

Chesterfield Skills Action Plan Refresh Consultation Summary: 27/03/23

1) Introduction and Consultation Process

This paper collates and presents the main findings from the first round of consultation carried out between 1 and 28 March 2023 to support the Chesterfield Skills Action Plan Refresh. The paper is structured around the questions asked during consultation discussions and is intended to:

- be straightforward and concise, so it is easy to pick out main messages quickly
- reflect the full range of consultations
- make clear which points emerged most strongly and repeatedly
- identify some points made less often, but which may be important or point to new opportunities
- cross-reference fit with evidence when that is apparent and relevant

The first round of engagement reached 21 distinct organisations¹ via:

- semi-structured interviews with 14 people representing interests from eight organisations, considered to be key partners or local anchor organisations
- two specifically convened workshop sessions: one with seven wider stakeholders; and one with five local employers plus Chesterfield Borough Council (CBC) Leisure Team
- presenting and facilitating discussion at existing meetings within the Council and beyond.

Table 1 shows the organisations engaged, their sectoral spread and the engagement mechanism.

Table 1: Summary of first round consultees

Sector	Organisation	Engagement type
Education and Training	University of Derby	One-to-one interview
	Chesterfield College	One-to-one interview
	Head Teacher Forum	Attended regular meeting
Employer Representatives	Federation of Small Businesses	One-to-one interview
	East Midlands Chamber	One-to-one interview
Place-based	Staveley Town Deal	One-to-two interview
	Destination Chesterfield Board	Attended Board meeting
Local government and LEP	Derbyshire County Council	One-to-three interview
	D2N2 LEP	One-to-two interview
	CBC Portfolio Holder Employment & Skills	One-to-one
	CBC Corporate Leadership Team	Attended regular meeting
Employer	CBC Economic Growth	One-to-two interview
	Mortgage First (FPS)	Employer workshop
	Henry Boot (Construction)	
	CASA/Peak Edge Hotels (Hospitality/Food Dist.)	
	AECOM (Engineering)	
	Clee Hill (Construction/Engineering)	
CBC Leisure (Leisure)		
Wider stakeholder	Derbyshire County Council Public Health	Stakeholder workshop
	North East Derbyshire District Council	
	CVS/BAME Forum	
	African Caribbean Forum	
	Derbyshire Voluntary Action	
	DWP	
DBC Training (Independent Training Provider)		

¹ Note that Chesterfield Borough Council is counted as one organisation but that meetings were held with representatives from four areas within the council; likewise Derbyshire County Council counts as one organisation despite two distinct discussions held on economy, skills and employment and on public health

2) Strengths and assets (not projects – see section 6)

Table 2 shows the main strengths and assets that consultees identified in respect of Chesterfield's current position on skills and employability and how often – although it should be noted that numbers are a broad indication not an exact science as some issues overlapped at times or were presented slightly differently by different stakeholders.

Table 2: Summary of strengths

Strength and/or asset	No. of times raised
Big ticket regeneration in the pipeline and scope to connect to skills	4
Strong record in partnership working and collaboration, inc. across 'anchors'	4
Willingness of business to engage, inc. in shaping provision	3
Route to support business engagement, inc. on skills via Chesterfield Champions	3
Skills infrastructure to build on, inc. for lifelong learning agenda	3
College with good potential	3
University centre provision and scope to expand	3
Central location and transport links for accessing provision	2
Presence of great businesses/employers, inc. sector strengths to build on	2
Destination Chesterfield role in place promotion and inward investment	2
Galvanised sense of place	1
Good location for accessing opportunities in surrounding areas	1
Urban centre provides a mix of roles	1
Good focus on STEM	1
Good focus on construction	1
Local labour clauses	1
Improved access to improved schools	1
Promotion of apprenticeships	1

The points below elaborate on those areas raised in three or more engagement meetings:

