

## **Skills Priority Statement | Executive Summary**

What does the future hold for  
business in Berkshire?

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# Helping Berkshire to thrive

This Skills Priority Statement Executive Summary encapsulates our priorities for investment in employment and skills initiatives that will maintain the competitiveness of Berkshire's economy, raise productivity and improve the wellbeing of the local population.



# Next steps for...

## Careers leads

- Increase collaboration with local businesses of all sizes to promote the benefits to business of work experience schemes
- Promote opportunities in the priority job families we have identified (see page 20)
- Promote the range of Apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities available
- Use the Skills Priority Statement 2020 to understand local skills shortages

## Business organisations and employers

- Do not underestimate the potential for older workers to fill job vacancies
- Consider work experience placements and internships as a way of attracting future employees and supporting young people whose employment opportunities have been impacted by Covid-19
- Seize opportunities to collaborate with local education and training providers to help improve the talent pipeline
- Use the Apprenticeship scheme to help overcome recruitment challenges

## Further and Higher Education

- Be aware of the continued need to meet the supply of STEAM skills into the local economy
- Provide pathways for older learners and those returning to work to develop skills for employability
- Engage with local employers to inspire students about future opportunities and increase the talent pipeline
- Consider the role of T levels in the future success of the local economy
- Position skills for employability at the heart of educational provision

## Thames Valley Berkshire LEP and local authorities

- Continue to use the STEAM strategy to promote essential skills and fill job roles in the future
- See the provision of affordable housing as central to overcoming the challenges of skills shortages and hard-to-fill jobs
- Scope what is required locally from the National Retraining Scheme
- Explore the potential benefits of devolving the Apprenticeship Levy to local areas
- Monitor progress towards improving the availability and accessibility of learning provision for high-needs learners



# Responding to Covid-19

// The Covid-19 pandemic has become the greatest challenge of our time and as we try to recover from this, we understand businesses, educators and communities are understandably anxious. We want you to know that we are taking actions and decisions to get Berkshire back on track and that the LEP, and its partners, are determined to continue working together to overcome the challenges we face and provide the right support for businesses, residents and our communities. We are collaborating now on leading economic recovery in Berkshire and will play our part in securing a national recovery. //



# A resilient response to Covid-19

The impacts of Covid-19 are bringing unprecedented challenges to Thames Valley Berkshire. We do not yet know how labour demand and supply will be impacted by the crisis. And while we have enjoyed a strong economy, our ability to contain the economic fallout of Covid-19 is not yet clear.

As a LEP area we have strengths that make us resilient and should allow us to adapt to the post-Covid-19 landscape. We must also be mindful, however, that there are many challenges ahead.

We remain committed to supporting our local economy. We are building resilience in Thames Valley Berkshire by offering support, advice and awareness, and responding with the tools required to create a more certain future for everyone.

Our information and resource portals provide up-to-date information on the latest local and national support available.

This includes details of the latest financial support (e.g. small business grants, business rates relief, Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme, Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme), government guidance, sources of support, online events and sector-specific advice.

15.5% of all employees (80,300 people) work in the sectors most affected by the shutdown; this is lower than the UK average of 16.9%.

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## A helping hand

The Coronavirus (Covid-19) is presenting businesses of all sizes with unprecedented challenges, but the Berkshire Growth Hub team is helping businesses through this challenging time.



You can find out more information on our  
Resources Portal: [berkshirebusinesshub.co.uk/  
coronavirus-advice-for-businesses](https://berkshirebusinesshub.co.uk/coronavirus-advice-for-businesses)

# What we know <sup>1/2</sup>

Thames Valley Berkshire is slightly less impacted by the Covid-19 shutdown than the national average

15.5% of all employees (80,300 people) work in the sectors most affected by the shutdown; this is lower than the UK average of 16.9%.



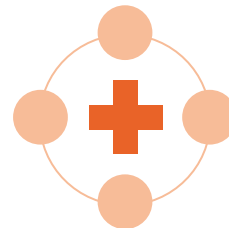
Our cohort of young workers is vulnerable

The employment impacts of Covid-19 have been higher for younger adults. Future recruitment freezes could also significantly affect job entry for young people. In the next five years, 7.5% of the local population will enter the labour market, higher than the UK average.



