APPENDIX 2

New Forest Skills Action Plan 2025-2030: Technical Report

Technical Report | June 2025

New Forest District Council is grateful for the work undertaken by EKOS Consultancy in supporting the preparation of this Skills Action Plan.

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1 Introduction

The workforce in the New Forest faces several challenges and opportunities. A significant proportion of workers are nearing retirement, creating skills gaps and recruitment challenges. Many young people leave the area for education and employment elsewhere, leading to local labour shortages. Additionally, tourism and agriculture contribute to seasonal job fluctuations, requiring flexible skills solutions to support economic stability.

While regional strategies like the Solent Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) offer a broad framework for workforce development, they do not fully address the unique challenges and opportunities within the New Forest. There was a recognised need therefore to develop a tailored, place-based skills plan that aligned with local economic needs, supports workforce resilience, and ensures the New Forest remains a thriving place to live, work, and invest.

Commissioning EKOS

New Forest District Council (NFDC) commissioned EKOS, a UK independent economic research consultancy, to:

- "Evidence skills challenges specific to New Forest District and to develop an associated skills action plan with bespoke New Forest interventions, thereby maximising the benefits of the Solent Freeport for the district".

Research Aims

This research aims to support the NFDC in maximising the benefits of the Freeport while ensuring that local priorities and challenges are effectively addressed. Given that the New Forest is a key contributor to the business rate retention pipeline programme, it is essential to explore both Freeport-related opportunities and additional approaches that align with the district's economic and workforce objectives.

Research Phases and Outcomes

The research was structured into two phases:

- Phase One: Desk research, primary research with stakeholders and stakeholder workshop to:
    - Identify the additional needs for the New Forest.
    - Provide a rationale for the inclusion of target groups and key themes
- Phase Two: Skills Plan Development
    - Develop a New Forest-specific skills plan that addresses local workforce and economic challenges.
    - Ensure the skills plan aligns with both New Forest priorities, regional skills planning and the New Forest Freeport Delivery Plan to maximise opportunities for businesses, residents, and the wider community.

2 New Forest Labour Market and Economic Profile

This chapter draws on data analysis and intelligence to highlight the key economic and labour market issues across the New Forest. It explores skills supply and demand by highlighting some of the key regional opportunities and challenges and outlines a range of strategic insights that have informed the development of the Skills Action Plan.

2.1 Headline Findings

Ageing population & workforce decline: The New Forest's working-age population is shrinking, with projections indicating a 10% contraction by 2043. This demographic shift poses significant challenges for the vibrancy and sustainability of the local economy.

Jobs are often lower paid & more part-time work: The local job market is heavily concentrated in lower-paid foundational and service sectors, with health and accommodation each accounting for 11% of employment. While part-time roles align with the New Forest's strengths in tourism and the rural economy, part-time employment levels are higher than the national average across most sectors.

Decline in key industries: Employment in manufacturing has fallen by 14% and construction by 17%, despite their importance to the local economy and the transition to net-zero. Ensuring that skills pathways support both replacement demand and future workforce needs in these sectors is critical.

Job demand: Current jobs demand continues to be in lower-paid foundational and service sectors with key employers being NHS, recruiters for teaching assistants (particularly SEN), chefs, care workers, and cleaners

Rising unemployment & economic strain: There is an increasing reliance on unemployment-related benefits in the New Forest which has been most pronounced in areas with existing deprivation, such as Totton and Eling, and Hythe and Dibden.

Earnings & gender pay gap: Wages in the New Forest are affected by higher rates of part-time and lower-qualified work, particularly among women. In 2024, the gross weekly median pay for full-time workers in the New Forest was £668, significantly below the national average of £732. Men earned £801 per week, while women earned £594, marking a £207 weekly pay gap. This gender pay gap has widened since 2014 when the gap stood at £173 per week.

2.2 Population

New Forest has an ageing population resulting in a declining working age population, as set out in Table 2.1. In 2023, the number of individuals of working age (between 16 and 64) in New Forest was around 95,800. This is a decrease of 5% from 2013 (5,500 individuals). If there were to be no policy interventions to address this, and the trends observed were to continue to 2043, Table 2.2 indicates that the New Forest working age population is forecast to have contracted by 10% - potentially presenting challenges for the vibrancy and vitality of the New Forest economy.

Table 2.1: Population change (2013 to 2023)

	2013	2023	Change	% Change	% Change, Hampshire	% Change, England
Children (aged 0 to 15)	28,700	26,400	-2,300	-8%	2%	5%
Working age (aged 16 to 64)	101,300	95,800	-5,500	-5%	4%	5%
Pensionable age (aged 65+)	47,300	53,100	5,900	12%	20%	16%
Total	**177,400**	**175,400**	**-2,000**	**-1%**	**7%**	**7%**

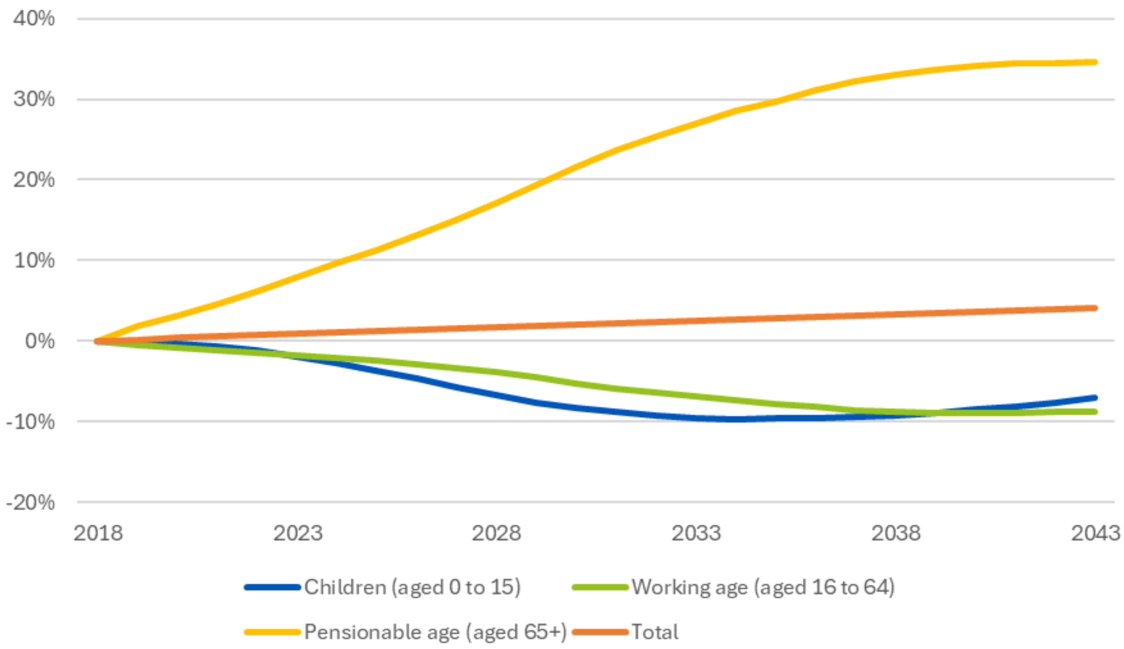
Source: ONS

Table 2.2: Population principal projections (2018-based percentage change) (2018 to 2043)

	2018	2043	Change	% Change	% Change, Hampshire	% Change, England
Children (aged 0 to 15)	28,500	26,500	-2,000	-8%	-3%	-1%
Working age (aged 16 to 64)	99,400	90,700	-8,700	-10%	-2%	4%
Pensionable age (aged 65+)	51,900	69,900	18,000	26%	30%	31%
Total	179,800	187,100	7,300	4%	7%	9%

Source: ONS

Figure 2.1: Population principal projections (2018-based percentage change) (2018 to 2043)



Source: ONS.

2.3 Business Base

In 2024, there were approximately 7,800 businesses across the New Forest, predominately in industries such as professional, scientific and technical (16%) and construction (16%), Tables 2.3 and 2.4. The business base has contracted by 3% (lower rate of contraction compared to 8% at Hampshire local authority level), between 2019 and 2024, particularly driven by decline in main sector of professional, scientific and technical services (-12%) and information and communication (-18%). The industries that have experienced the largest absolute growth were construction (+4%) and property (+8%) albeit at a lower rate of growth compared to Hampshire and national averages.

Table 2.3: Business base by industry (2019 to 2024)

	2019	2024	% of 2024	Change	% Change	% Change, Hampshire	% Change, England
Professional, scientific & technical	1,440	1,270	16%	-170	-12%	-16%	-11%
Construction	1,210	1,255	16%	45	4%	8%	11%
Business administration & support services	595	605	8%	10	2%	-2%	-1%
Retail	555	570	7%	15	3%	-34%	3%
Arts, entertainment, recreation & other services	510	515	7%	5	1%	5%	9%
Manufacturing	490	485	6%	-5	-1%	-8%	-4%
Accommodation & food services	450	470	6%	20	4%	6%	11%
Information & communication	565	465	6%	-100	-18%	-28%	-17%
Property	370	400	5%	30	8%	12%	18%
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	405	330	4%	-75	-19%	-9%	-8%
Health	270	290	4%	20	7%	8%	13%
Motor trades	260	270	3%	10	4%	2%	5%
Transport & storage (inc postal)	250	260	3%	10	4%	2%	5%
Wholesale	300	255	3%	-45	-15%	-7%	-1%
Education	160	160	2%	0	0%	1%	8%
Financial & insurance	150	150	2%	0	0%	-6%	-2%
Mining, quarrying & utilities	40	40	1%	0	0%	4%	10%
Public administration & defence	25	30	0.4%	5	20%	3%	4%
Total	**8,055**	**7,815**	**100%**	**-240**	**-3%**	**-8%**	**0.3%**

Source: UK Business Counts

Table 2.4: Business base by industry and locality (2024)

	New Forest	New Milton	Lymington & Pennington	Ringwood	Totton & Eling	Hythe & Dibden	Fordingbridge	Brockenhurst	Lyndhurst	Burley	Milford on Sea	Ashurst & Cadnam	Fawley
Professional, scientific & technical	**16%**	12%	15%	12%	9%	8%	10%	9%	6%	5%	6%	4%	4%
Construction	**16%**	16%	10%	14%	18%	9%	8%	3%	4%	3%	4%	5%	6%
Business administration & support services	**8%**	14%	11%	13%	12%	10%	7%	6%	7%	5%	5%	4%	5%
Retail	**7%**	17%	17%	15%	9%	7%	8%	6%	6%	4%	4%	3%	4%
Arts, entertainment, recreation & other services	**7%**	14%	14%	14%	11%	11%	8%	6%	6%	5%	5%	3%	4%
Manufacturing	**6%**	15%	15%	12%	18%	9%	6%	5%	4%	3%	4%	4%	7%
Accommodation & food services	**6%**	14%	12%	11%	12%	11%	7%	7%	9%	4%	7%	3%	4%
Information & communication	**6%**	15%	12%	15%	12%	8%	10%	9%	6%	5%	4%	3%	3%
Property	**5%**	13%	18%	14%	5%	9%	10%	8%	9%	6%	5%	3%	3%
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	**4%**	11%	17%	9%	2%	2%	23%	8%	12%	6%	5%	5%	3%
Health	**4%**	14%	12%	16%	12%	10%	7%	5%	3%	5%	3%	5%	3%
Motor trades	**3%**	19%	9%	15%	15%	7%	9%	6%	2%	4%	2%	7%	7%
Transport & storage (inc postal)	**3%**	15%	12%	8%	21%	17%	6%	2%	6%	2%	4%	4%	6%
Wholesale	**3%**	10%	14%	18%	16%	4%	10%	4%	6%	4%	4%	4%	4%
Education	**2%**	16%	13%	13%	6%	13%	6%	6%	3%	9%	3%	3%	3%
Financial & insurance	**2%**	7%	17%	20%	10%	10%	3%	7%	10%	3%	3%	3%	3%
Mining, quarrying & utilities	**1%**	13%	0%	13%	0%	13%	13%	0%	13%	13%	0%	0%	0%
Public administration & defence	**0.4%**	17%	17%	0%	0%	0%	17%	0%	17%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Total	**100%**	**14%**	**13%**	**13%**	**12%**	**9%**	**9%**	**6%**	**6%**	**5%**	**5%**	**4%**	**4%**

Source: UK Business Counts

2.4 Employment

In 2023, total employment for New Forest (measured by people) was estimated to be 75,000, Tables 2.5 and 2.6. While total employment remained relatively stable between 2019 and 2023 with small 2% growth in line with regional (+1%) and national averages (4%), the industry trends reveal a mixed picture in New Forest. The main employment industries of health (+11%) and accommodation (+25%) all outperformed growth relative to Hampshire and England. Employment in retail has remained stable in contrast to regional and national trends where the sector is experiencing widespread job losses.

There have been large declines in manufacturing (-14%) and construction (-17%). As core industries, particularly in context of a just transition to net-zero and green skills, it is important that pathways are on offer to ensure the local workforce can meet replacement demand as well as any forecast demand.

Employment is dominated in lower-paid foundational and service sectors with high levels of part-time working - such as health and accommodation (both 11%). While part-time jobs are linked to the New Forest's regional strengths in visitor and rural economy, there are higher than average levels of part-time employment across most sectors in the New Forest.