- Opportunities provided by the regeneration pipeline** – CBC and key partner organisations are clear that the capital investment coming forward in the borough provides significant opportunity for skills and employment, both in the construction phase and in subsequent end use and that this is a unique opportunity to seize by building upon existing good practice being delivered through the councils 'local labour activity'. Awareness beyond this group was less prominent in discussions.
- Partnership working** – there was a sense that Chesterfield is well positioned in respect to the level, quality and impact of partnership working across the economic development and skills landscape, positioning Chesterfield well compared to neighbouring areas. It was noted that leadership across this partnership shared a common desire to make a difference. This is a strength to retain and will be critical in building the connections that can leverage maximum benefit for local people and places from skills and employment activity, from the regeneration pipeline, and from the evolving policy landscape. The establishment of a skills and employability partnership that is being progressed by the council will further strengthen this.
- Business engagement and mechanisms for doing so** – following from the above, strengths were identified and typically mentioned together in respect to the willingness of businesses to engage and the mechanisms for doing so (i.e. Chesterfield Champions and CBC Key Account Management). The view is that this is something unique to Chesterfield, bringing a large (200+) and diverse range of business voices (across sectors and business types/sizes) together in a well-established and trusted forum. Strong engagement via CBC's skills function suggests this can provide a route for taking forward action on skills and employment, but with some recommending that it would be useful to make sure that business engagement in the

town is effective and extended beyond this cohort e.g. by widening participation or ensuring clear, simple and joined up communications around business and skills support offers.

- **Skills infrastructure and provision across FE and HE** – those consulted see the town as having good skills infrastructure in place to build on in going forward. They noted the college being well positioned to support growth (including via its own substantive skills capital investment programmes in the areas of advanced manufacturing and digital). The presence of the University of Derby is considered a ‘win’ that further bolsters local skills infrastructure, notwithstanding comments made regarding continual need to refine and expand provision across qualification levels to meet demand and ensure smooth transition points across the education and skills continuum.

3) Challenges and gaps

Table 3 shows the main challenges consultees identified and how many noted each of those – again the numbers provide a broad rather exact indication, as some issues overlapped at times or were presented slightly differently by different stakeholders.

Table 3: Summary of challenges and gaps

Challenge	No. of times raised
Young people – unemployment, aspirations and employability skills	9
Lack of high level skills and/or high value jobs requiring them	7
Education - secondary level attainment and progress within schools	5
Careers information advice, guidance (quality and reach)	4
Make transition points work better – e.g. FE to HE into employment and between jobs	4
Inequalities and deprived areas related issues	4
Gender stereotypes around roles/sectors, and diversity more widely	4
Mismatch between business skills needs (now + future) and provision – e.g. shortages in digital, green, engineering, construction, health/care	3
Health – including mental health and wellbeing	3
Adult economic inactivity / over 50s into the labour market	2
Lack of and fragmented public transport	2
Low business awareness of available skills support	2
Job seekers not willing to take jobs	1
Insufficient work experience opportunities	1
Care leavers becoming NEET	1
Keeping skilled people local (linked to quality of place)	1
Low business starts/enterprise skills	1
Gap in networking between anchor organisations	1
Logistics jobs downsides – fewer into apprenticeships, automation risks	1
Employers not taking responsibility (or paying) for skills and training	1

The points below elaborate on those areas raised in three or more engagement meetings:

- **Young people, employment, aspirations and links to education** – these factors were sometimes discussed separately, and sometimes linked together, and were clearly seen as the prime skills and employment challenge locally. The cause of this concern was often high (and rising) youth unemployment, as highlighted in the evidence base, together with high numbers who are NEET. Many people linked this to low ambitions, a lack of employability skills and self-confidence, and cultural factors and lack of role models. The issue of poor attainment and insufficient progress in secondary schools was also highlighted and linked to this - which makes subsequent progress in and transition into FE and HE difficult.