Recovery will be partly dictated by our neighbours

Thames Valley Berkshire is part of a wider functional economy; many residents commute into London and the South East. Recovery in these areas will have an effect on our ability to bounce back. Our proximity to Heathrow Airport is another important factor. Aviation and related activity at Heathrow support around 120,000 jobs and contributes £6.2 billion to the economy.



We are already feeling the impact of a decrease in demand

Some sectors important to the local economy have been significantly affected by falling demand; these include retail; aviation; hospitality and tourism; admin and support services; and art, entertainment and recreation. Some parts of Berkshire have particularly high levels of employment in these sectors, e.g. Slough and Royal Borough of Maidenhead & Windsor.





# What we know <sup>2/2</sup>

## The short term will have an impact on the future

The shape of recovery, and the extent of closures and job loss over the next six months, need to be carefully monitored. There will be longer-term implications for our town centres and the availability of lower-skill, entry-level jobs.



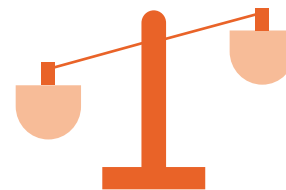
## Our international outlook is both a risk and a strength

Our local economy is highly dependent on international markets, supply chains, and multinational firms. While this makes us vulnerable to multinational restructuring, it should give us the capability to adapt to changing international markets and supply chains.



## Some of us will be worse off than others

The economic fallout from Covid-19 will disproportionately affect young people, women, and lower skilled workers. This will need to be closely monitored, and responses should be considered if there is significant risk of long-term marginalisation.



## We are well placed for recovery

The LEP area has a good record of employment in knowledge and science-based industries and business and professional services. This resilient mix of skills and industries, many of which span international borders, should allow us to adapt to the post-Covid landscape.



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# Introducing the skills portal

Our new skills and employment portal, Berkshire Opportunities, is designed to combat the employment and skills challenges brought about by Covid-19. It enables businesses to tap into local skills and talent while residents are able to search local vacancies in real time.

The portal has been created to meet current challenges. In the longer term, it will help to narrow the gap between job opportunities and the talent pipeline. By enabling Thames Valley Berkshire to draw attention to the most relevant sectors, employers and opportunities, Berkshire Opportunities will help to boost awareness of opportunities in the area.



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# How Berkshire Opportunities works

Real-time opportunities

Locations search

Sectors in the spotlight

Career inspiration

Wider resources

## Real-time opportunities

Search for local jobs, apprenticeships and courses easily and quickly. Users can create alerts to receive tailored updates every 24 hours.

Find out more about how we're supporting business at [berkshireopportunities.co.uk](https://berkshireopportunities.co.uk)

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# How Berkshire Opportunities works

Real-time opportunities

Locations search

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## Locations search

Users can search opportunities using the map view to identify opportunities based on preferred locations and transport options.

Find out more about how we're supporting business at [berkshireopportunities.co.uk](https://berkshireopportunities.co.uk)

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# How Berkshire Opportunities works

Real-time opportunities

Locations search

Sectors in the spotlight

Career inspiration

Wider resources

## Sectors in the spotlight

Sectors that are urgently recruiting are highlighted. Post-crisis, this section will be used to highlight growth areas.

Find out more about how we're supporting business at [berkshireopportunities.co.uk](https://berkshireopportunities.co.uk)



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# How Berkshire Opportunities works

Real-time opportunities

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## Career inspiration

A comprehensive database of job roles that can be searched by skill or job type to access current vacancies, apprenticeships and course opportunities.

Find out more about how we're supporting business at [berkshireopportunities.co.uk](https://berkshireopportunities.co.uk)

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# How Berkshire Opportunities works

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## Wider resources

Access a database of useful links to the Berkshire Business Growth Hub and key stakeholder websites.

Find out more about how we're supporting business at [berkshireopportunities.co.uk](https://berkshireopportunities.co.uk)

# The Berkshire economy

Thames Valley Berkshire is a story of successes, challenges and opportunities. The area has one of the most buoyant labour markets in the UK thanks to high levels of productivity, high employment and the wide range of opportunities our knowledge-intensive economy offers.

