

Natural Infrastructure and Growth Scrutiny Panel



Date of meeting:	12 February 2025
Title of Report:	Refresh of Skills4Plymouth Plan
Lead Member:	Councillor Sally Cresswell (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Apprenticeships)
Lead Strategic Director:	David Haley (Director for Childrens Services)
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Your Reference:	
Key Decision:	No
Confidentiality:	Part I - Official

Purpose of Report

To provide an update on progress since the development of the last Skills4Plymouth Plan 2021-2026 and to establish the need for a refresh of this plan, aligning with wider strategic documents. To provide the next steps we will take for this refresh.

Recommendations and Reasons

- To note the report.
The report provides an update on skills and the anticipated future skills need in Plymouth.

Alternative options considered and rejected

- Report is to note and for information, no alternative options relevant.

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan

The report notes the Skills4Plymouth Plan 2021-2026 and the intention to refresh this plan in the near future. The Skills4Plymouth Plan sits below the Plymouth Economic Strategy which informs and comes under the Plymouth Plan.

Implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

NA

Financial Risks

NA

Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

NA

Other Implications: e.g. Health and Safety, Risk Management, Child Poverty:

** When considering these proposals members have a responsibility to ensure they give due regard to the Council's duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote good relations between people who share protected characteristics under the Equalities Act and those who do not.*

NA

Appendices

*Add rows as required to box below

Ref.	Title of Appendix	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A	Briefing report title							

Background papers:

*Add rows as required to box below

Please list all unpublished, background papers relevant to the decision in the table below. Background papers are unpublished works, relied on to a material extent in preparing the report, which disclose facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the work is based.

Title of any background paper(s)	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Sign off:

Fin	DJN. 24.25. 159	Leg	LS/00 0107 5/1/A C/31/ 01/25	Mon Off	N/A	HR	N/A	Asset s	N/A	Strat Proc	N/A
Originating Senior Leadership Team member: David Haley											
Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes Date agreed: 31/01/2025											
Cabinet Member approval: Cllr. Sally Cresswell – approved by email Date approved: 30/01/2025											

1. The current Skills4Plymouth Plan

Plymouth City Council has previously developed the Skills4Plymouth Plan 2021-2026. This sets out an ambitious programme with three key objectives:

- To ensure people have the right skills they need now and, in the future, to access employment and progress in their careers.
- To ensure employers and individuals invest in skills and lifelong learning.
- Employers have people with the right skills they need to grow and scale-up their businesses.

This plan has already delivered significant progress in terms of responding to economic inactivity and reducing the numbers of young people that are Not in Education, Employment and Training (NEET) in our city.

1. Refresh of Skills4Plymouth Plan

We are now looking to refresh the Skills4Plymouth plan.

It is a timely moment to refresh this plan as we need to ensure it aligns with the updated Plymouth Economic Strategy 2024-2034, as well as reflect the latest opportunities and challenges for the City. These include the major Ministry of Defence (MoD) investment into His Majesty's Naval Base (HMNB) Devonport and the work of Growth Alliance Plymouth.

We will work closely with the existing governance and partnership structures, ensuring they are consulted. The Plymouth Employment and Skills Board (ESB) will be engaged to identify current and future skills priorities. The ESB will then report into the Plymouth Growth Board to engage the wider business community.

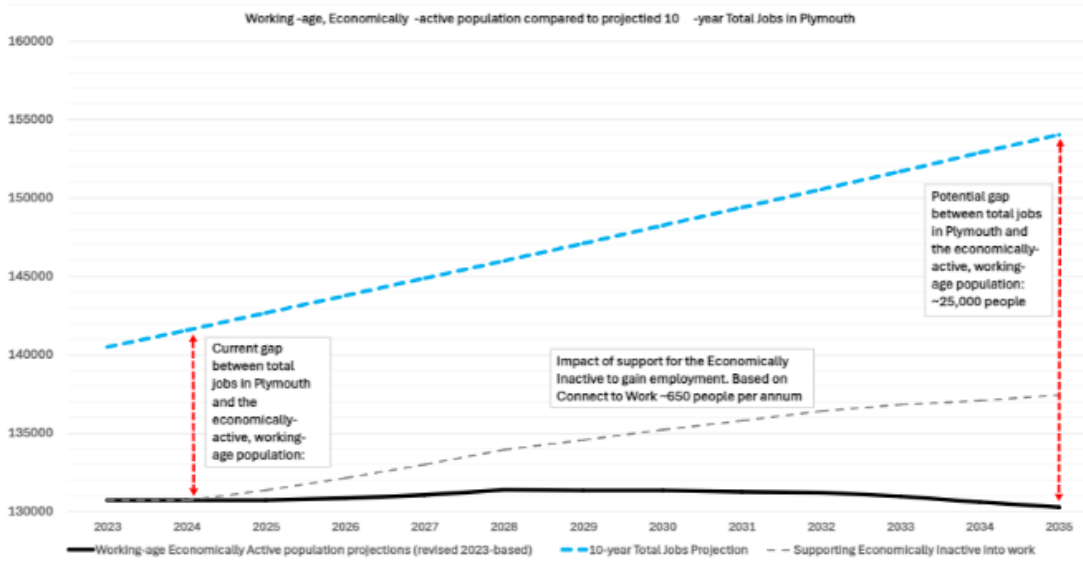
2. Anticipated Future Skills and Challenges