- **Lack of high level skills and high level jobs** – in line with the evidence, consultees frequently pointed to a deficit in well paid, highly skilled jobs locally. Some pointed to a ‘chicken and egg’ situation where lack of skills at this level means fewer employers requiring those skills will locate here, with this then making the destination less attractive for those seeking such jobs. One stakeholder session also discussed whether quality of place and the town centre and leisure offer was sufficient to attract and retain graduates, highly skilled workers and ‘career climbers’.
- **Careers information advice, guidance (CIAG)** – a number of groups, including employers questioned whether CIAG had wide enough reach and was of good enough quality, especially in highlighting available jobs locally, the opportunities of careers in areas such as engineering, construction and hospitality, and future growth areas such as green and digital skills.
- **Disconnect at transition points** – some consultees said that connections and co-ordination are lacking at key transition points into FE, from FE into HE (notably University of Derby), and from FE and HE into employment; and also that moves between various jobs over a career bring the risk of losing people in skill shortage or highly skilled areas to employers elsewhere.
- **Inequalities, deprived areas and health** – the evidence shows Chesterfield to be the 86th (out of 317) worst affected local authority area for deprivation in England, and consultees noted the issue of disadvantage and inequality as a problem which affects education, aspiration, employability and opportunity. This was often linked to health and disability, the domain in which local deprivation is most pronounced (in the worst affected 5% of areas). Health – and especially mental health – was also singled out as an issue in its own right. The number of people, including young people, affected by mental health and anxiety issues was seen to be rising, with implications for employers in relation to the current workforce and available recruits.
- **Gender stereotypes around roles/sectors and diversity** – some consultees said that gender stereotypes around particular roles and careers were a problem in reducing the potential supply of skills and talent. Examples included engineering and construction, and although some commented that work to promote STEM subjects to girls and young women was starting to have an impact, they did not always go on to use those qualifications in skill shortage areas. The importance of diversity was raised more widely, specifically in relation to ethnicity, where the size of the BAME community may be proportionately lower than is the case nationally, but is still significant and rising, and needs to be properly represented and fully utilised.

Issues that were important in the evidence but perhaps raised as challenges less often than may have been expected included how far young people the workforce were equipped with the specific skills needed by employers, and which would be important in the future. Likewise, the challenge of getting over 50s back into (or retained in) the workforce was raised, but perhaps not as frequently as might have been expected given its prominence in national policy.

4) Wider comments on the evidence base

The two workshops and the session at the CBC Corporate Leadership Team received a presentation on key points in the evidence base and were invited to comment on how far this rang true, or to make wider points around it. Generally, the evidence findings chimed with what consultees expected to emerge. Additionally, some comments were made emphasising particular points, noting potential gaps, or seeking additional evidence and insights in the future. The most notable examples were:

- Travel patterns to employment (and higher skilled/value jobs) into and out of Chesterfield, and the extent of labour market connections to other areas and cities, e.g. Sheffield and Derby (NB summary information on this in the full updated evidence base, based on census 2011, shows significant commuting flows out of the district, but slightly more people commuting into it).

- The importance of mental health as a key issue, especially for young people. This is not easy to fully capture with current available data. Related to this, there was interest in how far new Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) data will see changes when it is completed, e.g. in health and disability, and the prominence of mental health within this.
- Transition points (as raised in consultation) as a key opportunity, but one that is hard to convey based on data alone.
- Reflect diversity and the BAME community within population statistics and the action planning.
- Comparisons to local areas were made at time, e.g. higher levels of enterprise/business start ups in Bolsover and North East Derbyshire than in Chesterfield.
- Low numbers of applications for apprenticeships – potentially relating to competition for better paid employment options in logistics, and awareness and perception of opportunities.
- Difficulty in recruiting locally for STEM and higher levels skills (related to this, the evidence base also notes challenges in recruiting to professional and managerial positions).

5) What should the plan aim to achieve and measures of success

We asked people to consider what the refreshed Skills Action Plan should be aiming to achieve and what success would look like in four years time. The main points are captured in table 4.