Despite this, the changing economic landscape presents challenges. Berkshire is, of course, not immune to UK-wide trends, in the post Covid-19 landscape. These include the impact of an ageing population, the continuing polarisation of the labour market, the slowing of recruitment activity and job losses within the high-street retail sector.

Retaining the area's enviable position will rely on us acting on the intelligence provided by our 2020 Skills Priority Statement. It will help us to ensure continued innovation and collaboration across the region. This activity can create a pathway towards a secure future which benefits everyone in Berkshire.

## Experience is a valuable resource

Giving Berkshire's older workers the opportunity to gain the skills and knowledge to thrive in the future economy could be a powerful strategy for tackling skills shortages.

## Full STEAM ahead

Almost one in nine Berkshire job roles is in digital tech, 2.5 times the national average. Around the county, more than 118,800 people work in STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art and maths) roles - nearly twice the national average.

## We are...

### ...Future focused

The digital tech sector dominates our economy and is responsible for nearly a quarter of Berkshire's economic output, compared to only 7% nationally. It is predicted this sector will continue to grow, putting us in an excellent position.



### ...Growing older

Our population is ageing more quickly than the national average – with the proportion aged over 65 increasing by 75% over the two decades. While a sizable number of young people will enter the labour market in the next five years, our population aged 0-15 is projected to decline by 7% by 2028.



### ...An economy of diverse businesses

A significant proportion of workers in Berkshire are employed by large employers (those employing more than 250 people). Even so, large firms make up just 0.6% of the number of organisations in the LEP area.



### ...Well qualified

Berkshire residents are much more likely to possess a degree than the national average (49% of the working population versus 39% nationally). This is the third highest area in the country, after London and Oxfordshire.



### ...Preparing to grow

Our data indicates that Berkshire's economy will grow in key sectors such as technology; engineering and science; business and finance; healthcare and sales.



### ...Highly professional

55% of the local workforce operate in managerial, professional or associate professional occupations compared with 47% of the national workforce.



### ...Not thriving in equal measures

Wages are becoming increasingly polarised and the gender pay gap is significant. The latest data highlights how the five most deprived areas in Berkshire – all in Reading – fall within the 10% most deprived areas of the country. This has worsened since 2015, when Reading had two areas within the 10% most deprived areas of the country.



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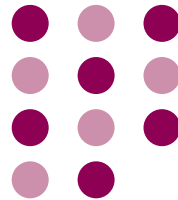
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# Berkshire in numbers



**3rd highest**  
local growth rate in number  
of scale-ups



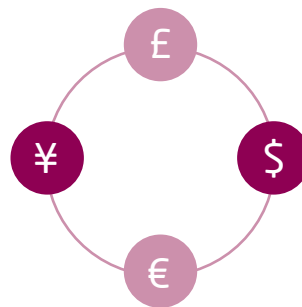
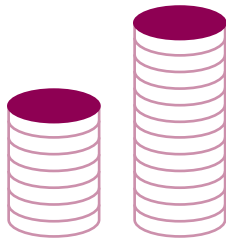
Berkshire hosts  
**11 FTSE 100  
Companies**

**£91M**

Innovate UK funding

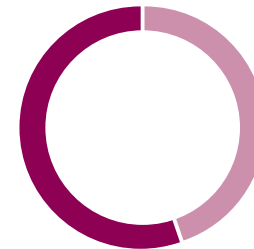


Productivity: GVA per hour worked  
in Berkshire = **£41.3 vs**  
**UK average of £33.6**



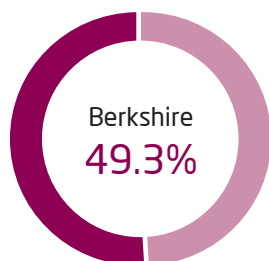
**Highest** concentration  
of foreign-owned companies

Professional, associate prof and tech  
occupations make up **43% of all**  
**Berkshire employment**



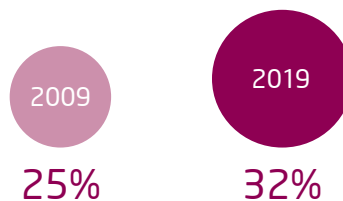


# Berkshire in numbers



The number of employees qualified to degree level or higher

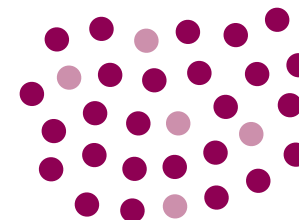
**7% increase** in proportion of workers aged 50+ engaged by enterprises in Berkshire between 2009 and 2019