Table 2.5: Employment by industry (2019 to 2023)

Industry	2019	2023	% of 2023	Change	% Change	% Change, Hampshire	% Change, England
Health	9,000	10,000	13%	1,000	11%	4%	11%
Accommodation & food services	8,000	10,000	13%	2,000	25%	10%	8%
Retail	7,000	7,000	9%	0	0%	-10%	-7%
Manufacturing	7,000	6,000	8%	-1,000	-14%	-8%	-3%
Education	6,000	6,000	8%	0	0%	-4%	3%
Construction	6,000	5,000	7%	-1,000	-17%	-5%	1%
Business administration & support services	4,500	5,000	6%	500	11%	2%	3%
Arts, entertainment, recreation & other services	4,500	5,000	7%	500	11%	13%	4%
Professional, scientific & technical	5,000	4,500	7%	-500	-10%	0%	10%
Wholesale	3,000	3,000	4%	0	0%	7%	-1%
Transport & storage (inc postal)	2,500	3,000	4%	500	20%	12%	6%
Public administration & defence	1,500	2,000	2%	500	33%	29%	13%
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	2,000	1,750	2%	-250	-13%	-11%	-7%
Information & communication	1,750	1,750	2%	0	0%	-6%	11%
Motor trades	1,750	1,500	2%	-250	-14%	0%	-5%
Property	1,250	1,500	3%	250	20%	22%	8%
Mining, quarrying & utilities	1,500	1,250	2%	-250	-17%	0%	2%
Financial & insurance	900	700	1%	-200	-22%	0%	2%
Total	**73,150**	**74,950**	**100%**	**1,800**	**2%**	**1%**	**4%**

Source: Business Register & Employment Survey

Table 2.6: Employment by industry and locality (2023)

	New Forest	Totton & Eling	Lymington & Pennington	New Milton	Ringwood	Hythe & Dibden	Lyndhurst	Fawley	Fordingbridge	Ashurst & Cadnam	Brockenhurst	Burley	Milford on Sea
Health	**13%**	9%	14%	17%	12%	10%	2%	4%	4%	15%	2%	3%	7%
Accommodation & food services	**13%**	6%	15%	15%	7%	6%	13%	2%	7%	4%	9%	6%	7%
Retail	**9%**	18%	15%	21%	15%	10%	4%	2%	5%	3%	4%	2%	2%
Education	**8%**	16%	15%	14%	11%	13%	4%	5%	8%	2%	10%	4%	1%
Manufacturing	**8%**	16%	17%	9%	9%	5%	4%	34%	4%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Construction	**7%**	22%	10%	11%	28%	8%	3%	11%	5%	3%	2%	2%	3%
Professional, scientific & technical	**6%**	8%	13%	8%	19%	6%	10%	7%	9%	3%	5%	3%	3%
Arts, entertainment, recreation & other services	**7%**	16%	21%	11%	10%	9%	20%	3%	5%	2%	2%	4%	2%
Business administration & support services	**7%**	15%	8%	17%	23%	9%	12%	10%	3%	4%	3%	2%	3%
Wholesale	**4%**	42%	13%	5%	17%	2%	5%	5%	6%	4%	1%	1%	0%
Transport & storage (inc postal)	**4%**	34%	15%	4%	8%	16%	2%	12%	3%	0%	1%	0%	2%
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	**2%**	1%	2%	2%	0%	0%	9%	0%	2%	1%	1%	1%	0%
Information & communication	**2%**	11%	11%	7%	21%	5%	6%	4%	9%	3%	7%	4%	2%
Motor trades	**2%**	27%	6%	14%	10%	5%	5%	7%	7%	5%	7%	3%	2%
Property	**2%**	7%	15%	38%	8%	7%	7%	3%	7%	2%	5%	3%	2%

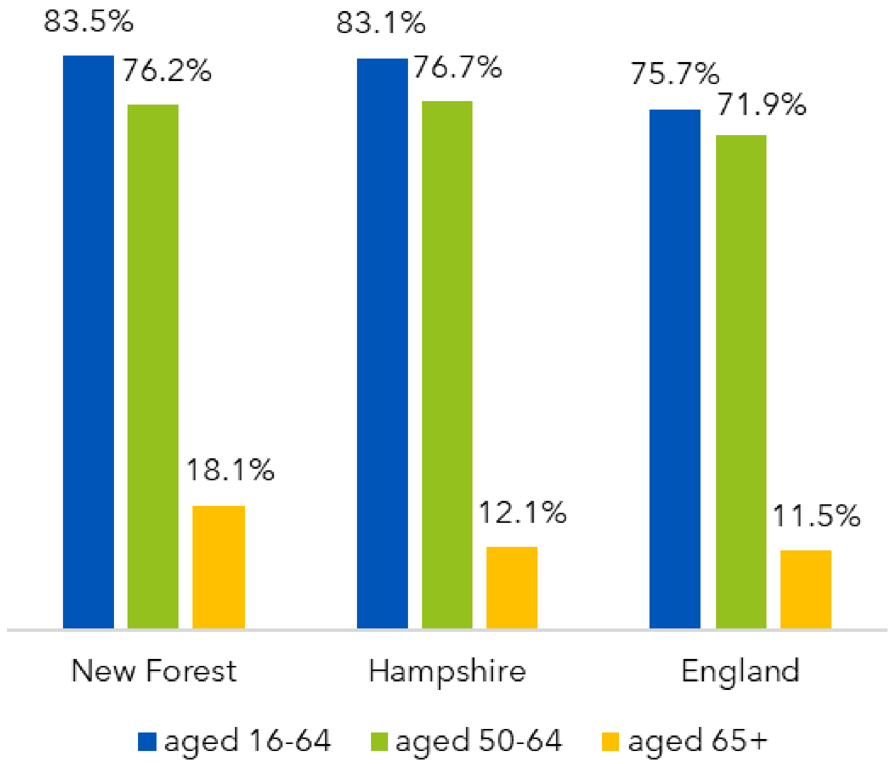
	New Forest	Tott on & Eling	Lymington & Pennington	New Milto n	Ringwo od	Hythe & Dibden	Lyndhu rst	Fawley	Fordin gbridg e	Ashurst & Cadna m	Brocke nhurst	Bur ley	Milford on Sea
Public administration & defence	**3%**	26%	26%	3%	5%	11%	23%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Mining, quarrying & utilities	**2%**	6%	4%	8%	8%	36%	24%	4%	3%	0%	0%	1%	2%
Financial & insurance	**1%**	12%	15%	16%	32%	6%	1%	2%	4%	4%	6%	1%	1%
Total	**100%**	**15%**	**14%**	**13%**	**13%**	**9%**	**8%**	**7%**	**5%**	**4%**	**4%**	**3%**	**3%**

Source: Business Register & Employment Survey

Between July 2023 and June 2024, the employment rate for the working age population was 83.5% - broadly in line with Hampshire average (83.1%) and much higher than national average, Figures 2.2 and 2.3. This means that roughly two in 10 of the New Forest's working age population were unemployed (1.8%) or economically inactive (15%).

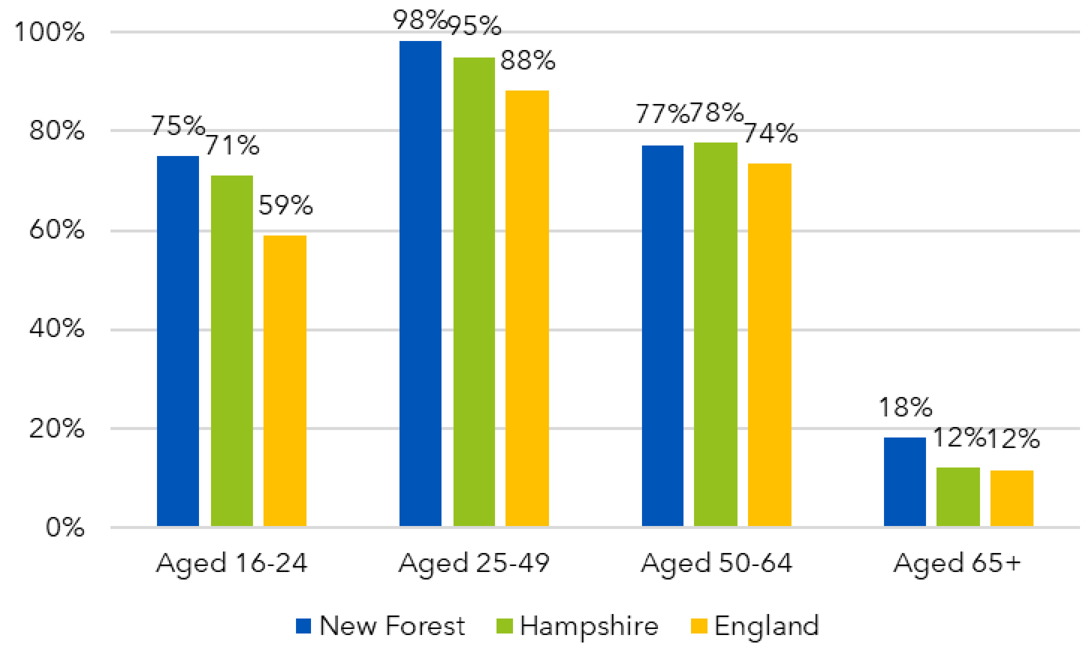
Employment patterns are different in rural areas such as New Forest. For example, there are higher incidences of part-time employment, self-employment, portfolio working, and home-working compared to urban areas, Figure 2.4.

Figure 2.2: Employment rate by selected age groups (2023/24)



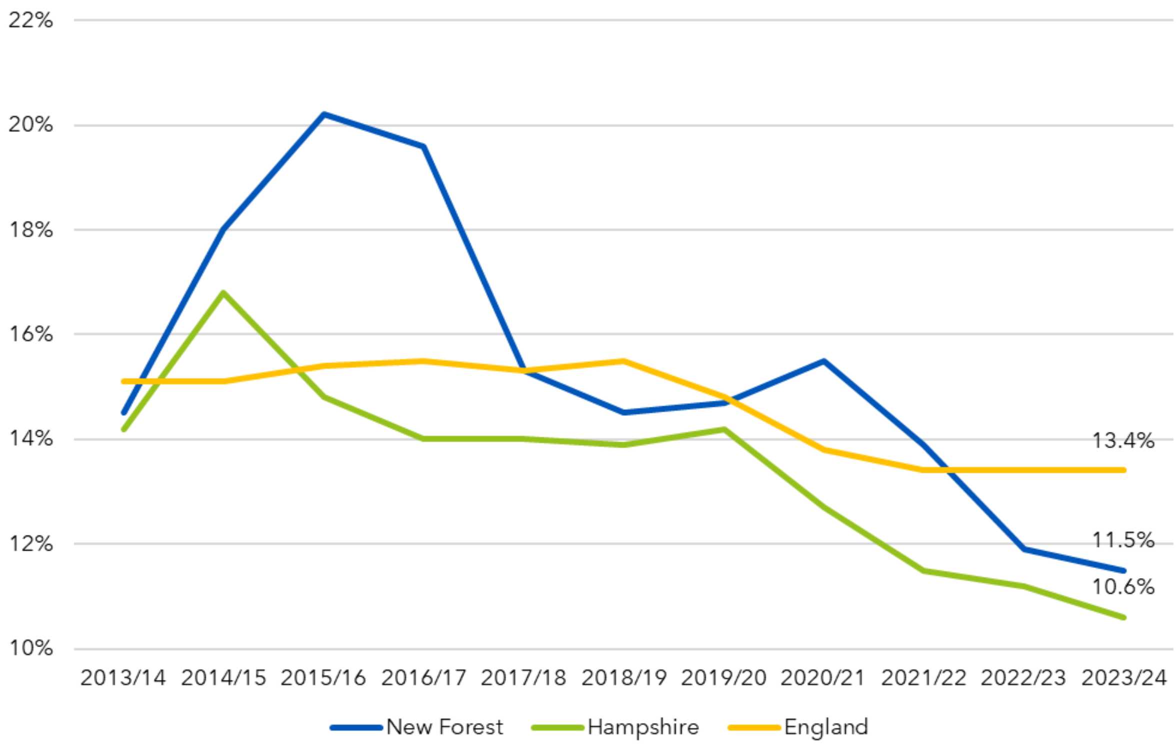
Note: Annual data is between July 2023 and June 2024.
Source: Annual Population Survey.

Figure 2.3: Economic activity rate by age bands (2023/24)



Note: Annual data is between July 2023 and June 2024.
Source: Annual Population Survey.

Figure 2.4: Self-employment rate as percentage of employment (2013/14 to 2023/24)



Source: Annual Population Survey.

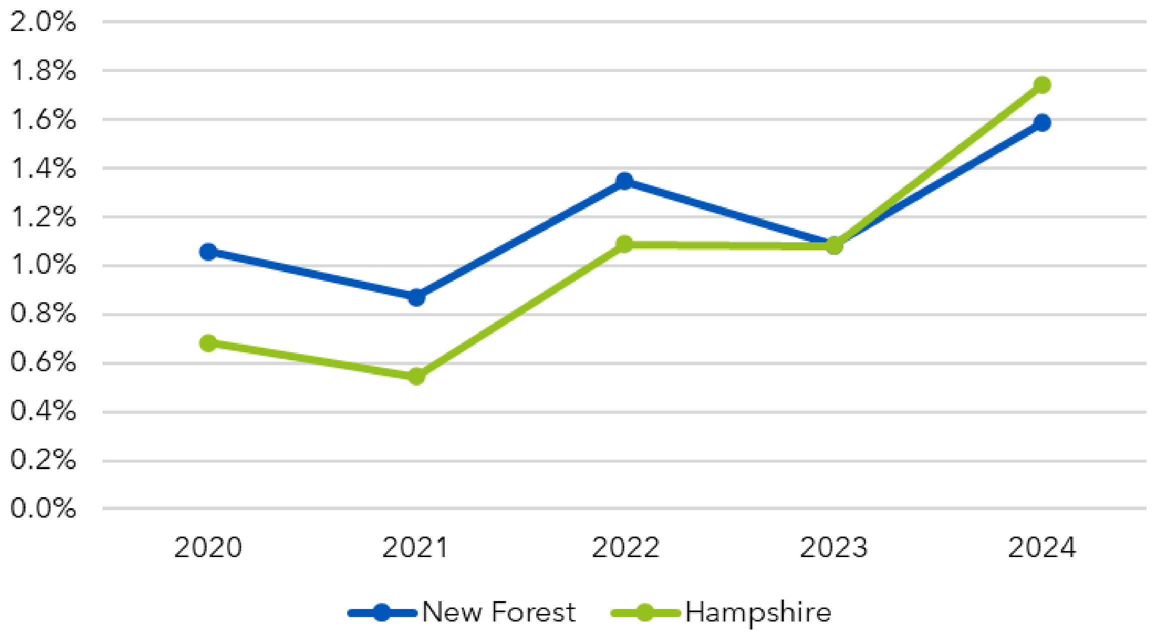
2.5 Unemployment

Young People

Due to Raising the Participation Age (RPA) legislation 2014, young people are under a duty to participate in education or training until at least their 18th birthday, although in practice most young people continue until the end of the academic year in which they turn 18 (academic Year 13). Destination data from Hampshire County Council shows that the New Forest has a lower proportion of young people that move to participating situations (including full-time education, employment and training) which meet the Department for Education defined 'Raising the Participation Age (RPA)' (91.6% in New Forest compared to 92.8% at Hampshire level).