Table 4: Measures of success

Aspect of achievement / success	No. of times raised
Improvement in NEET and youth employment, inc. joined up support	4
Increase in aspiration and ambition, esp. in young people but also amongst parents/carers, teachers and in communities	3
Achieving inclusive growth and improved outcomes for those facing disadvantage or who are excluded from opportunity	3
Focus on knowledge, skills and behaviours needed by employers	3
Improvement in unemployment, economic inactivity and worklessness	2
Reduced barriers to employment and improved work readiness	2
Improvement in areas of higher deprivation – health & wellbeing, skills & employment	2
In-work progression, inc. moving out of low paid work	2
Retraining and lifelong learning	2
Improved higher level skills (L4+)	2
Alignment to sub-regional agendas and national policy	2
Strategic alignment across Council Plan, Growth Strategy and UKSPF	2
Improved diversity of employment	1
Increased apprenticeships	1
Better connected schools, FE, HE, apprenticeships and business	1
Connecting people to economic opportunity regardless of skill level	1
Alignment via partnership working	1
Connection to climate and versatility of skills in this area	1
Be future proofed, inc. on climate and digital skills	1

Consultees often raised issues to address and potential priorities rather than progress measures. The points below elaborate on those areas raised in three or more engagement meetings:

- **Young people, employment, aspirations and links to education** – supported by the evidence base and to this being identified by consultees as one of the major challenges locally, it follows that these are also top areas where people wish to see progress over the coming four years and are looking to the Skills Action Plan to be part of the framework for driving improvement.

- **Inclusive growth** – an emphasis on equipping all residents with the skills they need to connect in a meaningful way to the labour market came across strongly, with inclusive growth mentioned in the round multiple times but then also broken down into elements such as reducing barriers to employment, improving work readiness, progression out of low pay, and improvements in areas of higher deprivation. Again, this is supported by the evidence base and aligns with the major challenges that people identified.
- **Meeting business need** – a number of people positioned business need prominently and making sure that the Skills Action Plan focuses on the interface between supply and demand - and in so doing supports achievement of the Chesterfield Growth Strategy. This would also include increasing awareness of and accessibility to existing provision.
- **Connections, alignment and influence** – there are a group of individual comments that, when bundled together, point to a similar measure of success, that being the extent to which the Skills Action Plan is aligned with national, sub-regional and local economic and skills policy. This is an evolving landscape, but one that the Skills Action Plan should be looking to connect into and influence in order to ensure the best outcomes for Chesterfield from a funding and delivery perspective, and ultimately for businesses, residents and communities.

6) Current activities to build upon

a) Skills (and employment) activity led by CBC

Build on...	And in particular...
Regeneration pipeline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction Skills Hub and links to green and retrofit needs • DRIIVe • Local labour clauses and social value
Apprentice Town	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep but refresh and refocus
Skills capacity in CBC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highly regarded and noted by partners as being proactive and far more than other boroughs have locally

b) Activity within the Borough lead by others and that supports skills

Build on...	And in particular...
Regeneration pipeline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staveley Town Deal package and associated Skills framework
Chesterfield College	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch of new advanced manufacturing and digital centres by the college, including adult digital literacy offer • Apprenticeship offer
University of Derby 'win' for the town	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addressing much needed skills in Health & Social Care • Degree level apprentice provision • Part time top up access courses, e.g. logistics, legal, accounting • Knowledge Transfer Partnerships • Ripe for expansion of provision connected to local need, including firming up and communicating the executive/leadership and management offer • Objective within Growth Strategy to secure the further development of higher education provision in Chesterfield
Business engagement robust and ripe for leveraging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual business engagement with primary and secondary schools including on STEM, careers and mock interviews • Destination Chesterfield, Chesterfield Champions and Made in Chesterfield (with scope to extend numbers engaged and to increase engagement with business through more visibility and access to existing provision)

Connecting people to economic opportunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth Hub • Careers Hub • Sector based work academies, typically JCP-led, and a tested way of connecting people to relevant training for real employment opportunities (if with room for improvement) • Third sector initiatives connected to specific communities or cohorts (mentioned in the round rather than with specifics) • Recent transport improvements to key employment sites
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Third sector initiatives connected to specific communities or cohorts (mentioned in the round rather than with specifics)

c) Key skills (and employability) activity beyond the Borough, but with local impact

