement with the technical skills our economy needs, offering opportunity to all residents with or without school qualifications to progress to Level 3 and above.

This will include: campaigning and raising awareness of technical routes on offer; identifying and increasing the number of technical and apprenticeship placements available; increasing apprenticeship starts and completions region-wide, while also increasing the proportion of apprenticeships available locally to those aged between 19 and 25; and, developing a pledge for the number of apprentices anchor institutions will take on. At every stage, we will work to improve access to and availability of technical education opportunities for those historically underrepresented and underserved by education and skills training.

We will also explore developing cross-organisational training schemes, such as apprenticeships and supported internships, with our MCA partners. These schemes could involve wider public sector or anchor institutions in the future.

Good Business Campaign

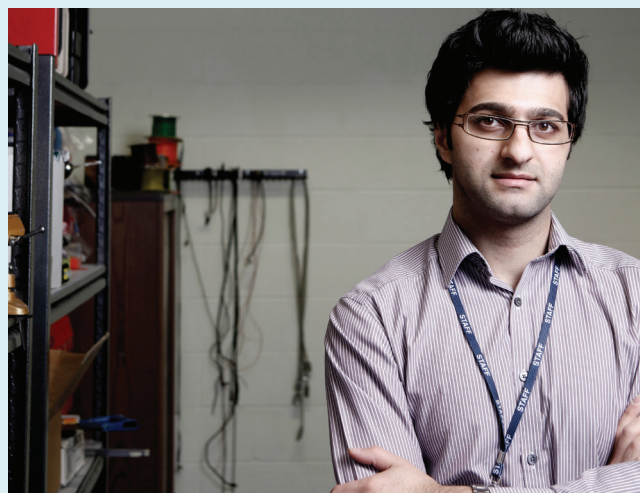
Employers and contractors play a crucial role in ensuring South Yorkshire residents have the skills they need to be productive and resilient. We are committed to delivering our Good Business Campaign. This includes a skills element of encouraging businesses to invest in employees and engage in careers advice; championing and awarding best practice; commitments to delivering the three Missions in this Strategy; and, ensuring employers are supporting employees to remain and prosper in work.

Mayoral Awards

Where changing attitudes to skills and training are hard to shift, we could do more to recognise and reward best practice. Alongside delivering our Better Business Campaign for South Yorkshire, we will develop Mayoral skills awards that will recognise learners, practitioners and stakeholders that embody the objective of the Skills Strategy.



Our partners



We want South Yorkshire to be the leading example of effective partnership working. We are already paving the way for new models of delivering services as exemplified by our Integrated Care Partnership, bringing together NHS partners and chaired by the Mayor.

Achieving the objective to support residents to live resilient and productive lives will not be possible without every partner in the region playing a role. Together we will ensure the skills base of the region can transform by:

- Being **outcomes led**. Ensure activity builds towards our Missions and outcomes.
- Being **driven by evidence** and effectively measuring impact and success, while continuing to develop our understanding of what works for South Yorkshire and sharing **best practice**.
- **Collaborating across organisations** to put the needs of our communities and employers at the heart of our decision-making and skills activity.
- **Ensuring programme delivery happens at the right level** to maximise engagement with communities and individuals. This means recognising and using partners – such as our local authorities and voluntary and community sector – to understand learner need and employer demand and target programmes appropriately.
- **Delivering excellent business engagement**, ensuring employers understand how skills can transform their businesses and the lives of their employees. Build understanding of skills needs in the region and how these will change.
- Ensuring more **employers collaborate** with providers and our third sector and take pride in developing and supporting people and communities.

- Create and deliver **excellent and inclusive careers support** for all young people and adults to help them identify clear goals and the steps needed to get there. Ensure all business types are built into careers advice and guidance.
- **Providing learning and support** which sets all young people and adults up for success, ensuring they leave programmes ready and able to access work or transition to further, higher level study. This includes facilitating in-work skills development and career progression.
- Ensure system leaders drive a **clear, consistent narrative** and set of priorities. Ensure priorities across public services align to enhance access to services for all.



South Yorkshire's Plan for Good Growth



Photographs by VOX, property of Sheffield City Council.

The South Yorkshire economy and the labour market are entering a new industrial era. Slowing rates of productivity growth, the pandemic and the energy crisis have put government budgets under increased pressure, creating an ever greater imperative for growth.

The transition to net zero brings largescale investment needs, with opportunities to seize as well as challenges to overcome. The revolution in technology underway will change the nature of work, the skills it requires and where it will take place.