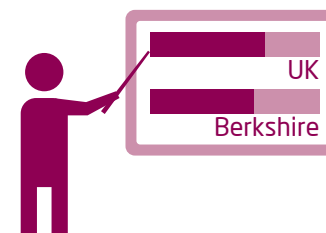
**5,600 hard to fill job vacancies**  
(UK Employers Skills Survey 2017)



The proportion of workers who are non-UK nationals averaged 16% across 2019



58% of Berkshire employees receive training - lower than UK average of 62%



# Our strengths and challenges

Impacts caused by an ageing population, climate change, technological change, the post-Covid-19 landscape and the UK's exit from the European Union are among the challenges we face.

We are in a good position to mitigate these future risks by recognising where we are strong and where the opportunities lie.

See [tvbintelligence.co.uk](https://tvbintelligence.co.uk)  
for more key facts and figures

We have many strengths that will enable us to thrive in the coming years

- We have a strong, knowledge-intensive economy
- Our pipeline of future talent is abundant and high performing in exams
- The high concentration of digital tech puts us in an enviable position
- Around Berkshire, there is a good track record of employer-led training
- Our excellent educational resources include a high proportion of schools rated 'good' and 'outstanding' and the internationally renowned University of Reading
- There is an appetite among organisations to continue collaborative working

However, we also have challenges

- Skills shortages; especially in 'associate professional' and 'professional' roles, particularly in STEM-related roles
- A potential mismatch between the skill supply of and demand in engineering, construction and digital technologies
- A gap between the worlds of education and employment
- The potential for increased recruitment difficulties in sectors such as health and social care, construction, hospitality, and transport and distribution caused by Brexit
- Low proportion of women taking up STEM (particularly digital tech and engineering) degrees and apprenticeships

# Meeting the need for skills

We must retain our focus on meeting the need for skills and labour. There are significant skills shortages in the region, particularly in STEM roles. Employers also struggle to recruit and retain skilled people in areas such as health and social care and transport & distribution – two sectors that are predicted to grow.

The impact of Covid-19 alongside the UK's exit from the EU could further weaken our talent pipeline. With a higher-than-average number of overseas workers in Berkshire, sectors such as health, social care, transport and distribution and hospitality may be particularly vulnerable. Recent research has suggested that two of Berkshire's hubs – Slough and Reading – are amongst the five UK cities at greatest risk in the post-Brexit landscape.

**In 2017, 11% of Berkshire employers reported skills gaps within their current workforce, compared to 17% in 2015.**

## Don't forget the soft skills

While qualifications are key, we must not overlook the role of so-called 'human' skills in a proficient workforce. According to local employers, the 10 most demanded soft skills are:

Communication	English
Organisation	Creativity
Planning	Problem solving
Microsoft Excel	Building effective relationships
Detail orientated	Writing

# Prioritising skills supply

## Keeping up with demand

Our research has identified 10 priority 'job families' in which efforts should be concentrated locally to ensure a sufficient supply of skills that are key to Berkshire's future prosperity. They have been split into three tiers in order of priority.

**We're relying more and more on European and overseas skills for the STEM subjects than growing our own at home. 60-70% of our applicants are from overseas, some of whom have studied in the UK. However, recruiting from overseas is more costly and takes a lot longer.**

TIER

1

Digital Tech

Engineering  
& Science

TIER

2

Construction

Health, Care  
& Welfare

Education

TIER

3

Transport  
& Distribution

Hospitality

Business (inc HR)  
& FinanceSales &  
Customer Service

Creative

# Job families in focus

We've focused in on a specific skillset within each priority tier, and highlighted the key reasons why this particular skillset is being prioritised.

**The number of programmers and software development professionals in Berkshire grew at the greatest rate and in the greatest volume between 2012 and 2017.**

## TIER

# 1

Why are we prioritising Digital Tech?

High number of jobs

Job growth predicted

Employers find it hard to fill vacancies

High value to the Berkshire economy

## TIER

# 2

Why are we prioritising Health, Care & Welfare?