Build on...	And in particular...
Business engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-instate Derbyshire Skills Festival
Specific skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital and Green Skills Bootcamps • Rail and integrated rail plan and related investment
Higher level skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity provided by 5 universities within a 45 minute drive, including University of Derby Campus in Chesterfield
Connecting people to economic opportunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talent Match previously delivered successfully in Chesterfield and NE Derbyshire • (Lessons from) Kickstart • 50+ agenda coming increasingly to the fore
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DWP Health Adjustment Passports and Access to Work • Living Well

7) Priorities for new action/interventions

Partners were asked to highlight priority new actions, both in broad terms and with specifics where possible. In practice, consultation messages were more the former and indicated the types of action needed more than their details. This precluded gaining specifics about lead partners, funding, etc. but on occasions key partners were apparent. Additionally, whilst this question was framed as about new action, many of the avenues identified would clearly build on or connect to activity that is already in place or planned.

The main priorities are listed below, presented broadly in order of how often/how prominent each was mentioned.

Mentioned by nearly all consultees

Young people, CIAG, aspirations and connections to work – consultees picked out various areas of focus within this heading, but connections between them were clear. No specific initiative was described, but the key elements that people suggested should be progressed included:

- Widen the reach/quality of careers information advice and guidance, building on the early success of the Youth Hub
- CPD for teachers that make them more aware of local industries and opportunities, including via Industrial Placements for Teachers. Also make parents more aware of the opportunities available.
- Boost levels of and strengthen connection between employers and young people, including through work experience and site visits.
- Nurture ambition, confidence and awareness of opportunity amongst young people, especially in disadvantaged areas, and with use of role models, networks, mentoring etc.
- Links to education and how schools can deliver better, including on the STEM agenda.

- Support employability skills for young people, including communication and CV writing.

Widening the workforce and tackling barriers to recruitment – this was the second major area of focus running through the consultation messages. At its broadest, the call was for actions that would expand the number of people who are able to and want to enter the workforce, at all or in areas of skills/labour shortages. In addition to enhancing employment/employability amongst young people (as above), specific angles within this included:

- Encouraging over 50s and older workers to stay in work for longer or to re-enter the workforce, for example by offering incentives, through promoting DWP provision in this respect (e.g. ‘Over 50s MOTs’), or by employers offering flexible and agile working that enables part time working, home/hybrid working, and potentially staying on in capacities such as mentoring new recruits.
- Offering flexible working more broadly (e.g. 4 day week options) and promoting best practice and evidence to employers on what is effective.
- Addressing gender stereotypes around particular occupations and skills sets, for example around STEM and careers in engineering, construction and digital sectors.
- Promoting a diverse and representative workforce, e.g. in terms of ethnicity and disability.
- The importance of having support in the workplace available on mental health and wellbeing.

Mentioned by around a half or more

Good jobs and in-work progression – this was linked to supporting recruitment and retention, but also productivity, quality of life and inclusion. Suggestions included factors such as fair pay and conditions (e.g. paying the real living wage) but also a big focus on quality of work more widely and on in-work progression opportunities, including for those from diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds. This was also linked to meeting skills shortages by developing and upskilling existing employees.

Expanding higher level skills and university provision – a good number of stakeholders wanted to see a widening of routes into, and promotion of, higher education in order to enhance higher level skills. It was recognised that this needs to be done in conjunction with increasing demand for and uptake of high level skills by employers (e.g. catalysed through knowledge transfer partnerships and student placements). Specifically, the opportunity to widen provision by the University of Derby was welcomed, potentially including areas such as leadership and management skills, and with stronger communication of the offer and widening participation activity to promote uptake of opportunities.

Skills to support net zero and green jobs – skills to support the transition to net zero carbon were highlighted as a major growth area where skills and labour shortages are already evident, and where addressing them will help people, businesses and delivery on environmental goals. The need to demystify and make specific general terms like ‘green skills’ was identified, and specific opportunity areas include skills related to heat pump installation (where a local manufacturer is seeking to expand), EV charging points, and housing retrofit skills.

Opportunities for those facing disadvantage and far from the labour market – a significant body of opinion wanted to see action to help those who are furthest from the labour market or facing challenges in getting into work. That included support for those facing mental health barriers or who need employability and confidence-building support.