Therefore, New Forest has a higher proportion of young people who are not in education, employment, or training (NEETs) or is in part-time education or employment. Looking specifically at NEETs, the percentage of NEETs has broadly been on the rise since 2020, Figure 2.5.

Figure 2.5: Percentage of Year 11 Leavers who are NEETs (2020 to 2024)



Source: Hampshire County Council 2024 Activity Survey - Year 11 Leavers from New Forest District

Unemployment-related benefits

Across New Forest, the claimant count (those seeking unemployment-related income support) rose sharply following the initial lockdown measures in March 2020, peaking at almost 4,000. The claimant count gradually decreased to 1,900 in 2022, however, it has rose in the past two years with 2,200 people claiming unemployment-related income support in 2024. The growth in claimant count has been concentrated in existing pockets of deprivation such as Totton and Eling and Hythe and Dibden, Table 2.7.

Table 2.7: Number of people claiming unemployment-related benefits (2019 to 2024)

	2019	2024	% of 2024	Change	% Change
Totton & Eling	280	450	20%	170	61%
New Milton	260	355	16%	95	37%
Hythe & Dibden	220	340	15%	120	55%
Lymington & Pennington	145	220	10%	75	52%
Fawley	135	220	10%	85	63%
Ringwood	105	200	9%	95	90%
Fordingbridge	60	110	5%	50	83%
Brockenhurst	25	75	3%	50	200%
Milford on Sea	35	65	3%	30	86%
Burley	40	65	3%	25	63%
Ashurst & Cadnam	25	55	2%	30	120%
Lyndhurst	25	50	2%	25	100%
New Forest	**1,345**	**2,205**	**100%**	**860**	**64%**

Source: Claimant Count

One-third of households (34%) in New Forest are deprived in some way, particularly concentrated in pockets of Totton, Waterside, New Milton and Fawley, Table 2.8. Most of these areas are within close proximity to the Freeport sites – this should be seen as an inclusive growth opportunity for any skills intervention to target local people in these areas.

Table 2.8: Percentage of households deprived across 4 dimensions (2021)

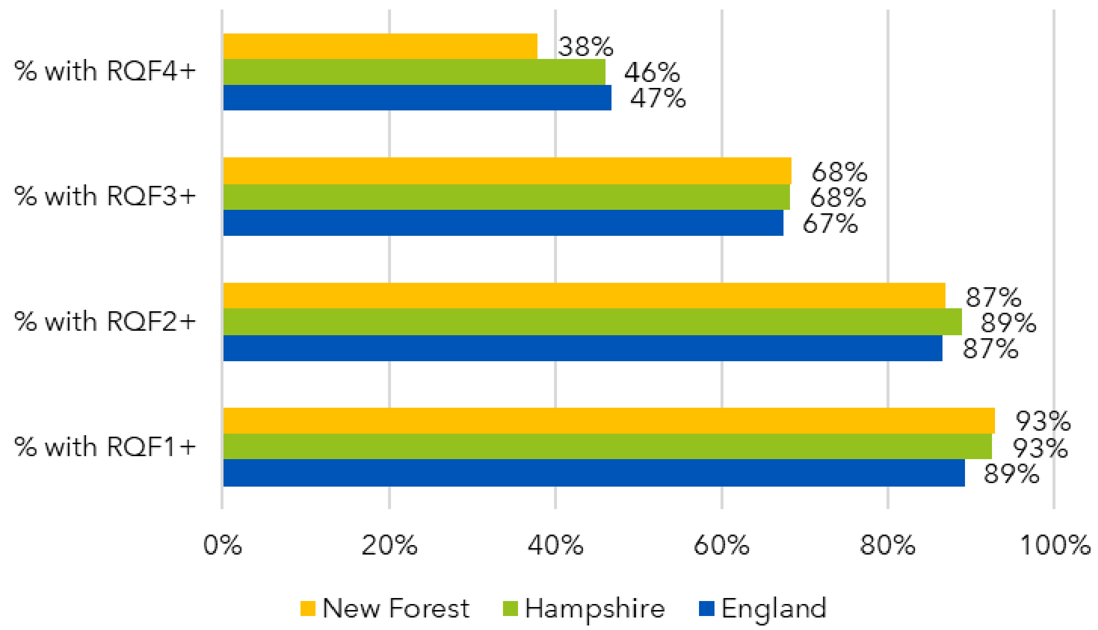
	1 dimension	2 dimensions	3 dimensions	4 dimensions
New Forest	**34%**	**12%**	**2%**	**0.2%**
New Milton	37%	13%	2%	0.1%
Fawley	36%	14%	3%	0.3%
Milford on Sea	35%	8%	1%	0.1%
Totton & Eling	34%	13%	3%	0.3%
Hythe & Dibden	34%	12%	2%	0.2%
Ringwood	34%	13%	2%	0.1%
Fordingbridge	33%	11%	2%	0.1%
Ashurst & Cadnam	33%	10%	1%	0.1%
Burley	32%	9%	1%	0.1%
Lyndhurst	32%	10%	1%	0.2%
Brockenhurst	32%	8%	1%	0.0%
Lymington & Pennington	32%	11%	2%	0.1%

The 4 dimensions of deprivation are: Employment, education, health and disability, and household overcrowding.
Source: Census 2021

2.6 Skills and Qualifications

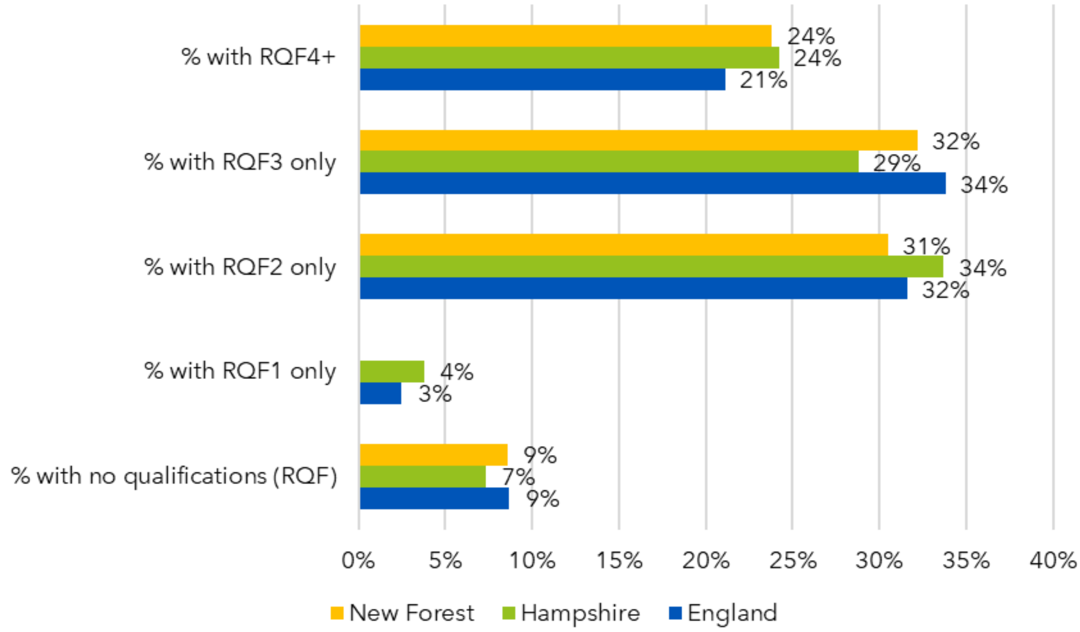
New Forest has a much lower proportion of people of working age with higher level qualifications (RQF4 and above), particularly amongst older cohort (people aged 50 to 64), Figure 2.6. Young people in New Forest are relatively higher skilled than regional and national averages, Figure 2.7.

Figure 3.6: Working age qualifications (2023)



Source: Annual Population Survey

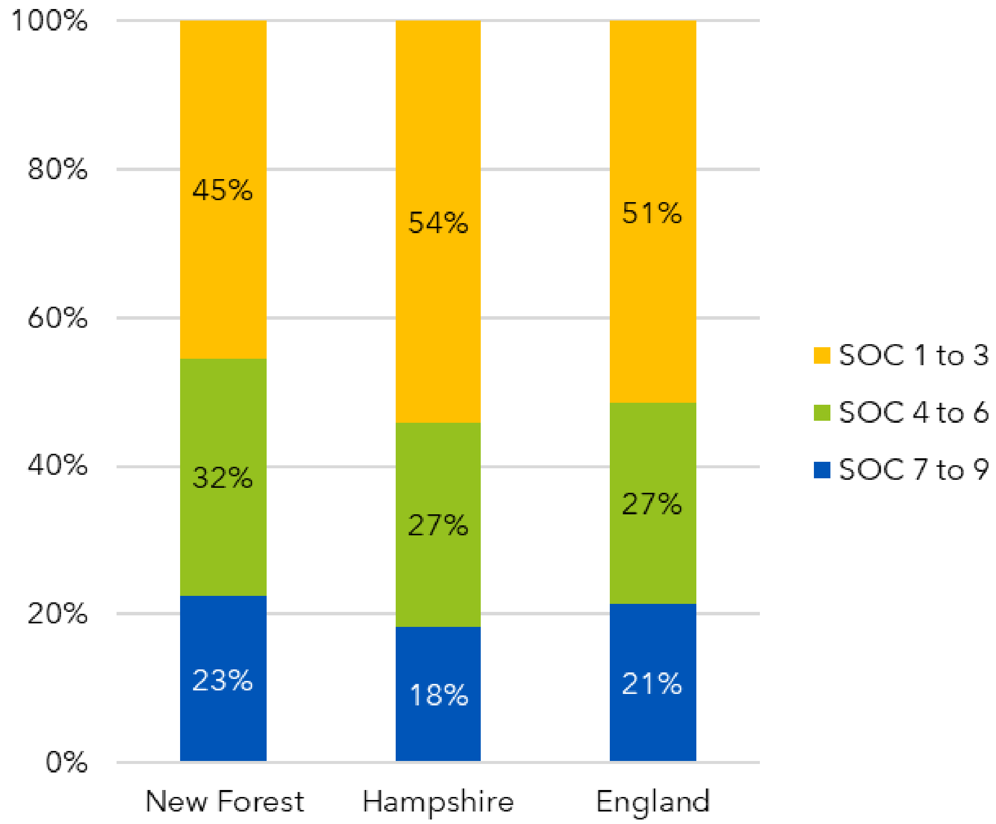
Figure 2.7: Qualifications of population aged 16 to 24 (2023)



Note: Estimate for % with RQF1 only in New Forest is unavailable due to small sample size.
Source: Annual Population Survey

Between July and June 2023, New Forest had a lower proportion of individuals employed in higher-level professional occupations (45%) compared to England (51%), Figure 2.8. However, 12% of individuals were employed as managers, directors and senior officials compared to 11% at a national level. New Forest has a greater proportion of its workforce employed in medium-level occupations (such as skilled trades occupations, caring, leisure and other service occupations) (32% compared to 27% England) and a marginally higher rate of individuals employed in low-skilled occupations (such as elementary occupations).

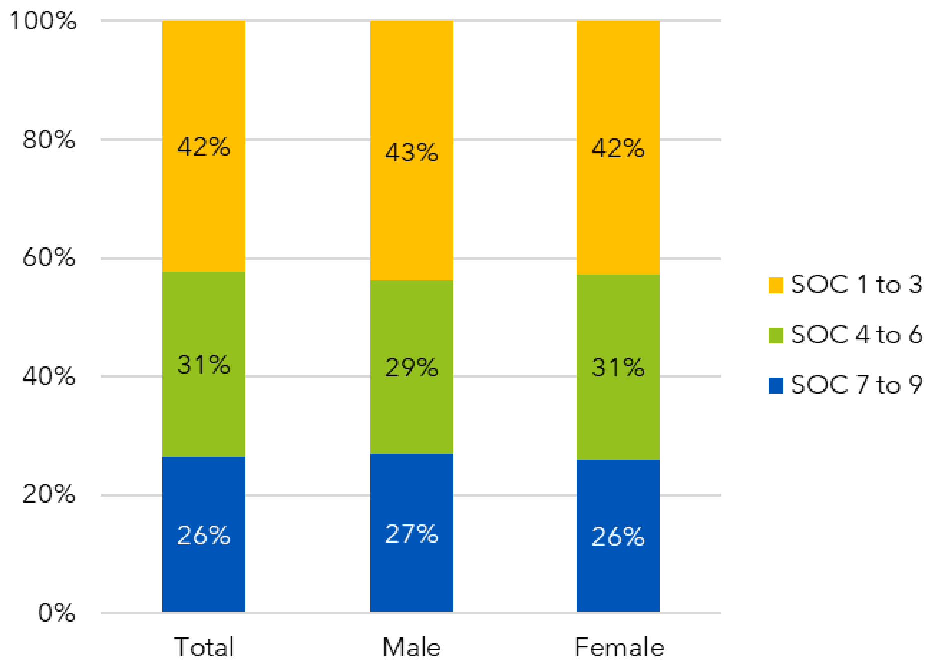
Figure 2.8: Employment by Standard Occupational Classification (SOC2020) (2023)



SOC Codes 1 to 3 include: managers, directors and senior officials; professional occupations; and associate professional occupations.
SOC Codes 4 to 6 include: administrative and secretarial occupations; skilled trades occupations; and caring, leisure and other service occupations.
SOC Codes 7 to 9 include: sales and customer service occupations; process, plant and machine operatives; and elementary occupations.
Source: Annual Population Survey.