There are a number of major anticipated investments happening in Plymouth that reflect a new demand for skilled workers. We need to ensure that Plymouth is positioned to capitalise on these investments and that the City's residents have the skills to secure these new and different employment opportunities. It is a key aim of the Skills4Plymouth Plan 2021-2026, to close the skills gap between the current workforce and the current and future demand for skilled labour. The plan also identifies particular areas of challenge for skills, engineers, technicians, construction workers and health care professionals. Many of these roles are in Plymouth's key sectors and the excess demand will only grow with future investment.

A key element of the future skills demand is the MoD commitment to investing an additional £4.4bn into HMNB Devonport. This is to ensure that it can continue to play its fundamental role in our Country's defence and crucially, act as a support base for both surface ships and submarines as part of the Continuous at Sea Deterrent (CASD). At present, the City does not have sufficient skilled labour to meet the demands of this investment, due to legacy challenges of educational outcomes, poor health outcomes and skilled labour retention, as well as a lack of high-quality housing. Plymouth City Council (PCC), the Royal Navy and Babcock therefore established Growth Alliance Plymouth (GAP) as a partnership to ensure the vital defence outputs are delivered into the future, whilst supporting the region's growth, understanding the risks and opportunities and scoping potential solutions.

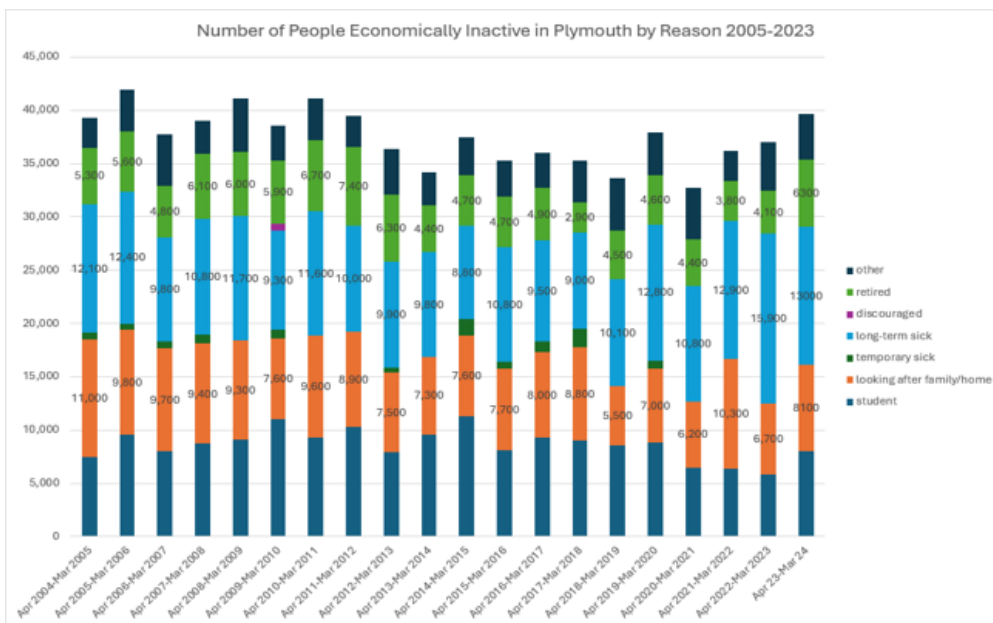
3. Gap between local labour supply and demand

Our research shows Plymouth has a growing gap between local jobs and the local workforce. This indicates that over the next 10 years, an extra 15,000 workers will be needed in the City to meet the growing number of jobs and subsequent labour demand.