Anchor organisations, local labour and procurement – building on support for existing local labour policies, a good number of consultees suggested extending this both to more organisations, and to other actions that anchor organisations can take to support local businesses and jobs – such as through enabling local employment (e.g. via workforce development plans) and procurement. Large anchor organisations such as the council, college, hospital, university and

large local businesses have potential to do this individually and collectively, and there are examples of anchors networks in other areas that look to take this sort of action.

Promoting apprenticeships – there was support for re-focusing and re-energising the Apprentice Town initiative (which remained well supported) and for provision to widen routes into apprenticeships, especially for those with lower qualifications and at Level 2, where apprentice numbers have reduced. Potential challenges were noted in finding enough employers to cater for both apprentices and T-Level students, with some noting apprenticeships as the priority.

Mentioned by a significant minority

- Improve work readiness and soft/transferable skills (e.g. creativity, teamwork, communication)
- Strengthen links between employers, FE and curriculum planning, for example through an annual event on this
- Enhance future skills, and specifically digital and data skills
- Smoothen and utilise transition points between FE, HE and employment
- Utilise skills and employment opportunities presented by local regeneration initiatives
- Enhance physical access to work, for example via better public transport and cycle routes to employment sites, including to connect to shift patterns

Other points mentioned by one or two consultees

- Enterprise, entrepreneurship and social enterprise skills and support
- Utilise skills and employment opportunities for regeneration initiatives
- Specific calls for upskilling and access to work in Staveley
- Promote/communicate existing and new skills support to employers
- Attract businesses that support skills development
- Lifelong learning
- Address hospitality skills shortages
- Rail related skills/work opportunities
- Further projects using a business-college-university partnership model
- A new Manufacturing Academy (already in the pipeline)
- Further enhance available evidence
- Different approaches to current Maths and English requirements for college students

Few consultation meetings got into the specifics of resourcing at this point, but the importance of UK SPF funding was highlighted as important given the end of ESF funding.

8) Key evidence & implications not covered strongly in consultation messages

Most of the input received gelled well with evidence findings, and by and large the issues, opportunities and priorities put forward are supported by evidence base as well as stakeholder views. However, there are a few key issues and potential action areas that emerged in the evidence but less so in discussions. The most notable examples in this respect are:

- **Economic sectors profile** – this came out in the consultation to an extent, but perhaps not as prominently as it may have done, for example in relation to the scale of the health sector and current and future job opportunities within it, and potential to connect local skills and provision to these. There was generally little comment about sector mix more widely.
- **Declining sectors and reskilling** – there was relatively little discussion of areas where employment is declining or threatened in the future, such as retail or sectors where AI and automation may reduce jobs (e.g. logistics – although the lure of jobs at Amazon’s warehouse locally was noted, including in respect to these paying relatively higher rates of pay than other typically lower paying roles e.g. in care, and hence contributing to vacancies in those sectors

and potentially storing up an issue for the future on skills). Opportunities based on reskilling/upskilling people to be able to move from declining or at-risk sectors/jobs into growth areas with skills shortages – e.g. in digital and low carbon sectors – were mentioned less than they may have been.

- **Ageing population, over 50s and the workforce** – there was some discussion of this, but much less than around young people. Employers in particular focused more on new entrants into the workforce than on upskilling their employees or attracting and retaining older workers.
- **Apprenticeships and T-Levels** – apart from employers noting some challenges in recruiting apprentices, the scale of comments and ideas around apprenticeships (or T-Levels or traineeships) was less marked than the falls in apprentice numbers that have been seen and the changing patterns of those that are progressing.
- **Wages and good jobs** – there was some discussion of good jobs and progression, for example in how to compete with better paying but potentially poor quality and at risk jobs in other sectors. However, there was little comment around wage levels and the sizeable gaps between local and national average or around gender pay gaps.
- **Regeneration based opportunities** – apart from discussion within the council and those directly involved in regeneration initiatives, awareness of the sizeable regeneration and investment programmes underway or in the pipeline locally was low, including the skills opportunities and needs they would present.