Women also tend to be employed in lower-skilled and lower paid occupations where the quality and security of their employment may be considerably poorer than their male counterparts, Figure 2.9. Across New Forest, more males (13% of males in employment) were employed in higher-skilled occupations such as managers, directors, and senior officials than females (9.5%). Occupations such as caring and leisure (17.3%) and administrative and secretarial occupations had a larger share of female employment (13.2%) than male employment.

Figure 2.9: New Forest Employment by Standard Occupational Classification and gender (SOC2020) (2023)



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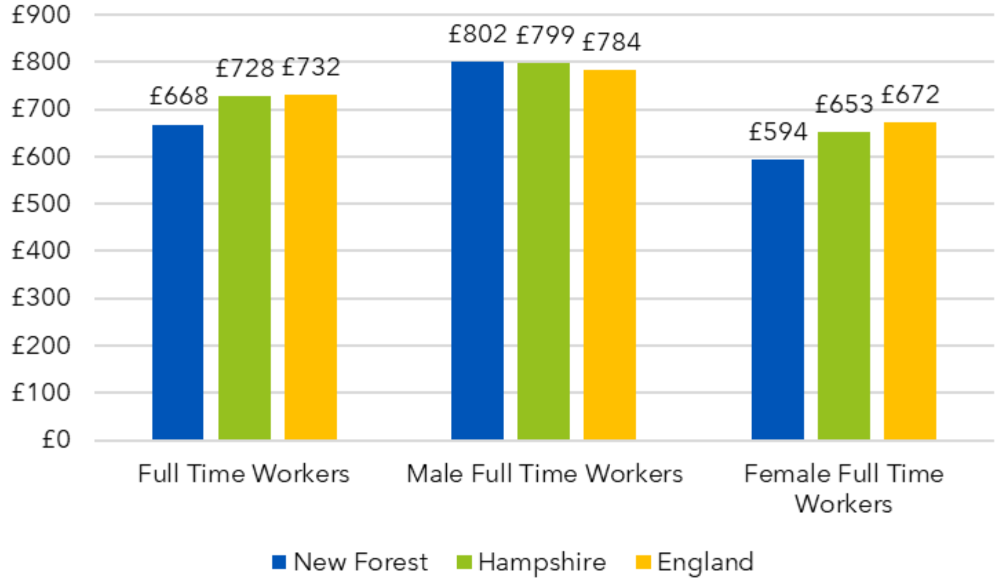
Source: Annual Population Survey.

2.7 Earnings

Earnings in the New Forest are impacted by the higher prevalence of part-time working and lower-qualified work, particularly for women, Figure 2.10. In 2024, gross weekly median pay for full-time workers in the New Forest (£668) was below the national average (£732). Males received a higher weekly gross pay at £801 than females at £594 - a difference of £207 each week. This pay gap between male and female weekly gross pay has only increased since 2014, where the disparity was £173, Figure 2.11.

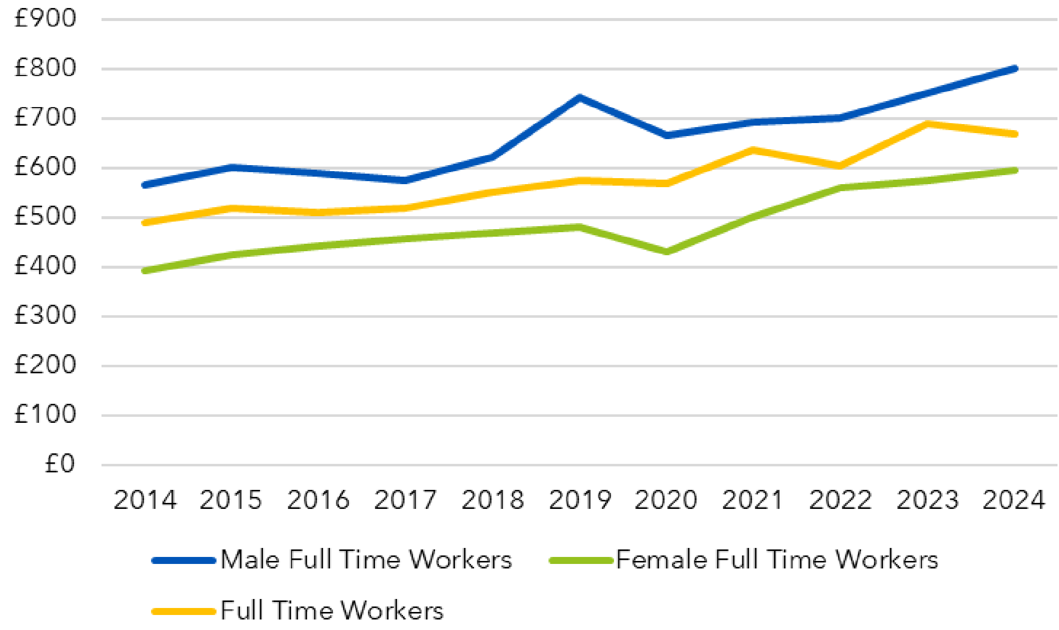
More efforts could be taken to address the quality of work for women across the New Forest and address the existing equality imbalances.

Figure 2.10: Gross median pay (workplace-based) (2024)



Source: Annual Survey of Hours & Earnings

Figure 2.11: Gross median pay (workplace-based) (2014 to 2024)



Source: Annual Survey of Hours & Earnings

2.8 Job Postings

Between October 2023 and 2024, there were almost 20,000 job postings in New Forest across almost 2,500 employers, Table 2.9. Job postings were mainly concentrated around the population centres of Ringwood, New Milton, Totton and Eling, and Lymington, Table 3.10. It shows that current demand continues to be in lower-paid foundational and service sectors with key employers being NHS, recruiters for teaching assistants (particularly SEN), chefs, care workers, and cleaners, Table 2.10.

Chefs also saw the biggest increase in demand in New Forest. The data also tracks what skills are most commonly sought in the job postings – these were management, communication and customer service skills.

Table 2.9: Job postings by employer (2023/24)

Employer	Sector	Total number of unique	% of unique
NHS	Health and social care	474	2%
Randstad	Recruitment - teaching assistants particularly around SEN	268	1%
Hampshire County Council	Public sector	218	1%
Colten Care	Health and social care - Residential, nursing, and dementia care	211	1%
New Forest District Council	Public sector	210	1%
Maid2Clean	Cleaning	205	1%
The Work Shop Resourcing Ltd	Regional recruitment - based in Ringwood	199	1%
Reed	Education, accountancy, logistics, IT, engineering	191	1%
Platinum Recruitment Consultancy	Hospitality	169	1%
Cma Recruitment Group	Accountancy & Finance, Executive, HR recruitment	162	1%
Total		19789	

Annual data is from October 2023 to October 2024.
Source: Lightcast

Table 2.10: Job postings by locality (2023/24)

Locality	Total number of unique postings	% of unique
Ringwood	4982	25%
Lymington	3392	17%
New Milton	2811	14%
Fordingbridge	2620	13%
Totton	1875	9%
Lyndhurst	1546	8%
Total	19789	100%

Annual data is from October 2023 to October 2024.
Source: Lightcast

Table 2.11: Job postings by occupation (2023/24)

Occupation	Total number of unique postings	% of unique
Care workers and home carers	1106	6%
Chefs	723	4%
Cleaners and domestics	694	4%
Sales	568	3%
Teaching assistants	543	3%
Customer service	477	2%
Kitchen and catering assistants	458	2%
Bookkeepers, payroll managers and wage clerks	361	2%
Other administrative	351	2%
Retail & Wholesale - managers and directors	301	2%
Sales and retaila assistants	301	2%

Annual data is from October 2023 to October 2024.
Source: Lightcast

2.9 Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are in sectors which have well-established apprenticeship pathways commonly used by employers in these sectors. For example, health, public services and care had the largest number of new starts (240) and achievements (130) in 2022-23, Table 2.12.

Table 2.12: Apprenticeship starts by industry (2022/23)

Industry	Number	% of total
Health, Public Services and Care	240	27%
Business, Administration and Law	170	19%
Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies	170	19%
Retail and Commercial Enterprise	110	12%
Construction, Planning and the Built Environment	100	11%
Information and Communication Technology	50	6%
Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care	30	3%
Education and Training	10	1%
Leisure, Travel and Tourism	10	1%
Total	**900**	**100%**

Source: Department for Education

3 Employer Skills and Workforce Needs Survey

An online survey targeted at employers was distributed in early January 2025 by partners (including New Forest District Council, Hampshire County Council, and Solent Business Skills and Solutions). The survey ran for 4 weeks and closed on 7th February 2025.

The employer survey received a total of **65 responses**. The survey had an estimated reach of 1600 contacts through partners' distribution; therefore, the estimated response rate is around 4%.

3.1 Headline Findings

Respondent Profile

- The employer survey received a total of **65 responses**.
- The main industries represented were retail (16%), accommodation and food services (14%), arts, entertainment and leisure and recreation (11%), business administration and support (10%), and manufacturing (10%). Given the lack of representation from particular industries such as construction and IT digital companies, caution is advised when analysing some aspects of the survey findings.
- In terms of business location, there was a reasonable mix of respondents from across the District.
- Almost half of employers (42%) stated that all of their staff live within the New Forest.
- For transport to work, there is a significant reliance on private transport to access work and very low levels of active travel and public transport use to travel to work amongst the respondent workforce.

Recruitment

- Two thirds of respondents (67%) were actively recruiting in the last 12 months.
- A relatively high proportion of vacancies were seasonal or temporary (38%) with a similar proportion of vacancies advertising a full-time role (37%).

- The most common recruitment challenges faced by New Forest employers are that: applicants lack the necessary experience (52%), required attitude or motivation (50%) or lack the required skills (41%).
- Almost half of respondents (43%) who were actively recruiting stated that at least one of the vacancies proved difficult to fill – the most common occupations that were identified as hard-to-fill included chefs, cleaners, and skilled trades (for example, marine electrician, shipwright).

Skills

- Respondents were asked which skills were most important to their business/organisation. The most commonly reported technical or practical skills were knowledge of organisation and/or industry sector (61%); basic numerical skills and understanding (58%), and computer literacy/basic IT skills (56%). For people and personal skills, the most commonly reported skills were team working (75%), customer handling skills (70%), and ability to manage own time and prioritise tasks (70%).
- The most common causes of skills gap amongst respondents are unable to recruit staff with the required skills (44%), staff are new to the role (31; and the introduction of new working practices (23%) or new technology (21%).

Training

- The vast majority of respondents (86%) had provided or arranged staff training in the last 12 months. Most training was delivered internally by a member of staff (74%) while over half of respondents reported that they had accessed training from a training provider outside of the New Forest.
- The main reason for respondents who did not use a local training provider in the New Forest was that it did not meet their needs (46%) – this was followed by lack of awareness (31%). Cost was a less common reason (15%).

Skills provision

- More than one-quarter of respondents (28%) plan on using one of the skills products in the next three years – almost half stated that they would not while remainder (25%) were unsure. The most common issues impacting ability to apprenticeships, T-levels, or work placements are capacity to provide mentoring support (58%), cost (55%), and administrative burden (50%).

Skills Action Plan priorities

- Skills Action Plan priorities for respondents include improved links between education sector and employers (61%); providing more opportunities for reskilling and upskilling the existing workforce (54%); and better promotion of routes into and pathways through different sectors to attract future talent (51%).

3.2 Respondent Profile

Respondents were mostly from the private sector (75%) followed by public sector (19%), and third/voluntary sector (6%). Almost two-thirds of respondents (64%) were micro or small businesses with 19% of respondents self-employed – the remainder were medium (11%) and large (6%) businesses. The vast majority of respondents (79%) were well established having been trading for over 10 years.

The main industries represented were retail (16%), accommodation and food services (14%), arts, entertainment and leisure and recreation (11%), business administration and support (10%), and manufacturing (10%). Given the lack of representation from particular industries such as construction and IT digital companies, caution is advised when analysing some aspects of the survey findings.

Table 2.1: Respondents by industry

	% of respondents
Retail	16%
Accommodation and food services	14%
Arts, entertainment, recreation, and other services	11%
Business administration and support services	10%
Manufacturing	10%
Financial and insurance	8%

	% of respondents
Professional, scientific and technical	6%
Visitor economy	6%
Agriculture, forestry, and fishing	5%
Marine	5%
Education	3%
Health and care	2%
Motor trades	2%
Transportation and storage	2%
Other	2%

N=63. Visitor economy and marine were additional categories after recoding other responses. Other response included Chamber of Commerce. No responses were received from companies within construction, Information and communication; Life sciences; Mining, quarrying, and utilities; Property; Public administration and defence; and Wholesale sectors.

In terms of business location, there was a reasonable mix of respondents from across the District. The most common locations were Lymington & Pennington (29%), Brockenhurst & Sway (21%), New Milton (21%), Hythe & Dibden (14%), and Totton and Eling (8%).

Table 3.2: Respondents by locality

	% of respondents
Lymington & Pennington – includes Beaulieu	29%
Brockenhurst & Sway	21%
New Milton	21%
Hythe & Dibden	14%
Totton & Eling	8%
Fordingbridge	6%
Lyndhurst & Minstead	6%
Ashurst & Cadnam	5%
Fawley – includes Blackfield, Calshot, Langley, Holbury and Hardley	5%
Milford on Sea	3%
Ringwood	3%
Burley & Bransgore	2%
Marchwood	2%
Other	3%

N=63

3.3 Respondent Workforce

Respondents were asked to estimate the proportion of their workforce that live within the New Forest. Almost half of employers (42%) stated that all their staff live within the New Forest.