Job growth predicted

Valuable to the wellbeing of Berkshire

High number of jobs

Employers find it hard to fill vacancies

## TIER

# 3

Why are we prioritising Sales & Customer Service?

Job growth predicted

High number of jobs

Valuable to the wellbeing of Berkshire



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# Skills shortages and gaps

Thames Valley Berkshire LEP asked local employers to identify those skills they found 'particularly difficult to find in the local labour market'.

The most commonly mentioned specialist skills were:

Digital Tech  
Engineering  
Customer Service  
Analytics

And the top generic skills mentioned were:

Communication  
Leadership  
Work Ethic

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# Looking ahead

Future growth

Training

Education

## Future growth

When it comes to future growth, high-skill jobs, (managerial, professional and associate professional occupations) will continue to grow in the future. Slower short-term growth is predicted for middle-skill (skilled trade and administrative occupations), service-intensive (care, sales and customer service occupations) and labour-intensive (manual and service occupations) jobs. Five of the top 10 growth occupations, in terms of volume, were in the IT sector.

These predictions were made before the advent of Covid-19. We will continue to monitor the consequences of the pandemic and report their impact on our views.

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# Looking ahead

Accessing future growth

Training

Education

## Training

In terms of skills gaps (i.e. where employees lack the necessary skills), Berkshire employers are more likely to report that skills gaps are having an impact on their ability to perform than nationally. They are, however, less likely to describe this impact on their operation as 'major'.

Almost all (95%) of Berkshire employers who report skills gaps have taken action to help overcome them.

Despite this, when the number of staff receiving training is considered, Berkshire employers are training fewer staff than the national average. Employers cite time restraints, lack of funding and/or internal budgets and a lack of good local training provision as barriers to upskilling their employees.

Since the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy, large employers are increasingly looking to use apprenticeships as a means to upskill existing employees. Reasons for not using the levy include scepticism about government training schemes, contentment with existing training strategies and inability to accommodate the mandatory 20% off-the-job training.

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# Looking ahead

Accessing future growth

Training

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## Education

Academic achievement in Berkshire schools is generally very high however we must ensure that disadvantaged young people have the opportunities to achieve their potential. In this tech-focused area, 34.1% of A-levels entered by young people in Berkshire are in STEM subjects compared to 30.9% nationally. Despite this, only 39.4% of STEM A-levels were taken by females, compared to the national average of 42.5%.

# Creating tomorrow's key workers

Activate Learning's £500,000 immersive Care Skills Suite at Reading College is an example of one of the steps we've taken to future-proof Berkshire's workforce.

The innovative teaching space, which received £430,000 in funding from our Local Growth Fund, was designed in partnership with Royal Berkshire Foundation Trust. The facility gives learners – our future health and care workers – a unique chance to practice and refine key skills so they can hit the ground running when they enter the world of work.

The state-of-the art facilities include a simulated care ward, IT facilities to build research and self-study skills, and an immersive classroom in which tutors and learners collaborate on complex challenges. The Care Skills Suite builds confidence and competence in the students, allowing them to gain a head start in one of our economy's growing sectors.

Find out more at  
[activatelearning.ac.uk](https://activatelearning.ac.uk)



# Skills priorities

Within firms of all sizes, from large knowledge-intensive companies and mid-market firms to scale-ups, start-ups and public service, there is a need for people with higher-level skills. Promoting the value of these skills will also help mitigate any negative impact that the UK's exit from the EU may have on the flow of skilled labour into the region.

To keep our economy strong, we must attract, train and retain the brightest and best talent however we must not solely focus on rising talent. It's important that we also view older workers as playing a key role in our future success, especially as working lives are being extended.

A diverse workforce equipped with higher-level skills will be critical for delivering Berkshire's Local Industrial Recovery and Renewal Strategy. It will also help address the four Grand Challenges identified by the UK government; these are: an ageing society; the future of mobility; Artificial Intelligence (AI); and data and clean growth.

**Our skills strategy must not solely focus on rising talent - older workers will also play a key role in our future success.**



## Focusing efforts where they are most needed

Our 10 priority job families (see page 6) highlight our priority occupational areas for investment. Each sector has been selected due to a number of factors, including rising job demand, high value to the local economy or significant contribution to the wellbeing of Thames Valley Berkshire.