South Yorkshire is well placed to benefit from this new industrial era. The Plan for Good Growth sets out how the region will grow more secure, high-paid jobs that bring investment and income into the region, as well as how it will build the economic and social foundations to make sure that those jobs and opportunities are accessible to all. The plan outlines four Growth Areas:

- 1. Sheffield City Centre and Innovation Spine –** spanning the city centre, the train station, and Kelham Island, it is a focal point for start-up and scale-up businesses which will provide the future knowledge economy.
- 2. South Yorkshire Airport City –** focused on the airport and adjacent sites, this area has potential to build and grow the region's capability in transport, manufacturing, green travel, and logistics, once the airport reopens.
- 3. Advanced Manufacturing Innovation District –** situated between Sheffield and Rotherham, this area has built out from its strength in advanced manufacturing into sectors such as health tech and clean energy. It illustrates the power of encouraging diffusion across businesses and the adaptability of skillsets across sectors.
- 4. Barnsley Town Centre –** building on the successful town centre regeneration, this project will look at how public service reform, through Health on the High Street and greater digital adoption and application, can continue to make Barnsley a place people are proud to call home.

What does this mean for our Skills Strategy?

We will not focus narrowly on any one or any group of sectors. We will use the Skills Strategy to work with employers in our foundational economy, in the care, hospitality, health and education sectors to provide good work and to ready our residents for opportunities in our growth and emerging sectors such as clean energy, manufacturing, and tech (including health tech).

Across all sectors, we will continue supporting the region's transition to net zero by developing the skills needed to embed change and develop a green economy. This approach will be supported through our South Yorkshire Investment Zone which will deliver programmes and funding to make the region the place to start, scale or relocate a business.

Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP)



Our LSIP 2023-2026 set out the challenges employers face in the region. It focused on South Yorkshire's growing digital sector and corresponding skills needs. Employment in the sector is expected to grow by 8.2% by 2035.

This built on a trailblazer LSIP which outlined digital, technical, employability and leadership as some of the top skillsets needed to boost business.

Our LSIP gave a set of recommendations for how to respond to these challenges which are cross-cutting to all three Mission Areas. The first set of priorities we are taking forward are:

For Mission 1 and 2:

- Improving digital literacy via focused campaigns towards individuals and communities that are too often left out of digital skills development.

For Mission 2 and 3:

- Improving employer engagement by increasing the number of businesses investing in workforce development through sharing best practice, supporting business engagement teams to know more about the region's skills offer and creating new skills marketplaces.
- Supporting middle leaders to know the skills their workforce needs to become more productive and for businesses to grow and prosper.
- Tackling trainer shortages by making sure teachers have the right skills and capability for learners, and therefore businesses, to adopt new technologies.
- Building capacity in the region's private training provider market and supporting local provision where possible.

Our Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF) is focused on delivering these priorities, such as investing in capital improvements to ensure we have state-of-the-art digital facilities. We are dedicated to evaluating LSIF investments with the view to building on successful interventions in future.

Our Plan of Action

Here, the *MCA* outlines the set of actions it will take over the next four years to move the dial on our *Missions*. These will be reviewed and renewed after four years.

Alongside the strategies of partners across the region, these interventions will deliver change to South Yorkshire residents and employers. We have focused on where we have levers to drive change: through funding; convening; and campaigning.



Cross-cutting

FUND

Fund programmes which result in **positive outcomes and progression** such as further education and/or employment

Realign funding to where there is most need and where the returns to investment are highest

Drive inclusion by providing support to those who are **underserved and underrepresented**

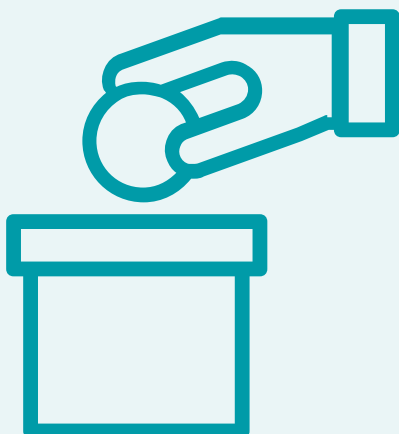
Provide **multi-year funding settlements** that offer financial stability and optimise delivery in return for outcomes frameworks

Retain **flexibility** within our budget to respond to acute need and deliver new, innovative provision

Coordinate funding streams to ensure programmes are outcome, not funding-led

Identify, develop, and target funding towards a pipeline of **capital funding projects** to improve delivery

Simplify our commissioning and procurement processes to make it easier for organisations to deliver provision and support that drives good outcomes



CONVENE

Provide system leadership by:

Working in partnership with learning organisations and wider partners to ensure we have an **accessible, responsive and effective skills system**

Co-ordinating stakeholders across the region to ensure the **system is ready for future devolution**

Supporting careers services and employers across the region to ensure **guidance is high quality and there are clear access points for advice** for all age groups (see single portal)

Providing regular data and intelligence to enable partners to develop provision which is informed by data

Working within the MCA and across partners to ensure other **strategic plans align** with priorities for skills, training, and education

Providing region-level leadership on technical education – such as apprenticeships - by **identifying and enabling innovative models** of delivery

Convening partners to **take advantage of national schemes** that align with our Missions such as the new pilot on apprenticeships



CAMPAIGN

Build on the recent announcement to move to Level 4 devolution and deliver a **single settlement** that allows fiscal flexibility to deliver programmes and fund local initiatives. We want to explore further devolution such as FE capital and an all-age careers service

Funding consolidation for programmes which are delivered differently but seek the same aim, such as UKSPF, WorkWell and Universal Support

Data-sharing agreements with Government, particularly with DfE, DWP and HMRC

Launch our **Good Business Campaign**

Develop Mayoral Skills Champion Awards to reward and recognise learners, employers and providers who are modelling best practice when it comes to skills training and development. Together with encouraging entries into sector awards such as World Skills



Alongside our actions to fund, convene and campaign we will set an ambition to be evidenced. This means we will:

- Invest in resource – and work with partners such as our universities - to improve our monitoring and evaluation function within the MCA
- Ensure appropriate evaluation built in from the start for any new programme and continuing to effectively monitor impact of current programmes
- Fund and support research into best practice and what works, to gain new insight into system and programmes design and delivery
- Explore local data sharing agreements such as on provision and support for young people with SEND
- Ensure learning is then built into programme development, curriculum development and career guidance.

1. Move those far from the labour market into work or ready for work

FUND

ACTION

Identify key outcomes and target groups we wish to support and coordinate funding streams to develop packages of support based on our principles for funding for these groups - providing high-quality and tailored provision that reduces individuals' barriers to learning or employment and provides access to valuable opportunities (see youth offer and skills community hubs)

Champion integrated partnership models and community-based programmes

Structure funding to incentivise accelerated outcomes and encourage progression into further learning or employment

Securing longer-term funding for programmes.

For the MCA to, where appropriate, directly commission and fund education and employment-related programmes where there is a clear need for the activity within the region and the MCA is the best placed to coordinate support

INTERVENTIONS

- Region-led programmes
 - UKSPF – People and Skills
 - Adult Skills Fund including Community Learning
 - Working Win
 - Skills bootcamps
 - Universal Support – from Autumn 2024
 - Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF)
- National programmes
 - Supported internships

OUTPUTS

- We collect, have access to or will collect the following data points for our programmes:
- Learner/participant achievement and/or employment outcomes
 - Learner demographics
 - Subject area/study type (applicable to study programmes)



CONVENE

ACTION

Lead effective engagement across the region that:

Brings partners in health, employment services and communities together to provide a multi-agency approach to those residents with complex needs

Brings together providers, funders and community groups to share good practice and identify areas that require further intervention – facilitating a co-ordinated approach across the region

Brings together providers, funders, and community groups to understand how transition points between education systems could be improved, such as for learners with SEND and care leavers



INTERVENTIONS

Region-led funded programmes:

- Careers Hubs

Stakeholder groups:

- South Yorkshire Skills Advisory Board (SYSAB)
- Young persons operational group
- LSIP
- Local Integration Boards
- South Yorkshire Integrated Care Board
- Partnership working with DWP, JCPs and Local Authorities

OUTPUTS

We collect, have access to or will collect the following data for our funded programmes:

- Learner experience
- Learner outcome from accessing services

CAMPAIGN

Ensure our best practice is showcased nationally.

Push for better join-up between Government departments when creating new programmes of support, such as employment programmes



2. Raise attainment of core knowledge and skills

FUND

ACTION

Strategically commission our Adult Skills Fund to increase the uptake of up to Level 2 qualifications and skills, following the nine priorities. This includes:

Providing funding for provision gaps up to Level 2

Fund innovative models of delivery up to Level 2 which is shown to support those who benefit from non-traditional approaches to learning

Increasing legal entitlements, digital and full qualifications

Alongside this, invest in programmes – including Learner Support - that remove barriers that prevent young people and adults accessing core knowledge, skills, and better employment

INTERVENTIONS

Region-led programmes

- Adult Skills Fund, including:
 - Legal entitlements
 - Community Learning
- Multiply
- UKSPF – People and Skills
- Skills Bank
- LSIF