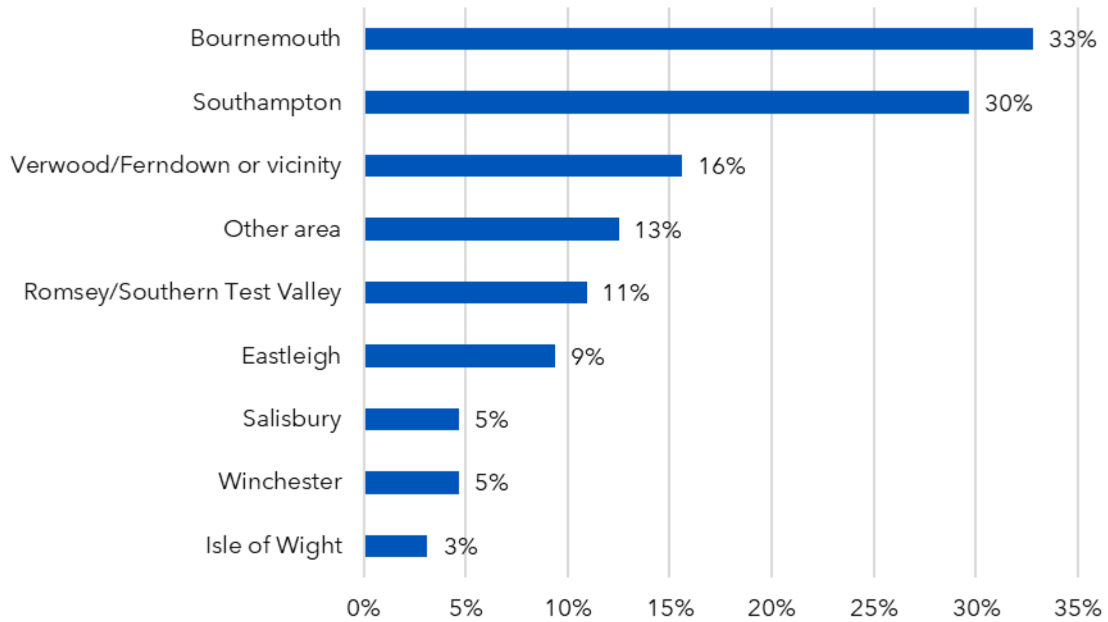
Table 3.3: What proportion of your staff live in the New Forest District area?

	% of respondents
All (100%)	42%
Almost all (76% to 99%)	19%
Most (51% to 75%)	17%
Many (26% to 50%)	8%
Some (10% to 25%)	6%
A few (1% to 9%)	5%
None (0%)	3%

N=64.

Bournemouth (33% of respondents) or Southampton (30%) were the most common location of employers' workforce outside of the New Forest – this was followed by Verwood/Ferndown (16%).

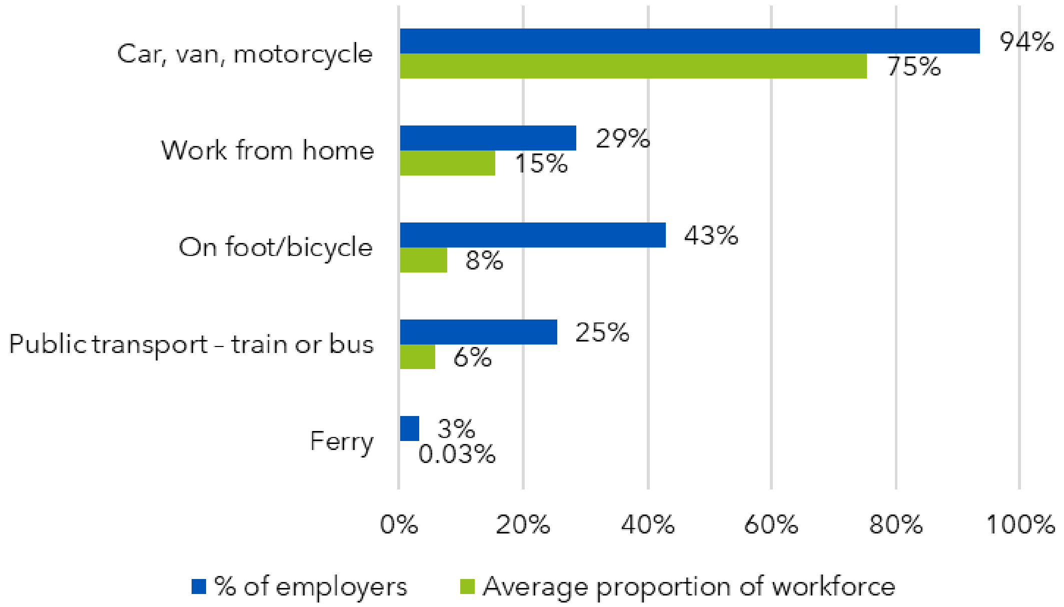
Figure 3.1: Percentage of respondents who reported that at least one member of staff lived within area



N=64

For transport, there is a significant reliance on private transport to access work with 94% of employers and 75% of their workforce using a car, van or motorcycle to travel to work. There are very low levels of active travel (8% of respondent workforce) and public transport (6%) to travel to work amongst the respondent workforce.

Figure 3.2: What proportion of your workforce uses the following modes to travel to and from work (commute only)?



N=63

3.4 Recruitment and Skills Shortages

Two thirds of respondents (67%) were actively recruiting in the last 12 months. In total, these respondents (n=42) had a total of 319 vacancies – an average of 7.6 vacancies per employer. A relatively high proportion of vacancies were seasonal or temporary (38%) with a similar proportion of vacancies advertising a full-time role (37%).

Table 3.4: How many vacancies have you had in the last 12 months?

	Number of vacancies	% of vacancies
Seasonal or temporary	120	38%
Full-time (35 hours or more)	118	37%
Part-time (Less than 35 hours)	83	26%
Total	**319**	**100%**

N= 42 employers

Most vacancies (55%) were a result of replacement of existing staff leaving the workforce (45% of vacancies were a result of growth of the business) – this likely reflects the high proportion of seasonal or temporary vacancies.

The most common recruitment challenges faced by New Forest employers are that: applicants lack the necessary experience (52%), required attitude or motivation (50%) or lack the required skills (41%). Another challenge is the low number of applications submitted for post(s) (38%).

Table 3.5: What recruitment challenges does your business/organisation face?

	%
Applicants lack the necessary experience	52%
Applicants lack the required attitude or motivation	50%
Applicants lack the required skills	41%
A low number of applications submitted for post(s)	38%
Competition from other employers	34%
Applicants lack the necessary qualifications	28%
Remote location/accessibility and travel/transport issues	24%
Pay and conditions when compared to other employers/sectors	21%
Seasonal/temporary work	21%
Shift work/unsociable hours	17%
Other	12%

N=58

Almost half of respondents (43%) who were actively recruiting stated that at least one of the vacancies proved difficult to fill – the most common occupations that were identified as hard-to-fill included chefs, cleaners, and skilled trades (for example, marine electrician, shipwright).

Of these respondents, 80% stated that a vacancy had been hard to fill because applicants lacked the required technical and practical skills – this mostly related to specialist skills to carry out the specific job role.

Table 3.6: Have any vacancies been hard to fill because applicants lack the required technical and practical skills?

	%
Specialist skills required to carry out the specific job role	67%
Knowledge of your organisation and/or industry sector	33%
Advanced/specialist IT skills	17%

	%
Reading and understanding instructions, guidelines, manuals, reports, etc.	17%
Writing reports, emails, etc.	17%
Basic numerical skills and understanding	17%
Manual dexterity – skills with which to repair, mend, assemble, etc.	17%
Knowledge of your organisation and products/services offered	17%
Complex numerical/statistical skills and understanding	8%
Adapting to new equipment, processes, materials, etc.	8%
Computer literacy/basic IT skills	0%
Communicating in another language	0%
Other	25%

N=15.

Similarly, around two-thirds of these respondents (67%) stated that a vacancy had been hard to fill because applicants lack the required people and personal skills – this mostly related to ability to manage own time and prioritise tasks.

Table 3.7: Have any vacancies been hard to fill because applicants lack the required people and personal skills?

	%
Ability to manage own time and prioritise tasks	70%
Creative and innovative thinking	50%
Managing and/or motivating others	50%
Team working	40%
Persuading, influencing and/or negotiating	30%
Problem solving	20%
Instructing, teaching or training people	20%
Customer handling skills	20%
Managing their own feelings and/or the feelings of others	20%
Sales skills	10%
Setting objectives for others	10%
Presentation skills	10%
Other	10%

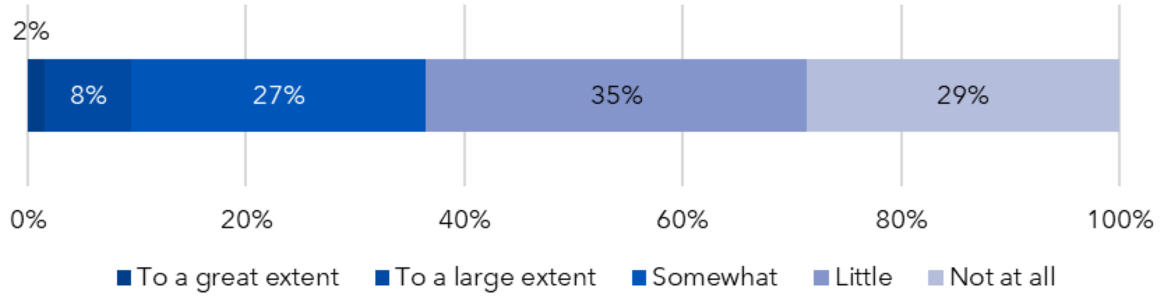
N=15

Staff retention does not appear a challenge for respondents (only 10% stated retention was a challenge to a great or large extent – 29% reported not at all). When asked to explain further, some respondents noted that their positive work environment, benefits, and employee care had resulted in long-serving staff.

Respondents who noted that staff retention was a challenge highlighted difficulties in hiring and retaining young or skilled staff – it was also identified that some industries face more difficulty retaining staff, such as hospitality and engineering businesses.

Often, these employees leave for better opportunities elsewhere and/or younger workers move out of the local area to progress their career.

Figure 3.3: To what extent, is staff retention a challenge?



N=63

Respondents were asked which skills were most important to their business/organisation. The most commonly reported technical or practical skills were knowledge of organisation and/or industry sector (61%); basic numerical skills and understanding (58%), and computer literacy/basic IT skills (56%). For people and personal skills, the most commonly reported skills were team working (75%), customer handling skills (70%), and ability to manage own time and prioritise tasks (70%).

Table 3.8: Which technical or practical skills are most important to your business/organisation?

	%
Knowledge of your organisation and/or industry sector	61%
Basic numerical skills and understanding	58%
Computer literacy/basic IT skills	56%
Reading and understanding instructions, guidelines, manuals, reports, etc.	52%
Knowledge of your organisation and products/services offered	52%
Writing reports, emails, etc.	47%
Specialist skills required to carry out the role in question	39%
Adapting to new equipment, processes, materials, etc.	30%
Manual dexterity – i.e. skills with which to repair, mend, assemble, etc.	25%
Advanced/specialist IT skills	16%
Complex numerical/statistical skills and understanding	13%
Communicating in another language	2%

Other	9%

N=64

Table 3.9: Which technical or practical skills are most important to your business/organisation?

	%
Team working	75%
Customer handling skills	70%
Ability to manage own time and prioritise tasks	70%
Creative and innovative thinking	56%
Problem solving	53%
Sales skills	41%
Managing and/or motivating others	36%
Managing their own feelings and/or the feelings of others	36%
Instructing, teaching or training people	28%
Persuading, influencing and/or negotiating	27%
Presentation skills	22%
Setting objectives for others	14%
Other	9%

N=64

The most common causes of skills gap amongst respondents are unable to recruit staff with the required skills (44%), staff are new to the role (31; and the introduction of new working practices (23%) or new technology (21%).

Around one-quarter of respondents (24%) implemented changes to their terms and conditions/workplace practices over the last 12 months to help attract and retain staff – this mainly included flexible working and increased salary.

Table 3.10: What changes to terms and conditions/workplace practices have been implemented?

	%
Flexible working	73%
Increased salary	60%
Additional benefits (e.g. gym membership, cycle to work scheme)	40%
Increased annual leave entitlement	7%
Other	7%
Special paid leave entitlement (for example, family emergency, bereavement)	0%
Provided company transport (own van, mileage expenses etc)	0%

N=15

3.5 Training and Workforce Development

Over two-thirds of respondents (69%) have a training plan that specifies the level and type of training your employees require in the coming year. Half (51%) stated that they have a dedicated training and CPD budget for training.

Table 3.11: Does your business/organisation have any of the following in place to support workforce development?

	%
A training plan that specifies the level and type of training your employees require in the coming year	69%
A dedicated budget for training and continuous professional development	51%
A dedicated in-house training manager/co-ordinator	31%

N=39

The vast majority of respondents (86%) had provided or arranged staff training in the last 12 months. Most training was delivered internally by a member of staff (74%) while over half of respondents reported that they had accessed training from a training provider outside of the New Forest.

Training mostly related to operational training (machinery or new equipment) (69%) or mandatory training (61%).

Table 3.12: Delivery of training

	%
Internal training – delivered by a member of staff	74%
External training – delivered by a training provider outside of the New Forest	52%
External training – delivered by a provider in the New Forest	39%

N=54

Table 3.13: Type of training

	%
Operational training (e.g. training or instruction on, for example, new software, kit, equipment, etc.)	69%
Mandatory training (e.g. training that is deemed to be essential to ensure a safer and more efficient operation)	61%
Statutory training (e.g. training that is required by law)	44%
Management/leadership training (e.g. training focused on developing staff for more senior roles)	37%
Vocational training (e.g. training focused on the skills required for a particular job function or trade, for example, BTEC, micro-credentials etc.)	33%
Academic qualifications or training	20%
Other	9%

N=54

The majority of training was delivered by a private sector training provider (84%) and face-to-face (70%). High levels of satisfaction were reported with private sector training providers.

Table 3.14: Type of training

	%
Private sector training provider	84%
University	20%
College	18%
Third/voluntary sector training provider	18%

N=54

Table 3.15: To what extent, did the training provider(s) meet your organisation's skills needs?

	Met needs in full	Met needs to some extent	Met needs to a limited extent	Did not meet needs
Private sector provider (n=37)	65%	35%	0%	0%
University (n=37)	67%	22%	0%	11%
Third/voluntary sector provider (n=8)	50%	50%	0%	0%
College (n=8)	25%	63%	13%	0%
Total (n=62)	**58%**	**39%**	**2%**	**2%**

The main reason for respondents who did not use a local training provider in the New Forest was that it did not meet their needs (46%) – this was followed by lack of awareness (31%). Cost was a less common reason (15%).