## Effective collaboration between stakeholders

By working together, the worlds of education and commerce can help to promote future careers and ensure a talent pipeline. By facilitating work placements and actively engaging with careers leads, teachers, lecturers and students, those in the workplace can inspire and secure skilled local talent. Furthermore, by understanding the needs of business, now and in the future, those in the education and careers sectors will contribute more effectively to our economic success.

## Seeing the workforce through new eyes

One of Berkshire's biggest assets is its people. In order to capitalise on the potential talent in our region, we must view the workforce of the future through a wider lens. With an ageing population and increasingly marginalised demographics within the region, it's clear we are not tapping into the full potential of our population.

### At a glance: our skills and employment priorities

- Grow and evolve the supply of people with higher-level skills
- Better align learning supply with Berkshire's current and future skill needs
- Raise the demand for skills (among employers and individuals)
- Increase the number of people in 'good work'
- Support those furthest from the labour market into work

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# Moving into the future together

We will continue to actively engage with a wide range of organisations in different sectors across the region to ensure everyone in Berkshire can thrive as the world changes.

Our action plan aims to prepare the workforce of tomorrow, both new entrants and those already in the labour market. The ageing population and extended working lives are also likely to impact on how people work, how skills are kept up to date and how skills are most effectively utilised.

By working together, we can ensure that Berkshire remains resilient in the face of current and forthcoming challenges and is well positioned to capitalise on future opportunities.



### Action: Grow and evolve the supply of people with higher-level skills

#### Why? To meet skills demand, drive productivity and deliver our Industrial Strategy

- Encourage greater collaboration between local businesses and between businesses and HEIs (including the University of Reading and the Henley Business School), to strengthen the supply of people with higher-level technical, managerial and entrepreneurial skills
- Promote local and national initiatives designed to improve the supply of people with higher level digital tech, engineering and scientific skills
- Promote the wealth of higher-level job opportunities available in the Berkshire economy to young people within schools, colleges and higher education institutions
- Support and promote projects and schemes that develop entrepreneurial skills

### Action: Better align learning supply with Berkshire's current and future skill needs

#### Why? To meet skills shortages and recruitment difficulties

- Map current and planned further education provision against the needs of the local economy
- Prioritise discretionary funding for projects that address local skills challenges
- Work with education and training providers to reduce vocational provision in areas in which few people enter related jobs
- Help young people make informed career decisions

### Action: Raise the demand for skills

**Why? To ensure that businesses maximise their potential and employees don't get left behind**

- Promote the value of training and development to employers
- Promote and support joint employer training initiatives
- Advocate for adult learning and development, particularly in relation to in-work progression and improving digital and basic skills
- Promote management and leadership training and development

### Action: Increase the number of people in 'good work'

**Why? To ensure that everyone benefits from a thriving Berkshire economy**

- Advocate for 'good jobs' and highlight best-practice employers
- Support projects that aim to reduce gender gaps within the labour market
- Explore the potential benefit of a living wage or extension of London wage weightings for skills shortage occupations
- Work with key employers to ensure local residents take advantage of 'good jobs' and apprenticeships in sectors experiencing recruitment difficulties

## Action: Support those furthest from the labour market into work

**Why? To increase inclusion, enhance wellbeing of the population and reduce pressure on the public purse**

- Ensure local employment initiatives align and that delivery partners can work collaboratively and sustainably for the benefit of individuals
- Ensure local employment initiatives are of high quality
- Support projects that help young people and adults furthest from the labour market take their first step into/back into employment
- Support local authorities in their work to help schools reduce the attainment gap between disadvantaged young people and their contemporaries
- Support local authorities in their work to monitor progress towards improving the availability and accessibility of learning provision for high needs learners
- Where appropriate, target interventions in areas of Berkshire with the highest levels of deprivation

## Responding to the demand for STEM skills

Activate Learning at Reading College will be a delivery partner for a forthcoming Institute of Technology based at Bletchley Park with a local hub in Reading. IoTs are collaborations between further education (FE) providers, universities and employers. They specialise in delivering higher technical education in key areas such as digital tech, engineering, science and maths.





## Contact

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