National programmes

- Apprenticeships
- Sector Work Academy Programmes

OUTPUTS

We collect, have access to or will collect the following data points for our programmes:

- Learner/participant achievement and/or employment outcomes
- Learner demographics
- Subject area/study type (applicable to study programmes)



CONVENE

ACTION

Lead effective engagement across the region that:

Targets underserved and underrepresented groups to showcase provision available that supports development of core knowledge and skills

Brings employers, employees, self-employed and providers together to showcase how provision can support and develop core knowledge and skills

Brings providers and the voluntary community sector together to share best practice and discuss how to support learner progression and development of core knowledge and skills

INTERVENTIONS

Region-led funded programmes:

- Apprenticeship Hub
- Levy Matchmaking
- Local Skills Improvement Fund

Stakeholder groups:

- SYSAB

- Careers Hubs
- Young persons operational group
- Local Integration Boards
- LSIP
- South Yorkshire Skills Advisors and Business Growth Advisors

OUTPUTS

We collect, have access to or will collect the following data for our funded programmes:

- User experience
- User outcome from accessing services



CAMPAIGN

Campaign for improvements to the technical and vocational education system and wraparound support for those facing greatest barriers to education skills and training



3. Increase the supply of a high-skilled workforce

FUND

ACTION

Strategically commission and increase the proportion of our Adult Skills Fund to support up-take of Level 3 and above qualifications and skills. This includes:

Support transition of those with Level 2 up to Level 3

Support in-work progression through training and education opportunities

Strengthening our Level 3 offer and exploring the funding of Level 4 and 5 provision – aligned to regional need

Ensure our skills budget allows for:

Encouraging co-investment and meeting acute needs to fill skills shortages whilst also investing in provision that develops growth sectors, such as clean energy

Funding innovative and flexible provision that supports engagement from both individuals and employers

INTERVENTIONS

Region-led programmes

- Adult Skills Fund, including:
 - Free Courses for Jobs
- Skills Bank
- UKSPF - People and Skills
- Skills Bootcamps
- Investment Zone
- LSIF

National programmes

- Higher Technical Qualifications
- Higher Apprenticeships
- Student finance
- Advanced Learner Loans
- Lifelong Learning Entitlement

OUTPUTS

We collect, have access to or will collect the following data points for our programmes:

- Learner/participant achievement and/or employment outcomes
- Learner demographics
- Subject area/study type (applicable to study programmes)



CONVENE

ACTION

Lead effective engagement across the region that:

Brings employers and providers together to develop a technical education offer at Level 4 and 5 that meets regional need and aligned to the flexibilities required for the introduction of the Lifelong learning Entitlement

Effectively targets careers advice and guidance to underserved and underrepresented groups to showcase provision to support development of high skills

Encourages peer-to-peer engagement between employers – and with providers - to improve understanding of the regional skills offer, new technology, management techniques and job opportunities to retain high-skill talent



INTERVENTIONS

Region-led funded programmes

- Careers Hub
- Apprenticeship Hub
- Levy Matchmaking
- Investment Zone
- LSIF

Stakeholder groups

- SYSAB
- Young persons operational group
- South Yorkshire Skills Advisors
- South Yorkshire Skills Advisory Board
- LSIP

OUTPUTS

We collect, have access to or will collect the following data for our funded programmes:

- User experience
- User outcome from accessing services

CAMPAIGN

Nationally:

Campaign for improvements to the technical and vocational education system and wraparound support for those facing greatest barriers to education skills and training

Locally:

Support IoT development in the region to strengthen high skill provision



Roadmap



We will refresh the Skills Strategy after four years. This will include assessing how we have delivered against our Missions and outcomes.

We will finalise an implementation plan in autumn 2024 which will provide detail on the work programmes the MCA is taking forward from the strategy.

This will include:

Developing an Outcomes Framework which will set realistic targets for our regional outcomes and programme outputs.

Developing our Adult Skills Fund priorities which will provide further detail on how funding, procurement and commissioning will align with our Skills Strategy.

Delivering on our Flagship Programmes. We will work with partners to scope next steps on these projects. These steps will be included in our implementation plan.



Background reading

1. KADA Research, South Yorkshire Skills and Employment Evidence Base, 2023
2. Institute for Employment Research University of Warwick, Skills Analysis Report, 2021
3. South Yorkshire Chambers, South Yorkshire Local Skills Improvement Plan, 2023
4. Metro Dynamics. South Yorkshire Plan for Growth: Economic Analysis, 2024