Table 3.16: Why did you not use a local training provider in the New Forest?

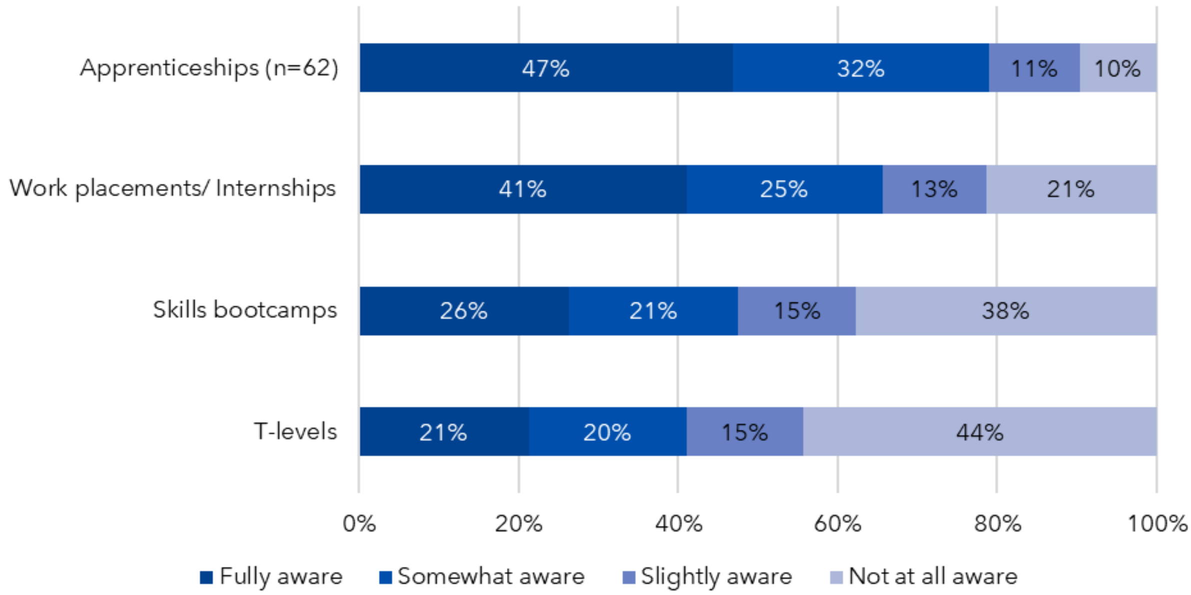
	%
Current provision does not meet our needs	46%
We lack awareness of local training providers and provision	31%
Cost	15%
Previous bad experience	4%
Other	19%

N=26

3.6 Apprenticeships, Skills Bootcamps, T-Levels, and Work Placements

Respondents were asked about their awareness and experience of a range of different skills products – these included apprenticeships, skills bootcamps, T-Levels and work placements. Apprenticeships and Work placements/ Internships had the highest level of awareness with relatively low awareness of skills bootcamps.

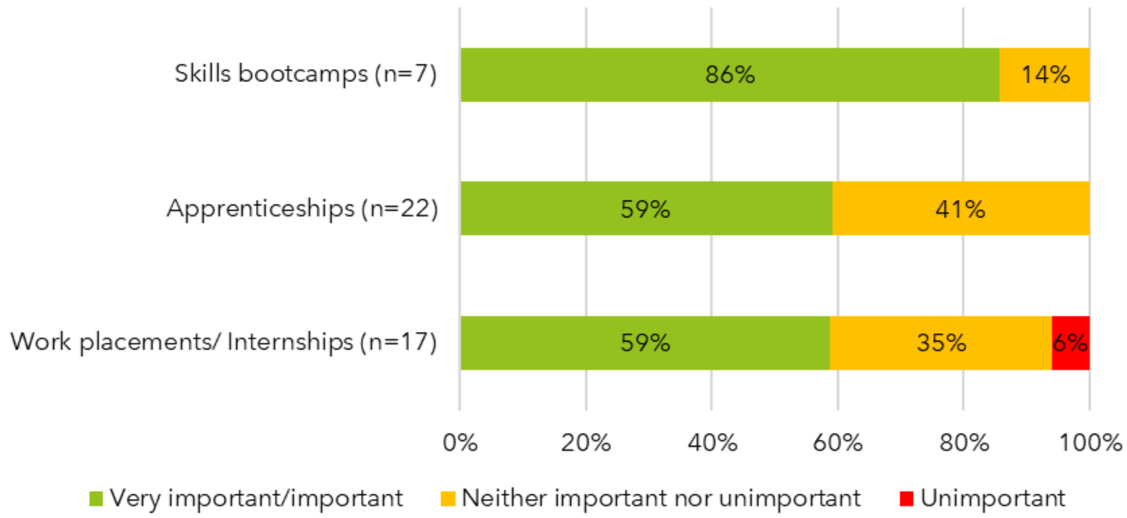
Figure 3.4: Awareness of skills products



N=61 unless stated.

Under half of employers (45%) had experience of offering and/or attending one of the skills products. Of these respondents, vast majority had experience of apprenticeships (79%) or work placements (61%) – only one-quarter (25%) had attended skills bootcamps, however these were highly valued.

Figure 3.5: Overall, how important or otherwise have the following been in helping your business to address its recruitment and skills needs?



T-Levels response has been omitted due to small sample size.

More than one-quarter of respondents (28%) plan on using one of the skills products in the next three years – almost half stated that they would not while remainder (25%) were unsure. The most common issues impacting ability to apprenticeships, T-levels, or work placements are capacity to provide mentoring support (58%), cost (55%), and administrative burden (50%).

Table 3.17: Which issues, if any, impact your organisation's ability to offer apprenticeships, T-levels, or work placements?

	%
Capacity to provide mentoring support	58%
Cost	55%
Administrative burden	50%
Time away from workplace for training	32%
Time taken for staff member to complete qualification	29%
Lack of knowledge about how to go about it	26%
Relevance of provision	26%
Preference for applicants with college certificates/university degrees	8%
Other	11%

N=38

Respondents reported very low awareness and access to each of the skills funds asked in the survey. For example, around two in five respondents (39%) were not at all aware of the Apprenticeship Levy. Similarly, fewer than one-third (29%) of respondents had accessed one of the skills funds (mostly apprenticeship levy – 89% of these respondents).

Finally, respondents were asked to identify the main skills priorities for a Skills Action Plan – this mainly included:

- improved links between education sector and employers (61%).
- providing more opportunities for reskilling and upskilling the existing workforce (54%).
- better promotion of routes into and pathways through different sectors to attract future talent (51%).

Table 3.18: Which issues, if any, impact your organisation's ability to offer apprenticeships, T-levels, or work placements?

	%
Improved links between education sector and employers	61%
Providing more opportunities for reskilling and upskilling the existing workforce	54%
Better promotion of routes into and pathways through different sectors to attract future talent	51%
Inspiring and preparing young people to engage in the range of opportunities provided by the Solent Freeport (for example, low carbon jobs)	42%
Addressing infrastructure challenges (for example, transport, housing, digital)	42%
Raising the profile and attractiveness of specific sectors	37%
Other	7%

N=59

4 Stakeholders Consultations and Insights

4.1 Introduction

As part of the development of the NFSAP, the EKOS study team conducted a series of interviews with various key stakeholders and partners within the New Forest skills landscape. In total, 30 interviews were carried out between October 2024 and January 2025.

The primary research stage also included two in-person workshops with members of local education institutions, business groups, the district council and the NFNPA, as well as learner session workshops with college students from Brockenhurst College and Totton College.

The following stakeholders were consulted:

- Local Authorities & Partnerships: Hampshire County Council, Southampton City Council, New Forest National Park Authority, New Forest Business Partnership, several parish councils (Fawley, Hythe & Dibden, Totton & Eling).
- Education & Skills Providers: Brockenhurst College, Totton College, Bournemouth University, Solent University, Hampshire Futures, Solent Business & Skills Solutions.
- Business & Employment: Hampshire Chamber of Commerce, Department for Work and Pensions, Hardisty Jones, Solent Freeport.
- Youth & Community: Community First, Youth Options, The Handy Trust.
- Students: Workshop learner sessions with students at both Brockenhurst and Totton College.

The rest of the chapter has been divided into four sub-sections of findings, including:

- Skills challenges
- Skills opportunities
- Skills infrastructure and policy interventions

There is also a separate sub-section containing feedback and discussion points raised and considered during the two in-person workshop sessions.

4.2 Skills Challenges

The following section highlights some of the key skills challenges that were raised by consultees, these have been grouped into a few key areas, namely:

- Barriers to accessing education and training
- Employer and education linkages
- Business environment
- Gaps in provision

Barriers to Accessing Education and Training

A recurring theme throughout consultations was the need to minimise barriers to education, training, and employment to ensure greater accessibility for all.

One of the most pressing challenges highlighted was the lack of reliable and affordable public transport in the New Forest. Many consultees described the transport network as infrequent, expensive, or, in some areas, non-existent. A specific concern was the recent cancellation of the bus services in the Calshot area which has left that part of the New Forest inaccessible to those relying on public transport. This issue disproportionately affects young people without a driving licence or access to a vehicle, limiting their ability to enrol in education, attend training, or secure employment. Innovative solutions, such as Community First's Wheels 2 Work which is a moped loan service for young people to access employment opportunities, are high in demand with waiting lists but face uncertain future with funding uncertainty.

Housing affordability was another concern, with property prices in the New Forest well above the national average, limiting the ability to attract and retain workers, with many leaving for higher wages or more affordable housing elsewhere.

Concerns were also raised about the lack of targeted funding for individuals classified as NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training). Consultees highlighted that limited investment in youth services was further restricting opportunities for at-risk individuals to develop key employability skills, such as teamwork, communication, and problem-solving.

Without dedicated funding and structured support, many NEET individuals struggle to access education, training, or employment opportunities, creating a persistent barrier to social mobility.

It was acknowledged that NEET individuals are inherently difficult to engage, requiring innovative outreach strategies – The Handy Trust engages with NEET people in a variety of ways. However, they should be a priority group in the Skills Action Plan, with a strong focus on removing barriers to skills provision and employment pathways.

Employer and Education Linkages

A few consultees highlighted a disconnect between employer needs and local training, with business engagement in education under-resourced. This gap can often result in a lag between industry demands and course development - while this challenge is not unique to the New Forest and is reflected across the UK, it remains a key barrier to ensuring a well-aligned, future-ready workforce in the area.

A key recommendation by stakeholders was establishing a shared forum for employers and educators to identify skills shortages and develop targeted training to fill gaps.

Business Environment

Consultations reported a hesitancy among businesses, particularly micro- and small businesses, to invest in training, driven by several financial and operational pressures. While not exclusive to the New Forest, factors such as rising operational costs due to high inflation, increased wages, additional national insurance contributions, and post-Brexit hiring challenges were frequently cited as key concerns.

Specific to the New Forest, consultees identified hospitality, health and social care, finance, and construction as sectors facing acute skills shortages and recruitment difficulties. While these challenges are also seen nationally, they are particularly pronounced in the New Forest due to the structure of the local economy. In industries such as hospitality and health and social care, low wages and demanding working conditions make recruitment especially difficult. Additionally, Brexit has further restricted access to international labour, exacerbating workforce shortages.

A major barrier to attracting workers is the high cost of living in the New Forest, making it difficult for businesses to recruit for lower-paid roles. As a result, the area struggles to retain and attract talent, particularly in sectors where wages may not be competitive enough to offset the cost of living. Addressing these challenges will require targeted skills development, improved workforce support, and measures to enhance job attractiveness in key sectors.

Skill Gaps and Shortages

Consultations identified several key skills shortages affecting the New Forest workforce. A notable gap in finance professionals was highlighted, alongside a broader need for vocational apprenticeships to support local industry demands.

Stakeholders also expressed concerns about a shortage of soft skills training, particularly in communication and teamwork. The COVID-19 pandemic was seen as a contributing factor, having limited young people's access to social and professional development experiences. Additionally, the rise of remote work has reduced opportunities for workplace social interactions, further impacting the development of these essential skills.

Other identified challenges included a lack of local support for entrepreneurship, a persistent emphasis on university pathways over vocational training, and concerns about the potential defunding of BTEC qualifications. The latter could significantly impact student pathways into key growth sectors such as engineering, exacerbating existing skills shortages. Addressing these gaps through targeted training, enhanced career guidance, and stronger employer-education collaboration will be essential for supporting the local labour market.

Other challenges in the area

Beyond workforce and skills issues, consultees identified several broader challenges affecting the local economy and labour market:

- **Demographic Shifts** – The New Forest has an ageing population and a stagnant working-age population, with projections indicating little to no growth over the next decade. To sustain key services and industries, there is a need for strategies to attract new residents and workers, alongside initiatives that encourage older individuals to remain in the workforce longer.
- **Inequality and Deprivation** – Certain areas, including Totton, Waterside, New Milton, and Fawley, face higher levels of deprivation. A stronger focus on inclusive growth is needed to reduce barriers to employment for individuals from

disadvantaged backgrounds and ensure that economic opportunities are more evenly distributed across the district.

Addressing these challenges will require a combination of targeted workforce strategies, investment in infrastructure, and policies that promote social mobility and economic inclusion

4.3 Skills-related Opportunities

The following section explores stakeholder views on key opportunities for skills development in the New Forest. These have been grouped into four main areas:

- Growth Sectors – Identifying industries with strong potential for job creation and skills demand.
- Employer-Education Collaboration – Strengthening partnerships between businesses and training providers to align skills with industry needs.
- Improving Access – Addressing barriers to education, training, and employment.
- Training and Skills Models – Developing innovative approaches to upskilling and workforce development.