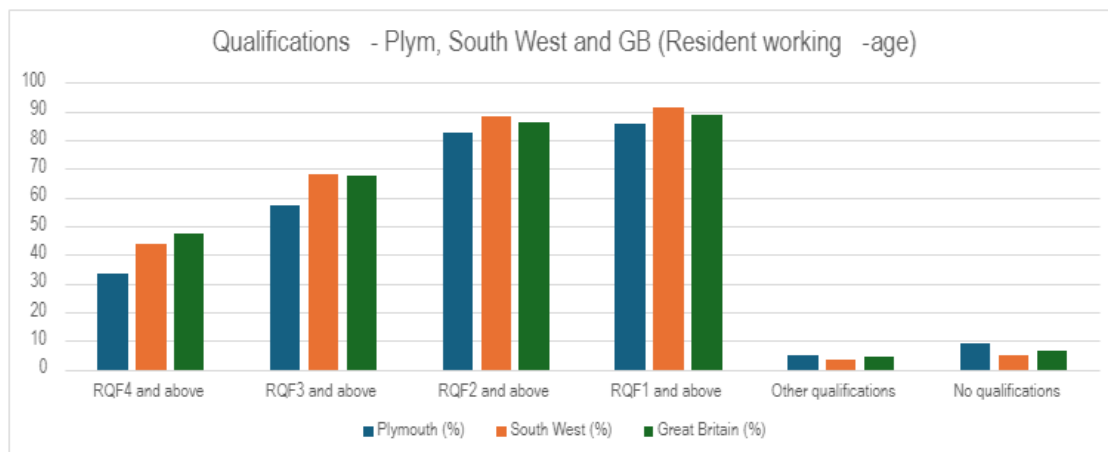
Plymouth takes a strategic approach to skills, it is demand-led, and demand informed. We know we have current demand across many different sectors and industries including healthcare, construction, manufacturing and engineering, education, administration and defence. Incorporating the upcoming investments into our City, we can foresee specific skills challenges for many industries. Construction is one of these areas, with the latest Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) South West report highlighting the need for an additional 42,000 construction workers across the region in the next 4 years ([ctb1003_csn-rep_regional_south-west_aw2.pdf](#)). We know the City has a significant un-met skills requirement that will only grow over the next decade.

Plymouth has approximately 40,000+ people economically inactive, a rate of between 24% and 25%. Higher than 21% in Great Britain and 19% in the South West. A significant proportion of these economically inactive people is due to long-term sickness, a specific issue in Plymouth (8.3% of working-age population compared to 5.3% for England). Economic inactivity is also a specific issue for the over 50s. Part of this solution is to support these individuals back into work.



Overall skills levels, measured through qualification rates, are also low in Plymouth when compared to national and regional averages. The greatest gap between Plymouth and National is in the higher-level

qualifications (RQF4+). Thirty-three percent of Plymouth residents have a qualification at this level compared to 47% nationally. More people in Plymouth have no qualifications (9.4% compared to 6.5% nationally).



These are alongside the national challenges of youth unemployment, an aging workforce and relatively stagnant growth in the working age population.

We must tackle this head on by targeted action to improve the skills base of our residents to help people transition into employment or into higher skilled, higher paid employment, creating a skills escalator. Supporting and investing in training and further education with our anchor Further Education and Higher Education Institutions alongside our Independent Training Providers will be critical to accelerate skilled workers into shortage employment areas.

4. Progress to Date

In the time since the development of the Skills4Plymouth Plan 2021-2026, significant progress has been made in addressing a number of the skills challenges. We have also seen city-wide improvements in some skills measures as a result of greater alignment.

- A vital part of this has been the continued growth of Skills Launchpad Plymouth (SLP), with over 60,000 unique visitors to the online website (since it was developed in 2022). Since its creation in 2020, SLP have supported 989 young people and 911 adults furthest from the labour market, of which 484 have entered employment and 351 into training (This rate is above the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) target of 30% into Education, Employment or Training). This has made a direct impact to the residents of Plymouth and worked to grow the supply of skilled labour to support economic growth. As well as the development of numerous sector skills partnerships such as Building Plymouth and Caring Plymouth, where we work alongside Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the private sector to fill critical job vacancies in key sectors.
- The Skills4Plymouth Plan has been delegated to the Employment and Skills Board (which reports to the Growth Board) and includes representation from local businesses and higher education, further education and independent training provider representatives, to ensure that business demand is fully understood and that the post-16 education system aligns to emerging needs.
- To support the high level of NEET young people, we established the Unlocking Plymouth Potential, young people Seeking Employment, Education or Training (SEET) plan, we have changed our language and we measure young people moving from NEET to SEET to Employment, Education and Training (EET), and the interventions and support in place. This has been extensive work and we have established a SEND employment panel, multi-agency NEET panels with a detailed understanding of the interventions and support received.