Growth sectors

Stakeholders identified several key growth sectors in the New Forest that will require an expansion of skills provision to meet future workforce demands. These included:

- **Marine Engineering & Offshore Wind –** Engineering, particularly within the marine sector, was highlighted as a priority, given the New Forest's coastal location and the opportunities linked to the Freeport. Consultees pointed to the need for boatbuilding and maintenance skills, particularly in relation to the growing offshore wind industry and the broader push toward decarbonisation. Developing specialised training pathways in these areas could help position the region as a hub for sustainable maritime innovation.
- **Digital & Technology** - The digital sector was frequently mentioned as a fast-growing, high-value industry with significant potential for skills development. Consultees emphasised the importance of expanding training in areas such as artificial intelligence, social media, and emerging technologies, particularly as these align with the Freeport's ambitions to attract digital-focused investment.

Additionally, given the increasing digitalisation of job roles across multiple industries, there is an opportunity to support older workers in reskilling, ensuring they remain competitive in the evolving labour market.

Employer and Education collaboration

Improving collaboration between employers and educational institutions was identified as a key priority for the New Forest. To bridge the gap between industry needs and skills provision, stakeholders proposed several initiatives aimed at fostering stronger connections and ensuring training aligns more closely with employer demands. These included:

- **Establishing a Formal Employer-Education Forum** - A recurring recommendation was the creation of a structured employer-education forum, bringing together local businesses and training providers on a semi-regular basis. This forum would serve as a platform for ongoing dialogue, enabling industry leaders to share insights on evolving skills needs, identify workforce gaps, and help shape education and training strategies. By fostering closer alignment between skills provision and industry demand, the forum would encourage a more proactive approach to workforce development, reducing the current lag between emerging industry needs and course offerings.
- **Employer Involvement in Course Design and Delivery** - Stakeholders also emphasised the importance of greater employer participation in shaping educational content. By directly involving businesses in course design, training providers can ensure that qualifications and curricula reflect real-world industry requirements. This could be further supported by inviting industry professionals to deliver guest lectures, share case studies, and provide hands-on insights into workplace expectations.
- **Promoting Dual Professionalism in Education** - Another key opportunity identified was the concept of "dual professionalism," where industry professionals contribute directly to teaching and training at local colleges and skills centres. This could involve professionals dedicating time—such as one day a month—to mentor students, provide hands-on demonstrations, or offer specialist insights into their field. By integrating industry expertise into education, students would gain practical knowledge and exposure to real-world work environments, enhancing their employability and workforce readiness.

Improving Access to Training/Skills Products

Consultees identified several approaches to enhance access to training and skills development for New Forest residents, focusing on flexible learning models and sector-specific initiatives. These included:

- **Expanding Short, Focused Training Programmes** - There was strong support for increasing the availability of short, targeted training programmes designed to develop specific skills in a condensed timeframe. Example included were 'bootcamp'-style courses, particularly in digital skills, aimed at helping individuals, especially older workers, retrain or upskill in response to the growing digital demands across multiple job roles.
- **Supporting Adult Reskilling and Career Transitions** - With the rapid evolution of the labour market, particularly in response to technological advancements like artificial intelligence, consultees emphasised the need for expanded opportunities in adult reskilling. Providing accessible training pathways for career transitions would help ensure that workers can adapt to industry changes and maintain employability in a shifting economy.
- **Developing Skills Academies** - Stakeholders highlighted the potential for dedicated skills academies to address sector-specific shortages. One key opportunity identified was a Construction Skills Academy, given that many local residents currently travel to Eastleigh for construction training. Establishing a local academy could support a steady pipeline of skilled workers, providing hands-on training, apprenticeships, and industry-led courses to meet local construction needs.
- **A Hospitality School** was also proposed as a means to address skills shortages within the hospitality sector. Similar to the construction academy model, this initiative could provide structured training and practical experience to better prepare individuals for careers in hospitality.
- **Strengthening Careers Advice in Schools** - Several consultees expressed concerns about the limited availability of careers guidance for young people. Some noted that career services had been reduced in recent years, leaving students without sufficient advice on employment and training options. A more comprehensive and accessible careers service could help students make informed decisions about their future, reducing the risk of them becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training). Strengthening career support in schools would ensure

that young people are better prepared to transition into the workforce or further education.

4.4 Skills Infrastructure and Policy Interventions

Consultations also focused on developing and discussing potential infrastructure or policy interventions that could help overcome some of the challenges identified earlier, as well as take advantage of the various opportunities for the New Forest.

New Forest District Council Transformation Strategy

The NFDC Transformation Strategy, Future New Forest: Transforming Tomorrow Together (TTT) 2024-2028, underpins the NFDC Corporate Plan by setting out a plan to address challenges and achieve the plan's objectives.

The TTT acknowledges that the world is rapidly changing, and as such, presenting new challenges and areas of focus for the New Forest and its residents. This includes the rise of digitisation; rising costs and budget constraints; skills demand and gaps; and sustainability.

To ensure the council can deliver on its objectives, the strategy focuses on four key themes:

- Customer and digital services – focusing on a digital-first approach for service delivery.
- People and capabilities – ensuring skills are evolving and provision is available to meet new service designs and needs.
- Assets and accommodation – making a better use of assets and improving sustainability
- Finances and delivery – strengthening the management of finance, strategy and performance.

Within the Transformation Strategy, NFDC acknowledge the importance of ensuring council staff are well-equipped with the skills needed to meet new service needs. In doing so, there is an aim to invest in skills development, training and career progression opportunities, to allow for a resilient workforce.

Notably, the strategy highlights that district councils are facing skills gaps around digitisation, people management, managing change and commerciality. To ensure these skills gaps are addressed, there is a need for enhanced skill provision and training opportunities to be made available to council staff, to ensure future skills needs are met.

Invest 2035: The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy

Invest 2035: The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy is the UK government's 10-year plan designed to drive sustainable and inclusive economic growth by focusing on eight high-potential sectors: advanced manufacturing, clean energy, creative industries, defence, digital technologies, financial services, life sciences, and professional and business services.

The strategy aims to create a pro-business environment, support high-potential clusters across the country, and deliver growth that is supportive of net zero, regional development, and economic resilience. It emphasises the need for long-term investment, innovation, and a stable regulatory framework to unlock the UK's full economic potential.

The Invest 2035 strategy could help shape the New Forest's future through its targeting of key growth sectors such as advanced manufacturing and clean energy.

As the New Forest looks to capitalise on its clean growth and decarbonisation opportunities, this strategy's emphasis on investment in regional development and innovation should ensure that local businesses and individuals are supported to develop the skills needed to thrive in these emerging industries.

Transport and Accessibility

Several consultees suggested initiatives to address transport barriers in the New Forest, particularly for young people and those accessing education and training.

Subsidised or Free Travel for Students and Trainees - A commonly proposed solution was offering subsidised or free bus travel for young people and those attending local education institutions. This could be implemented through:

- Discounted bus or train tickets
- Shuttle services connecting key education and training centres
- Travel vouchers for students enrolled in specific courses or institutions

However, it was noted by many young learners in the workshop sessions that travel bursaries or subsidies do not sufficiently reduce financial barriers to education and employment.

Improving Public Transport Connectivity - There was also strong support for continued efforts to improve the frequency and coverage of public transport routes, particularly in underserved areas such as Calshot. Consultees emphasised the need for key stakeholders to advocate for better transport links, ensuring that education, training, and employment opportunities remain accessible to all residents.

Funding and Policy Support

Expanding on the focus on young people and youth initiatives, consultees highlighted a lack of local funding for youth clubs and related programmes. Organisations like the Scouts were reportedly struggling with funding and volunteer shortages, while other youth services faced potential closure. Many felt that increasing investment in youth clubs, groups, and community initiatives could provide young people with more structured activities and opportunities to develop essential soft skills. These included:

Strengthening Employer - Youth Engagement - There were also suggestions for closer collaboration between youth clubs and local employers. This could involve work placements, skills workshops, or engagement initiatives that help young people develop career aspirations and workplace readiness.

Embedding Skills Development in Public Sector Contracts - Another proposal was introducing stronger skills-related conditionalities in construction contracts, particularly those procured by the council. Suggestions included:

- Requiring a minimum percentage of the workforce to be apprentices or trainees
- Mandating a set number of apprenticeship placements per £X millions of contract value
- Setting workforce upskilling targets, such as requiring employees to complete training or gain qualifications during the project
- Requiring contractors to collaborate with local colleges, participate in careers events, or offer work experience opportunities for students

Expanding Careers Fairs and Events - Finally, consultees emphasised the need for more careers fairs and industry engagement events in the New Forest. These events would help students and job seekers connect with local employers, explore career options, and gain insights into industry skill requirements.

4.5 Stakeholder Workshops

As part of the consultation process, EKOS facilitated two workshops at the New Forest District Council offices in Lyndhurst. These sessions, held in November 2024 and February 2025, focused on:

- Identifying key challenges, opportunities, and potential solutions related to skills in the New Forest (first workshop).
- Developing and refining priorities and objectives for the Skills Action Plan (second workshop).

Workshop participants included members of local education institutions, business groups, the district council and the NFNPA.

Many of the key findings from the workshops aligned with feedback gathered during one-on-one interviews, highlighting the following themes:

Key Findings

1. Transport as a Barrier to Skills Access

Workshop participants echoed concerns raised in the wider consultation that transport in the New Forest is infrequent, expensive, and lacks comprehensive coverage. This was recognised as a significant barrier to skills access, particularly for young people and those without private transport. Potential solutions discussed included:

- Subsidised transport for students and trainees
- Advocacy for expanded public transport routes
- Transport vouchers provided by education institutions

2. Strengthening Employer-Education Collaboration

Feedback from the EKOS employer survey reinforced the need for stronger links between education providers and local businesses. Workshop attendees emphasised that better collaboration is required to shape training programs, ensuring they align with industry needs.

3. Establishing a Local Skills Group

There was broad agreement on the value of creating a dedicated skills group comprising local stakeholders including employers, education institutions, local authorities, and community organisations. This group would provide strategic oversight, drive collaboration, and ensure training provision aligns with workforce demands.

4. Embedding Nature-Positive Solutions in the Transition to Net Zero

The integration of nature-positive solutions in the transition to net zero is essential for ensuring that economic growth aligns with environmental sustainability. Equipping individuals with the knowledge, training, and expertise to work in industries that protect, restore, and enhance natural ecosystems will support the transition to a low-carbon economy while addressing biodiversity loss and climate resilience.

The New Forest's unique natural environment presents significant opportunities for skills development in land management, conservation, and biodiversity restoration, alongside sustainable industries such as renewable energy and eco-tourism.

Key Areas for Skills Growth

1. Education and Training Programs

- Expanding vocational training and apprenticeships in land management, forestry, habitat restoration, and environmental conservation.
- Embedding biodiversity conservation, rewilding, and ecological monitoring into existing environmental science and agriculture courses.
- Developing short courses or bootcamps focused on sustainability in industries such as construction, tourism, and agriculture.

2. Green and Net-Zero Careers

- Training individuals for roles in renewable energy engineering, including offshore wind, solar, and sustainable construction.

- Providing opportunities for workers to transition into nature-based jobs, such as environmental consultancy, sustainable farming, and conservation project management.
- Supporting reskilling initiatives for traditional land-based workers (farmers, foresters, etc.) to adopt regenerative agriculture and agroforestry.

3. Integrating Nature-Positive Practices into Key Sectors

- Encouraging skills development in eco-friendly tourism and sustainable hospitality, particularly in areas like the New Forest where tourism is a significant employer.
- Training professionals in sustainable construction to use nature-based solutions, such as green roofs, sustainable drainage systems, and biodiversity-friendly urban design.
- Promoting circular economy skills, such as waste reduction, ecosystem restoration, and low-carbon material innovation.
- Enhancing skills in biodiversity loss mitigation, including species conservation, rewilding, and environmental monitoring.

4. Industry Collaboration and Workforce Development

- Creating green apprenticeships and work placements in conservation, environmental restoration, and renewable energy sectors.
- Encouraging employers to integrate biodiversity action plans and sustainability criteria into workforce development.
- Establishing partnerships between local businesses, education providers, and industry leaders to align training programs with sustainability goals.

5. Policy and Funding Support

- Advocating for funding incentives for education providers and employers offering training in nature-positive skills.
- Embedding nature-positive solutions in local and regional economic development strategies.
- Strengthening career pathways into green jobs by supporting careers fairs, employer engagement initiatives, and outreach programs.

Impact and Long-Term Benefits

By embedding nature-positive and environmental skills within training and education programs, the New Forest can future-proof its workforce, support net-zero and biodiversity goals, and enhance economic resilience through sustainable growth.

1. Prioritising In-Demand Skills

- The workshops highlighted a need to increase the focus on digital skills and "meta-skills" (e.g., adaptability, problem-solving, communication) as core components of future skills provision. These were identified as key growth sector requirements, where current training availability is limited.

2. Targeting Support for Young People, Particularly NEET Individuals

- It was agreed that young people—particularly those classified as NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training)—should be a key target group for skills interventions, with tailored programs to improve their access to training and employment opportunities.

3. Supporting Older Workers (50+) in Upskilling and Career Transitions

- Recognising the New Forest's ageing population, workshop attendees agreed that workers aged 50 and over should be a priority group for upskilling, retraining, and career transition support.

4. Raising Awareness and Uptake of Apprenticeships

- Both the workshops and one-on-one consultations highlighted low awareness and uptake of apprenticeships in the New Forest. Attendees agreed on the need for a stronger push to promote apprenticeships and make them more visible, ensuring they are seen as a viable pathway for both young people and career changers.
- These key findings will help shape the priorities of the New Forest Skills Action Plan, ensuring a targeted, effective response to the region's workforce challenges.

These key findings will help shape the priorities of the NFSAP, ensuring a targeted, effective response to the region's workforce challenges.

4.6 Learner Sessions

In March 2025, EKOS conducted two workshops with learners at Totton College and Brockenhurst College. In total, there were 20 young people in attendance across two sessions from a range of subject. course types and levels – this included: Law, Government and Politics, History, Biology, Geography, Media, Sport and Exercise Science, English Literature, Spanish, Music, Hairdressing, Marketing, Business, and Media.

Over half of the participants were from the New Forest - the rest were from Poole, Bournemouth or Christchurch. There are a high proportion of students from these areas. Around half of the participants used public transport (mostly for Brockenhurst College), with 26% reliant on private transport and 21% walking to college.

After their studies, most are planning to attend university, and some are interested in degree apprenticeships. To a lesser extent, there was interest in starting their own business and wanting to move abroad.

Desire to Leave the New Forest

The majority of young people expressed a strong inclination to leave the New Forest upon completing their studies. Key reasons included:

- Better job opportunities elsewhere – many felt that high-quality, well-paid jobs with career progression, particularly within their chosen sectors, were more accessible outside the region.
- Cost of living and housing affordability – students highlighted concerns about rising house prices, noting that they would be unable to afford to live in the New Forest at the start of their careers.
- Limited social opportunities – many young people felt that social activities and spaces in the New Forest cater more to older residents. As a result, they frequently travel to Southampton for socialising.

Need for More Apprenticeships, Vocational Training and Work Experience

Learners emphasised the importance of increasing local apprenticeship opportunities, vocational training, and work experience to increase the career pathways available to them and to improve their understanding of local career opportunities. Several students noted that work experience within the New Forest is limited in scope, lacking diversity across sectors and job types.

Stronger Employer Engagement with Schools and Colleges

A key recommendation was to promote greater collaboration between local businesses and educational institutions to better prepare young people for the workforce. Suggestions included:

- Guest lectures and industry talks to showcase career pathways and progression opportunities within local businesses.
- Stronger employer-school partnerships to improve access to work experience and apprenticeships.
- Incentives or support for businesses to engage with schools and colleges, as many may struggle to dedicate time and resources to outreach efforts.

Transport as a Barrier to Employment and Education

Many students raised concerns about public transport accessibility and cost, which could limit their job prospects. Key challenges included:

- Inconvenient routes and connectivity issues – in some cases, young people must travel from the New Forest to Southampton before accessing onward transport to their destination.
- High transport costs – many stated that existing travel bursaries or subsidies do not sufficiently reduce financial barriers to education and employment.

5 Priority Actions – further details

Theme 1: Aligning Skills with Emerging Opportunities

Objective: Ensure the workforce is prepared to capitalise on emerging opportunities, particularly those arising from the transition to a low-carbon economy.

Actions

Solent Freeport Skills Training: T1.1 Develop and promote training programmes that focus on trade, innovation, and job creation within the Solent Freeport.

Green Technologies and Renewable Energy: T1.2(a) Offer specialised courses and certifications in renewable energy (solar, wind, etc.), green technologies, and sustainable practices. T1.2(b) Encourage training pathways in energy efficiency, waste reduction, and low-carbon technologies.

Nature Positive Net Zero Transition: T1.3 Implement training and development programmes focused on carbon reduction strategies, nature-based solutions, and sustainable land management practices.

Theme 2: Supporting Established Sectors

Objective: Strengthen the workforce in key sectors, ensuring they are equipped with the necessary skills to meet current and future demands.

Actions

Hospitality and Tourism: T2.1 Develop and expand training programmes in customer service, hospitality management, and tourism, with a focus on improving visitor experiences and supporting sustainable tourism practices.

Health and Social Care: T2.2 Provide targeted training programmes for healthcare professionals and social care workers, addressing the growing demand for these services.

Construction and Carpentry: T2.3 Expand training opportunities in construction trades such as plumbing, electrics, carpentry, and plastering, as well as other technical skills needed for local infrastructure projects.

Renewable Energy Installation: T2.4 Create courses on renewable energy system installation and maintenance (e.g., solar panels, wind turbines).

Conservation, Land & Forestry Management: T2.5(a) Offer training in Geographic Information Systems (GIS), remote sensing, and emerging technologies to support forest and land management, including peatland restoration. T2.5(b) Encourage further development in wildlife management and sustainable forestry practices.

Manufacturing, Engineering, and Marine: T2.6 Provide training pathways in advanced manufacturing, engineering, and marine industries, focusing on skills in shipbuilding, marine engineering, and production of marine equipment.

Retail: T2.7(a) Develop career progression training and work-based learning opportunities to ensure resilience in the retail sector. T.2.7(b) Create pathways for career advancement in retail management and sales.

Theme 3: Lifelong Learning and Upskilling

Objective: Ensure continuous skill development to help residents adapt to the evolving job market and enhance employability.

Actions

Adult Education Expansion: T3.1 Increase access to adult education programmes, including literacy and numeracy, vocational qualifications, and life skills courses to support career progression and adaptability.

Digital Literacy and Advanced IT Skills: T3.2 Ensure access to courses on digital literacy, programming, and advanced IT skills to prepare the workforce for digital roles in the tech-driven economy. Offer certifications in areas such as cybersecurity, data analysis, and cloud computing.

Theme 4: Collaboration and Community Engagement

Objective: Foster partnerships to create a cohesive, community-driven skills development strategy that avoids duplication and addresses gaps in provision.

Actions

Partnerships & Collaboration: T4.1 Strengthen collaboration and alignment around skills between local employers, schools, colleges, training providers, local authorities, businesses, and community organisations to shape curriculum, offer placements, and influence strategic skills planning.

Community Needs Assessment: T4.2 Engage the community to assess skills gaps and identify training opportunities, ensuring the workforce meets the specific needs of local businesses. Encourage consultation through town halls, surveys, and community meetings.

Theme 5: Inclusive Growth

Objective: Ensure equality of access to skills development opportunities and target support for vulnerable and marginalised priority groups.

Actions

Support Vulnerable Groups: T5.1 Develop targeted initiatives for individuals facing barriers to employment, including NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training), the 50+, people living with disabilities, and ethnic minorities.

Gender Equality: T5.2 Promote gender equality by ensuring women have equal access to training programmes and resources that lead to career and self-employment opportunities. Develop mentorship programmes for women in male-dominated sectors.

Theme 6: Business and Entrepreneurship

Objective: Encourage entrepreneurship and support local businesses with the skills needed for success and growth.

Actions

Self-Employment and Business Startups: 6.1.(a) Promote entrepreneurial activity in the New Forest by providing access to financial support, grants, and resources for starting a business. 6.1. (b) Develop networking opportunities and business incubators, particularly for excluded groups (young people, women, NEETs, and career changers).

Business Management Skills: 6.2. Offer courses in business planning, financial management, and marketing to equip local entrepreneurs with the skills to grow and manage their businesses.

Leadership and Communication Training: 6.3 Create programmes focused on leadership development, team management, and effective communication to build stronger local leaders and improve business management.

Mitigation for Displacement: 6.4 Mitigation and support for businesses who may lose people as part of the upskilling and reskilling.

Theme 7: Monitoring and Evaluation

Objective: To systematically track, assess, and report on the effectiveness of initiatives, ensuring continuous improvement, accountability, and alignment with strategic goals.

Actions

Establish Clear Metrics and Indicators. Define specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) indicators to track progress across all key action areas, such as: number of training programmes delivered in key sectors (e.g., renewable energy, construction, tourism); number of individuals completing skills training and certifications; job placement rates and career progression outcomes (e.g., promotion, entrepreneurship); levels of participation from priority target groups; business growth and startup success rates; and implement regular data collection.

Set up a system for collecting quantitative and qualitative data regularly from skills group partners to monitor programmes performance. This may include surveys and feedback from participants on the relevance, quality and impact of training; employer feedback on effectiveness of skills training and job preparedness of graduates; and data on job placements, retention, and wage growth post-training.

Conduct Periodic Evaluations. Organise evaluations to assess whether activities are meeting the needs of local businesses and individuals. Evaluation methods may include reviewing progress reports and comparing results against baseline data; analysing employment outcomes for individuals who have completed training; tracking the adoption and impact of new skills on business performance and community development; and use evaluation results to identify areas for improvement, adjustments and to inform future strategy.

Engage Stakeholders in the Evaluation Process. Involve key stakeholders, including local authorities, business leaders, educational institutions, and community organisations, in both monitoring and evaluation activities. Actions include regular meetings and feedback sessions to review progress and gather input; advisory groups or steering committees to guide evaluation and ensure alignment with community needs; engaging participants in focus groups to gather qualitative insights on effectiveness of training programmes.

Use Technology for Real-Time Monitoring. Leverage technology, such as a skills development dashboard, to track real-time progress on key indicators. This can include monitoring training completion rates; participant demographics, and skills areas being addressed; and analysing workforce demand data to predict future skills gaps and training needs.

Assess Long-Term Impact. In addition to short-term outputs, conduct long-term assessments to measure the lasting impact of skills training on the New Forest economy.

Continuous Improvement and Adaptation. Use the insights gained from monitoring and evaluation to continuously improve the skills action plan. This may involve adjusting training curriculum to address emerging skills needs or gaps; updating training programmes to keep pace with technological and market changes; strengthening partnerships based on collaborative feedback from stakeholders

Develop an annual report detailing the achievements, challenges, and lessons learned from the monitoring and evaluation process. This report should be shared with stakeholders and the community to maintain transparency and accountability. Use the annual report to refine the skills action plan, ensuring it remains relevant and responsive to local and regional economic developments.

6 Conclusions from research and engagement

Persistent Skills Gaps Across Key Sectors

The visitor economy, construction, health and social care, retail, engineering, and land-based sectors (including forestry and conservation) continue to experience significant skills shortages. These gaps are driven by several factors, including difficulties in attracting and retaining talent due to relatively low wages, a high prevalence of part-time and seasonal roles, and an ageing workforce with limited succession planning. Additionally, the availability of relevant training and apprenticeship opportunities remains a challenge, with some sectors struggling to recruit younger workers or reskill existing employees.

Addressing these persistent shortages requires a coordinated approach, including enhanced career pathways, stronger employer engagement, and targeted skills development initiatives to ensure a sustainable and skilled workforce for the future.

Underutilised Apprenticeships and Alternative Training Pathways

Despite being a valuable workforce development tool, apprenticeships in the New Forest are underutilised due to low awareness and engagement among both young people and employers. Many potential apprentices are unaware of available opportunities, career pathways, and the benefits of earning while learning. At the same time, some employers, particularly smaller businesses, may lack the resources, guidance, or incentives to take on apprentices. Addressing these barriers through targeted promotion, employer engagement, and support for apprenticeship delivery could help increase participation and strengthen the local talent pipeline.

More flexible training models, including short courses and bootcamps, are needed to support career transitions and lifelong learning – these models are in increasing demand and highly valued by employers.

Transport Barriers Limit Access to Skills Development

Limited public transport connectivity and high travel costs present significant barriers to skills development in the New Forest. Young people, those in rural areas, and individuals without access to private transport often struggle to reach colleges, training centres, and workplaces. This lack of affordable and reliable transport reduces participation in apprenticeships, vocational training, and further education, ultimately restricting career progression and economic mobility. Additionally, businesses may find it harder to attract talent from a wider area due to commuting challenges. Addressing these issues requires investment in improved transport links, enhanced subsidy schemes, and local training opportunities that minimise the need for long and costly commutes.

Need for Greater Employer and Education Collaboration

Stronger partnerships between businesses, education providers, and training organisations are crucial to closing skills gaps and ensuring local talent is equipped for current and future workforce demands. Employers can play a key role by shaping curriculum content, offering work placements, and engaging in mentoring programs to give learners real-world insights. Improved collaboration would also help ensure that training provision remains responsive to emerging industry trends, particularly in sectors like tourism, construction, health and social care, and marine, land and nature-based industries. Additionally, better engagement between schools and businesses could increase awareness of career pathways, apprenticeships, and local job opportunities, helping to retain young talent in the New Forest.

Growing Demand for Green and Nature-Positive Skills

The transition to a net-zero economy, alongside increasing focus on biodiversity conservation and climate resilience, is driving demand for specialist skills across multiple sectors. Opportunities are emerging in land management, rewilding, sustainable tourism, and ecological restoration, requiring expertise in conservation practices, habitat restoration, and environmental monitoring. Additionally, the shift towards green construction and renewable energy, such as offshore wind, solar, and sustainable building materials, creates a need for skilled workers in eco-friendly design, energy efficiency, and low-carbon infrastructure. To meet this growing demand, investment in training, upskilling, and employer engagement will be essential, ensuring that the local workforce is equipped with the skills needed to support the region’s sustainability ambitions.

Limited Support for Adult Reskilling and Upskilling

As the workforce ages and industries evolve, many adults face challenges in adapting to shifting job market demands. There is a growing need for accessible, flexible, and industry-relevant reskilling and upskilling opportunities, particularly in key sectors such as health and social care, retail, digital skills, forestry, land and nature-based jobs, and emerging renewable technologies. However, barriers such as cost, time constraints, and limited awareness of available training programmes prevent many workers from accessing these opportunities. Strengthening support for lifelong learning through employer-led training, micro credential courses, and targeted funding could help ensure that the local workforce remains adaptable, competitive, and equipped with the skills needed for the future economy.

Need for More Targeted Support for Young People and Retention in the New Forest

Many young people in the New Forest, particularly those at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training), lack clear career pathways and access to high-quality careers advice. This has contributed to outmigration, with many young people leaving the area in search of better education, training, and employment opportunities elsewhere. To address this, more targeted support is needed to both engage young people in skills development and encourage their retention in the local workforce. There is a need to increase local apprenticeships and training opportunities and to promote the New Forest as an attractive place to live and work.

- Work with local businesses and the NFDC to increase awareness of career opportunities available in the area.
- Develop marketing campaigns showcasing career progression opportunities, quality of life, and affordability of living in the New Forest compared to nearby cities.
- Encourage businesses to offer graduate retention schemes and incentives for young professionals to stay in the region.

Self-Employment is high in the New Forest Creating Vital Job Opportunities

Self-employment in the New Forest is relatively high. As of 2024, 11.5% of the employed population in the New Forest were self-employed, compared to the Hampshire average of 10.6%. Up until 2022 the New Forest was significantly higher than the England average. This higher-than-average rate of self-employment reflects its diverse and entrepreneurial economy. The New Forest has fewer large employers, meaning self-employment and small businesses are creating vital job opportunities and providing services and products that sustain the New Forest such as, agriculture and forestry, tourism and retail.

By investing in targeted support for young people and creating clear career pathways, the New Forest can retain more of its younger workforce, ensuring a skilled and sustainable future talent pipeline.