- We have worked alongside our local training providers. In January 2023, we had one provider delivering 9 Supported Internships. As of December 2024, we now have three providers delivering 57 Supported Internship. We have a provider looking to commence delivering Supported Internships from March 2025 (approx. 10 in number) and three more providers looking to commence delivery in September 2025.
- We have grown the SEN provision for post-16 students in mainstream settings by 37% in a year, to enable greater access to skills provision.

As a result of the wider city alignment, improvement have also been seen across a number of key skills measures which include:

- Plymouths Unemployment Rate: Over the last 5 years, Plymouth has seen significant improvement in its unemployment rate. Pre-Covid Pandemic, Plymouth had on average 1% higher unemployment rate than the national average. However, over the last 5 years we have seen this reverse, and Plymouth has consistently had a lower unemployment rate than nationally, by approximately 1%.
- Plymouth NEETs: The development and introduction of Unlocking Plymouths Potential 2023-2025 plan has introduced direct action around those NEET young people in the City. The numbers of NEET young people were a particular challenge for the City and through this targeted action we have seen the rate drop from 1-in-10 to 1-in-5 over the last few years. In addition to this we have seen the rate of young people with a Special Education Need or Disability in Employment, Education or Training significantly increase from 72% January 2023 to 90.4% in December 2024.
- Plymouth has also seen gaps begin to close in attainment rates, particularly at GCSE and A-level. Comparing the attainment-8 score (GCSE) and A-level point score from 2018/19 to 2022/23 we can see Plymouth has seen significant improvement. Comparing with national and regional averages, we can also see this gap has begun to close, with Plymouth far more inline than it was before.

As a result of realigning Oncourse Southwest, PCCs in-house adult education provider, they have also expanded their reach and impact:

Oncourse Southwest, PCC in-house adult education provider, in academic year 2023/2024 supported over 5,000 adults and young people with courses, qualifications, and life-changing opportunities.

- 48% of their learners live in the most deprived areas of Plymouth (IMD priority areas 1–3).
- 67% of learners have progressed into further study or employment.
- The achievement rate stands at 92% and retention rate at 98%, ensuring learners meet their goals and gain qualifications that support their future aspirations.
- 60% of provision delivery was directly in the community, operating across more than 70 venues, breaking down barriers to access for those who might otherwise be excluded.
- 30% of our learners are from ethnic minority backgrounds, showcasing our commitment to inclusivity and ensuring diverse communities have equitable access to education.
- Recruitment for their 16–18 study programme has increased by 25% year on year, enabling better support for this critical demographic.
- They have also secured 100% pass rate in GCSEs across Maths, English, and Science.
- In 2024, they achieved Apprenticeship Delivery Status, marking a significant milestone in our commitment to bridging Plymouth's skills gap and fostering economic growth within our community.
- Established bespoke programmes such as Sector-Based Work Academy Programmes (SWAPs) to create tailored pathways into meaningful careers and Your Future programme to support young people in building confidence, developing skills, and exploring aspirations toward employment, education, or training.



- In 2024, On Course South West (OCSW) was awarded £190,000 through the prestigious Turing Scheme, enabling a transformative offer of international study and work placements to learners. This funding supports opportunities between September 1, 2024, and August 31, 2025. The inaugural Turing trip to Iceland was a resounding success, providing eight learners with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) a transformative experience. Six more trips are planned for 2025.



Significant challenges still exist in Plymouth. In looking to address the structural challenges around low qualification attainment in our population, we must think over the long term. However, we can already see that through this action, tangible progress is being made in many areas.

5. Next Steps

The next step is to refresh the Skills4Plymouth plan, ensuring it incorporates and aligns with the latest developments including the Plymouth Economic Strategy, MoD investment, formation of the Growth Alliance Plymouth and announcement of the Connect to Work programme.

We will use the existing governance and partnerships structures formed in the development of the current Skills4Plymouth plan. We will work closely with ESB which includes representatives from Local Authority, Local Employers, Further Education, Higher Education and sector networks including Federation of Small Businesses, Plymouth and Devon Chamber of Commerce, Devon and Cornwall Training Provider Network and Department for Work and Pensions.

In the refresh of this plan, we will review and align the skills priorities and outcomes for the City. These will reflect the significant future skills demand from the investment into HMNB Devonport and the wider impact on Plymouths economy this will have.

Timelines:

- Draft Skills4Plymouth Plan by 31 March 2025
- Consultation by 31 May 2025
- Launch update Skills4Plymouth plan and delivery plan by 31 July 2025